

# Commercial Sexual Exploitation

## A Guide for Parents

*Created by parents of exploited youth and My Life My Choice girls*

**“I was home for dinner by 5 o’clock.”**

- 16 year old survivor of commercial sexual exploitation

Among the girls My Life My Choice served, the average age of entry into the sex industry was **14 years old.**

### ***This could be your child...***

Jill, age 16, met a guy, James, on Facebook. They talked to each other on line for a little while, before James asked her if she wanted to hang out in person. When Jill met James, she learned he was actually a 30-year-old man. He told her that age “was just a number”. James treated Jill well and she really felt like she could trust him. James told Jill he loved her. After a few months, James told Jill that he owed someone \$500 and if James didn’t pay him, this guy was going to kill him. He explained that he needed Jill to have sex with other men in order to earn the money. Jill did not want to do this but was worried about James’ safety and felt like she had no choice.

***This is just one example of commercial sexual exploitation, also known as human trafficking.***

*Definition:*

**Commercial** - something of value is exchanged - money, a ride, food, shelter, drugs, new sneakers, etc.; **Sexual** - involving a “sex act” or a “sexual favor”; **Exploitation** - someone with more power taking advantage of/controlling/using somebody; **Human** - involving a person; **Trafficking** - being bought and sold

“... It really can happen to anyone. I never wanted to be a “police parent” monitoring my daughter’s every move (and clearly it didn’t work when I tried that). However, I realized that I had to pay attention to the signs of secretive behavior, and that she did need me to notice and not be afraid to ask questions. I needed to have conversations with her, not just try to restrict her activities to keep her safe.” — **Diane**, mother of a girl exploited at age 14

# Girls we see at My Life My Choice are of **every age, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.**

## **EVERYONE IS AT RISK OF EXPLOITATION, ESPECIALLY YOUTH.**

There are people who specifically prey on minors. Some children are at greater risk than others. Here are a few of the reasons why:

- » **Running away** - When youth leave home and don't have a place to go, they are in survival mode, which puts them at great risk of a trafficker offering to take care of them..
- » **Having gone through abuse at home**  
Sometimes when kids go through trauma with families and they don't think anything else could hurt them.
- » **Not getting along with family and not feeling accepted**  
Some girls are looking for independence and freedom when they meet the person who exploited them.

*The internet gives pimps more access to young girls and boys. Websites like Facebook and Backpage are used to recruit and exploit children.*

“... I didn't know this kinda stuff happened here.” — **Mary**, mother of a girl exploited at age 13

## **RED FLAGS**

Here are some things that when seen together could make you worry:

- Running away
- Frequently late for curfew or absent from school
- Owning new items (jewelry, new clothing, etc.) and you don't know where they came from
- Having a tattoo she is reluctant to explain
- Owning a cellphone that you didn't purchase for her
- Involved with an older male
- Having multiple sexually transmitted infections and/or pregnancies
- Being secretive about what she is doing online

## **HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR CHILD?**

- » **Take a minute to breathe**  
Talking about this isn't easy for either of you, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't do it.
- » **Ask questions and try to help by offering support**  
you and your daughter are not the ones who should be blamed.
- » **Do everything you can to know who your daughter is hanging out with, talk to her about what she is doing online**
- » **Be patient. Don't push her to talk before she's ready.**  
You may be scared, but stay calm. Trust her, believe her, and listen to what she has to say. There are resources for you too, so make sure you are getting support.

## **WHO CAN YOU CONTACT IF YOU ARE WORRIED THAT YOUR CHILD IS BEING EXPLOITED?**



**Talk to your child's school social worker, guidance counselor, or nurse.**  
You don't want to hold this on your own.



**Contact the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 or Text to BeFree (233733)**  
There is someone there 24/7 to talk to. They will connect you to help in your area.