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INDICATORS

800-THE-LOST
NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN

SEX TRAFFICKING WHILE IN SCHOOL

This young girl was 15 years old when she first met her trafficker. She was a typical 15 year old who lived at home and attended high school. She was online using social media when a cute guy contacted her. She was excited because he was a bit older in his early twenties and was interested in her! He told her how beautiful she was and how lucky he was to have met her. She used to study with her friends before, but that seemed so boring and “square” compared to hanging out with him. After “dating” for a few weeks, he asked to send some explicit pictures of herself. She was a bit hesitant, but he told her how much he loved her, that a girl his age would do it, and that if he couldn’t be with her he could look at her picture. He wanted to be with her all the time. He bought her new clothes and told her to wear some more make up. This wasn’t her normal style, but she wanted to look pretty the way that he wanted her to.

After a few months of dating, lavishing her with attention and making her feel like the most important person in his world, he said that he wanted to keep buying her nice clothes and treating her well, but that she needed to help out. He asked her to have sex with a man for money. He told her that it would be just once and that it would be fun. He begged her and she just wanted to make him happy. He gave her a drug that made the whole experience foggy. She didn’t want to do it, but she wanted to make him happy and figured it was just once. But then he kept telling her she had to do it. He took her to a place to get a tattoo. She didn’t want to a first, but he said it was because he was proud that she “was his” and wanted everyone to know she belonged to him. He said if she loved him she would do it. She just wanted to show him how much she loved him. She got mad at him once, but then he put his hands on her and got really scary. He told her that she belonged to him. This became a cycle. He would be physical with her one minute and tell her he loved her the next. She was so confused – he was so different now. She wanted to get out, but didn’t know how, and now she needed that drug he kept giving her, or everything would hurt.

Under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act,¹ sex trafficking is defined as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting a child under 18 years of age for the purpose of a commercial sex act, or any persons regardless of age, by force, fraud, or coercion. A commercial sex act occurs when the sex act is exchanged for anything of value, such as food, shelter, drugs, etc., and is not limited to money. Regardless of whether or not the child has identified a trafficker, that child is still a victim under the law. A child is not able to consent to being bought or sold. So, even if a child appears to be willingly engaging in commercial sex, she is considered a victim of sex trafficking under the law. This is in addition to each individual states’ laws prohibiting and penalizing sex trafficking. According to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, the average age of missing children who are exploited through sex trafficking is only 15. One of the top method that traffickers use as a form of control is emotional abuse. Another is substance abuse and

¹A federal law codified in relevant part in 18 U.S.C. § 1591.



dependency. A very common recruitment method used by sex traffickers in the United States is false promises of love, attention and affection which makes the child believe they are in a romantic relationship. Perpetrators take advantage of the undeveloped psyche of an adolescent to sexually exploit them for their own gain. It's not uncommon for girls to be recruited and sold for sex, even while attending school. Some of these girls may not even know that what the trafficker is doing is illegal. It's important to be aware of the signs and report any suspicions or concerns that a child is being sexually exploited to your local police, and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. These reports have made a difference in the lives of children and allowed them to start the process of recovery and restoration.

INDICATORS DEPICTED IN THIS SCENARIO:²

- Appears to be a minor
- May be involved in commercial sex
- Appears to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Displays signs of physical or sexual violence / visible scars or bruises they are unable or unwilling to explain
- Tattoos, brands or other marks indicating "ownership" by the perpetrator
- Significant change in demeanor, once outgoing and now appears unhappy, disconnected and/or does not smile often
- Child starts to isolate herself from her friends and community
- Child has an appearance that does not fit the current situation (new look, new clothes or shoes, nails/hair done)
- Change in clothing style or appearance either in person or postings online, dresses in a provocative manner inconsistent with her true age
- Child lies about age or identity
- Presence of an overly controlling or abusive "boyfriend," or older female
- The "boyfriend" or older female exerts control in a subtle manner, with a look of the eyes, or touch of the hand
- May have been disciplined through punishment
- Facial expression and body language display fear and anxiety
- Child is preoccupied with "getting money"

²While no single indicator confirms the existence of child sex trafficking, several indicators combined can increase the likelihood that a child is being exploited or is actively being targeted and recruited. Victims of child sex trafficking can include male, female and children who identify as LGBT.

