

Human trafficking is one the fastest growing illegal “businesses” in the world. Every day, children are, unknowingly, drawn into the path that leads to abuse and exploitation. This path is referred to as “grooming,” or the tactics employed by those who “exploit” the child’s vulnerabilities. To prevent this problem from starting, Reclaim13 created **The Path** video to help youth understand the path leading into child sex trafficking.

The Path was created as a prevention tool for pre-teens, teens, and adults. The accompanying study guide is intended to open adult-child discussions about **the path**. As you learn more, it is our hope that you and your child feel more empowered to identify warning signs of dangerous relationships. You know your child best, so we recommend you use the questions as a starting point to have open conversations about the content viewed in The Path.

You are engaging in the most important things you can do to protect your child - EDUCATION and CREATING DIALOGUE. There is no more influential safe person in your child’s life than YOU!

A first step to educating our children and creating dialogue is to talk with our kids about their own physical and sexual development. Educating youth about sexuality and sexual abuse in a matter-of-fact way is both protective and empowering. By teaching them about their own natural development and the complexities in the world, youth are better able to learn how to discern and navigate tough situations.

## Beginning a Conversation About Child Sexual Abuse

---

**What do you know about child abuse? Child sexual abuse? Do you know anyone who was touched in a way that made him/her feel uncomfortable?**

My response

---

---

---

---

---

My parent's response

---

---

---

---

---

## Parent Empowerment Tips:

Most predators are known to children (e.g. family, neighbors, coaches, teachers). So, tactics of “stranger danger” can be misleading to children. 1 in 10 children will be sexually abused before the age of 18<sup>1</sup>. When the definition of sexual violations expand to include any unwanted sexual contact 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men report being affected.<sup>2</sup> Those numbers are compelling.

- Children need to know that their bodies are their own. No one should touch them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable, nor should they be made to touch anyone.
- Secrecy is a powerful tool used by those who abuse children. Sometimes it is in the form of
  - Threats of harm “I will hurt your family,” “I will hurt you”
  - Overt or inferred threats to the child’s stability “if you tell your family will fall apart” - children can pick up on the shaming messages “You are a bad kid,” “You are dirty.”
  - Non-verbal messages that make the child feel ashamed, complicit in the process “don’t tell anyone about our relationship,” “the thing we do.”
- We encourage parents to tell their children that they can tell you anytime they feel uncomfortable, “creeped out,” scared, or confused by another person. Young children often fear “monsters” or the “boogeyman.” We often comfort them by telling them these scary creatures do not exist. When they are younger they are protected by adults, usually parents. It is important, also, to empower children to know how to let other “safe” people know when they feel uncomfortable. This opens the dialogue for future potential situations.

**Most of the youth we encounter had histories of early childhood sexual abuse prior to sexual exploitation.** They never told anyone at the time but began to exhibit behavioral problems as a teenager.  
**Healing childhood sexual abuse is key to preventing further harm.**

<sup>1</sup> Townsend, C., & Rheingold, A.A., (2013). Estimating a child sexual abuse prevalence rate for practitioners: studies. Charleston, S.C., Darkness to Light. Retrieved from [www.D2L.org](http://www.D2L.org).

<sup>2</sup> Sharon G. Smith, Xinjian Zhang, Kathleen C. Basile, Melissa T. Merrick, Jing Wang, Marcie-jo Kresnow, Jieru Chen. (2015). National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2015 Data Brief. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datasources/nisvs/2015NISVSdatabrief.html>

# Signs of Sexual Abuse

---

## Physical Signs

- Pain in genitals or discharge
- Pain during urination or bowel movements
- Bleeding and/or physical injury in genitals

## Emotional Signs

- Mood swings
- Changes in disposition
- Withdrawn
- Suicidal ideation, expression
- Anxiety
- Crying, increased sadness

## Behavioral Signs (children)

- Bad dreams
- Seems ashamed of his/her body
- Sleep problems
- Has precocious sexual knowledge
- Changes in eating
- Touches self in private parts in public
- Refers to secrets
- Regressed behaviors
- Choking or swallowing problems
- Has money or material possessions of unknown origin

## Behavioral Signs (adolescents)

- Drug, alcohol abuse
- Self-injurious behaviors
- Spacing out
- Sexual promiscuity

# Social Media Safety

---

We are not often aware of how much information people can glean about us via the Internet.

## How do you think the guy and the girl met?

My response

---

---

---

---

---

My parent's response

---

---

---

---

---

### Parent Empowerment Tips:

It is not clear how the two met, though social media is their primary means of communicating at the beginning. Social media is a growing way children and teens communicate with one another. It is also the tool used by predators to engage kids without having to reveal their true identities at first.

**How many “friends” do you have on your (social media accounts)? How do you choose them?**

My response

---

---

---

---

---

My parent’s response

---

---

---

---

---

Connecting with our kids around their use of social media is important. Likely they know more than parents will know. So, the key is not so much knowing what they know as much as it is developing a relationship that opens the door to conversations. Try to listen without judging.

### **Parent Empowerment Tips:**

Facilitating communication between you and your child is critical to helping him/her navigate the emotional and relational difficulties associated with growing up. Many children, nowadays, turn to social media to process and express their feelings.

Predators use social media as a way to meet young people. Have you ever heard of any stories about other kids meeting “weird” people or people that made them feel uncomfortable?

***One of the most common grooming tactics is the threat of exposure.***

(e.g. I am going to show these pictures to everyone!). We think this information is valuable for children to know. The more they understand common tactics the better armed they can be if ever facing such a situation.

# Relational Grooming

---

*“A young person can become a victim of sex trafficking in multiple ways: they meet someone on social media and they’re going on a date, they might meet someone at a party who promises them a different life or a different lifestyle, they’re dating online and they don’t really know the person they’re talking to and so they may set up a time and a place to meet and it’s not who they expected it to be but they’ve had so many long and engaging conversations so they feel a connection to that person.”* **Special Agent Carrie Landauv**

## Parent Empowerment Tips:

Review the stages of grooming so your child is aware of the planfulness of people who may seem to be harmless. There are 6 stages in the grooming process (Nesbitt, J. 2018)<sup>3</sup>:

- Friendship Forming - initial attempts to get to know the child (e.g. likes, dislikes, struggles)
- Relationship Forming - building a relationship (e.g. accentuating the commonalities) and groomer may give gifts or build a dependency relationship
- Risk Assessment - determining vulnerabilities (e.g. how close is the child to his/her parent, how much privacy does the child have)
- Exclusivity - attempts to isolate the child, create a “special” relationship (e.g. attempts to create a wedge between parent and child, arrange a time to meet child)
- Desensitizing - exposing child to sexually explicit material, asking for suggestive pictures (e.g. asking for or sending nude photos)
- Conclusion - abuse and exploitation

## What did you notice about the guy (in the video)?

### My response

---

---

---

### My parent’s response

---

---

---

<sup>3</sup> Nesbitt, J. (2018). The stages of online grooming: inside the mind of a predator. The Bark Blog. Retrieved from <https://www.bark.us/blog/online-grooming/>

## Parent Empowerment Tips:

Point out the

- Kind words, how he made her feel beautiful
- The speaking negatively about her dad and said things to create division and enhance the distance rather than simply offer compassion and ways to
- The age difference
- Predators find the vulnerabilities of children to exploit

## How did he change (in the way he treated her)?

My response

---

---

---

---

---

My parent's response

---

---

---

---

---



## Parent Empowerment Tips:

Point out the changes in the way he talked to and treated her

- He initially said she should be treated “like a queen” but then pressured her into sex
- The video implies he physically assaulted her (when he apologizes)

*The main point of The Path is to show the change in behaviors by the predator, or gradual introduction of abuse and maltreatment, as a sign of things to come. Talk with your child about the importance of paying attention to warning signs. Have a conversation with your child about the “list” of qualities a future partner should have. **Also, talk about the list of warning signs, or problem behaviors of which s/he can be aware.***

## My promise-to-myself words:

You are invaluable. No one should hurt you. What would be your list of behaviors that would tell you the other person is NOT safe? It is easier to come up with a list of behaviors that would tell your heart “this is not a safe relationship” before it gets too far than it is once you are further down the path. So, promise yourself if you experience these behaviors you will get help!

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

***Most of the youth with whom we work cared for or “loved” the one who eventually abused and exploited her/him.***

**How do you think she felt about him? What told you she felt that way?**

My response

---

---

---

---

---

My parent's response

---

---

---

---

---

**Parent Empowerment Tips:**

It is important that children understand predatorial relationships often begin with the same positive feelings experienced in normal relationships. Children are often astute observers. They may not always understand what they are observing, but if they are taught to pay attention to their feelings and communicate them to you (or another safe person) you may be better able to be aware if the relationship is turning into abuse.

## What did she do in response to his requests for things that made her uncomfortable?

### My response

---

---

---

---

---

### My parent's response

---

---

---

---

---

Help your child identify the actions that followed the feelings. Feelings cannot be controlled but actions can. We want children to understand what actions children can take and what not to pursue (e.g. went along with him, texted him when she needed help, snuck out without telling anyone)

- Actions we can pursue when uncomfortable:
- Find a safe adult to check it out
- Actions we can not pursue when uncomfortable:
- Giving in even though it feels uncomfortable.

## What Can You Do?

---

If you were the neighbor in the video, or if you knew someone who you thought might be being hurt, what would you do?

How can children know if relationships are safe?

Relationships with people who care should make you stronger, not tear you down.

## Signs of Possibly Abusive and/or Exploitive Relationships:

---

Does your partner ever:

- Humiliate you in front of others?
- Force you to have sex?
- Become threatening and violent when you disagree?
- Blame you for his/her anger episodes?
- Threatens to hurt those you love, including children, family members, pets, etc?
- Ask or force you to have sex with others against your will?
- Threaten to harm you physically and/or with weapons?
- Keep track of your comings and goings and know where you are at much of the time?
- Asks you to engage in degrading activities?
- Tend to limit your contact with others?

### Parent Empowerment Tips:

We suggest children and parent(s) have an agreed-upon code word or phrase that is only known within the family.

*"There's never a time when you can't back out and there's never a time that no matter what you feel like you did you can't step back from. No matter what they tell you, no matter how they threaten you, no matter what they threaten to put out on the Internet, no matter what secrets they threaten to divulge you're never stuck because we can always re-build as long as we get you back."* **Special Agent Michael Barker**

Perpetrators often use threats to silence victims. Sometimes it is shame (e.g. if anyone knew they would think..... of me). Sometimes it is a threat the relationship will end and s/he will get in trouble (e.g. if people find out I am going to get sent away or I am done with you if you tell anyone). Have your child identify a safe person in their school, extracurricular activities, etc