

Health Department



JANUARY IS SEX/HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS MONTH

Forced commercial sexual exploitation generates \$173 billion in illegal profits annually ([ILO, 2024](#))

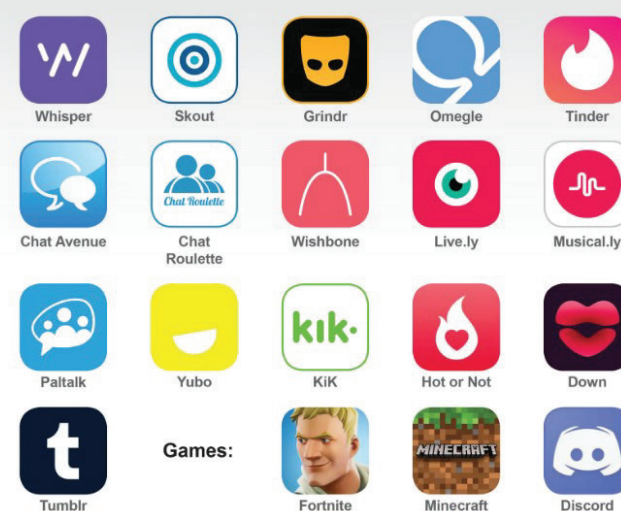
Human trafficking is the second most profitable illegal industry in the U.S. ([UNICEF](#))

Did you know?

- 1 in 3 children are first exposed to social media at age 5 or younger.
- 1 in 3 children are expected to have an unwelcome sexual experience online before they turn 18.
- Younger social media exposure correlates with more sexual harm online and peaks for kids who start using social media at 11-12 – the age around which most American children get their first smartphone.
- 43% of kids exposed to inappropriate sexual content online were under 13.
- Kids with disabilities, special needs or who identify as LGBTQ+ are 2-4 times more likely to send explicit images of themselves than their peers.

Parental Warning:

Parents should carefully monitor their children's activity on these popular social media apps and games.



In a real-life example, a trafficker used social media to connect with a vulnerable, young girl. She was an easy target because of how unhappy she was at the foster home she was living in—something the man immediately garnered from the girl's profile. In only a matter of hours after their initial social media-induced connection, he had picked her up at her foster home in Toledo and taken her to Columbus to traffic her.

Traffickers not only have immediate access to their victims, but they also have immediate access to a wealth of information about those victims such as what they look like, what their interests are, whether they are happy or not, where they are and who they spend time with, among other information.

According to the experts from the UT study, [traffickers are drawn to children](#) who post expressions of fear, emptiness and disappointment, such as “nobody gets me,” “my life sucks,” “I need to get out of here” and more. Traffickers also look for indicators of substance abuse, runaway activity and home instability in a victim all while protecting their own identities.

From there, the traffickers will further educate themselves on their potential victim by studying other posts their potential victim makes on his or her commonly used view-and-comment sites like Facebook, Instagram, Tinder and others.

These traffickers learn about the girl/boy and pretend to understand them so these kids, who are feeling not understood and not loved and not beautiful, are now told things like, “I think you're beautiful,” “I'll encourage you to show your body” and “I'll protect you,” to get the victim's guard down and establish trust. After trust is built, traffickers will convince the potential victim to meet up with them or may even coerce the potential victim to send a risky picture, which the trafficker can then use to extort the potential victim.

If you or someone you suspect or know is being trafficked, please contact the following for help.

National Human Trafficking Help Line - 888-373-7888

CARE Program 24-hour line - 541-444-9680

Police - 911