

Child Sex Trafficking in Southern Nevada

Child sex trafficking is an insidious crime. We need to realize that victims are often repeatedly violated, vulnerable to continued abuse and exploitation, and will suffer from lifelong emotional and psychological trauma.

The FBI has identified Las Vegas as one of 13 High Intensity Child Prostitution Areas in its 2017 annual report. The Nevada Coalition to Prevent the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children estimates that there were 5,687 victims of child sex trafficking in Nevada. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention the state that arrested the most kids for child sex trafficking was Nevada. However, these figures are much higher because child sex trafficking is a hidden crime because it is difficult to really know the true extent of child sex trafficking in our community.

The victims and the consumers or Johns who prey on children, for the most part, come from all of our neighborhoods: North Las Vegas, Green Valley, Sunset, Summerlin, Centennial Hills, etc. They represent all socio-economic categories.

In fact, anyone in this room could have a child or know a child, who unknowingly, is being trafficked. In fact, anyone in this room could have a friend, colleague or family member, who unknowingly, is preying on children. In fact, anyone in this room could be a consumer or John.

What can you do to fight child sex trafficking? First, educate yourself about the signs that children are being trafficked: unexplained gifts or money; dating apps on phones; change in language, use of slang; change in body language – crossed arms, poor posture, avoidance of eye contact; new clothes and electronics; changes in hairstyle; mood changes; ditching school or other activities.

Second, review, on a regular basis, your children's phones, laptops, tablets and other devices for unsuitable content and conversations, especially dating or meet up apps. Know the personalities of your children's friends and their families.

Third, if you feel your children are involved in suspicious activity don't approach them in threatening or accusatory manner. Instead, remain calm! Tell them you saw something that may indicate they have been approached by strangers online or elsewhere. Let them know that this can lead to dangerous and life-threatening situations.

Fourth, ensure that your children are engaged in activities that improve their self-esteem and self-confidence – organized sports, music and arts, arts & crafts, and religious and school activities. They may also be engaged in hobbies – yoga, photography, gardening, scrapbooking, knitting or sewing, and martial arts.

Most important, spend quality time with your children. Have regular family activities or projects. As parents or guardians, participate with your children in activities that are specific to them. Be good role models, be a positive communicator, and promote healthy practices. Avoid belittling, lax discipline, shaming, screaming, and guilt.

The bottom line: parents or guardians must be vigilant at all times. Parenting is a full-time job.

What else can you do? Join the Las Vegas Summerlin Rotary's grassroots movement to educate the community about the prevalence of child sex trafficking in Southern Nevada and long-term harm that it can cause our children. Please add your name to the list of those who support the campaign.