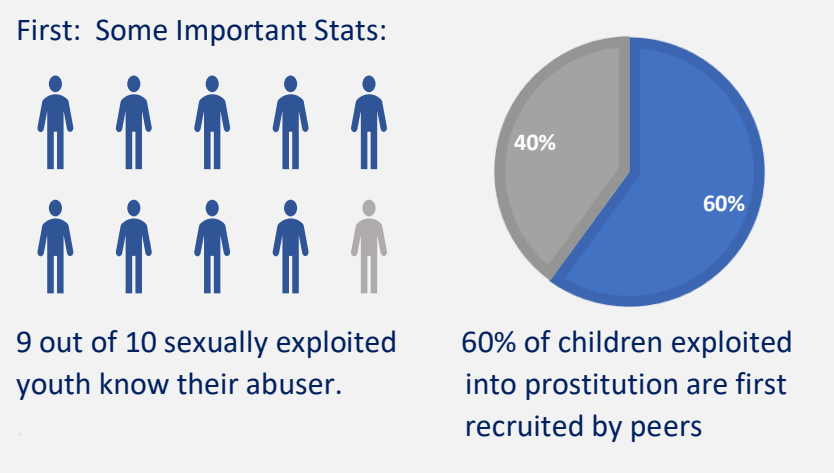


Protecting Our Children

(Social Media and Sexual Exploitation)




Unfortunately, there are no key phrases or terms to look out for in order to protect our children online; the sexual exploitation of our youth is insidious in nature.

Individuals seeking to exploit children engage in grooming activities; namely identifying a target child and befriending them. Perpetrators then build upon that relationship, manipulating youth into engaging in sexualized and/or risky behaviors. It is important to note that because of the purposeful relational quality in grooming, many exploited youth are unaware of the coercion, and some even view the perpetrator as a boyfriend or girlfriend.

Perpetrators are incredibly adept at utilizing social media platforms to both identify and groom victims.



- ### Red Flags (Warning Signs Something is Amiss)
- Your child won't answer questions about their online activity, becomes upset when screen time is limited, or hides/changes their screen when you walk by.
 - Your child is disconnecting from family, friends, organizations, clubs, or sports teams that they previously enjoyed or skipping out on previously held responsibilities.
 - They are displaying notable behavioral changes, such as differences in sleeping or eating, withdrawal, irritability, mood swings, nightmares, regression to more infantile behaviors (i.e. thumb sucking), difficulty concentrating, sudden drop in grades, recent increase in substance use, suicidality, seemingly turning against family members, etc.
 - Your child has new devices (cell phone, webcam, etc.), clothes, or money that you did not buy them.
 - They defer to their new boyfriend or girlfriend (usually older) when making any decision.
 - Your child engages in sexualized activity, including sexting or masturbation, or discussion, beyond what is developmentally appropriate.
 - They express intense fear or dislike of a certain person or place.

While ALL of these red flags may not be tied to sexual exploitation, if you are seeing any of these signs in your child or teen, it is highly recommended that you follow up with your child in open and honest conversation and seek additional support as needed.

Primary Parental Protections

- #### Oversight of Devices
- ✓ Check privacy settings on all apps and all devices, do this often and unannounced
 - ✓ Regularly review, and discuss, child's social media interactions—most effective if linked to your personal device or accounts
 - ✓ Check in regularly regarding friend requests or adds to ensure that all individuals added are people your child knows in real life
 - ✓ Sit in the same room as your child while they engage in screen time
 - ✓ Set, and reinforce, ground rules regarding social media use, expectations and consequences if not followed.

- #### Communication
- ✓ Begin open, honest communication ASAP—this way it is already an established norm in your family prior to any heavy topics
 - ✓ Model talking about thoughts and feelings for your child, share difficult feelings and worries about your child's safety
 - ✓ Use developmentally appropriate language and situations in your discussions
 - ✓ If your child comes to you with a concern, believe them! Temper your response—you want them to feel supported and comfortable coming to you in the future, so resist the urge to take all screens away
 - ✓ Take the time to know their friends and how your child interacts, so you can note changes in their norm.
 - ✓ Broach topics of self-esteem, vulnerability, and healthy relationships