



PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO

# Child Sex Trafficking in Cyberspace

## A GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONALS SERVING CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Law Enforcement • Health and Social Service Providers • Educators



### THE PROBLEM IS BIG AND CONTINUOUSLY EVOLVING

Through the use of digital technology by offenders, children are at high risk of being solicited, recruited, advertised, or bought and sold for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Online trends and threats continue to emerge and become more sophisticated.



### THESE ONLINE CRIMES HAVE UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS

As there is no need for a physical meeting between a child and an offender for the child to become a victim or for the occurrence of the crime, these crimes represent complex new challenges for law enforcement officials and victim service providers.



### THESE CRIMES ARE FORMS OF ONLINE VIOLENCE AND ABUSE OF CHILDREN

While most instances of violence against children still occur in the physical world, the online environment can be associated with new threats or forms of violence, including sexual abuse and exploitation.



### PRIOR ABUSE AND OTHER FACTORS MAY INCREASE THE RISK OF VICTIMIZATION

Although any child can become a victim, children with previous sexual abuse, family dysfunction, homelessness, LGBTQ youth, disabilities, and children in other vulnerable situations may be more vulnerable to face risks of exploitation online.



### CHILD VICTIMS CANNOT EVER CONSENT TO THESE CRIMES

Because of children's special legal status, the consent of child victims is legally irrelevant. Any child victim under the age of 18 trafficked or exploited online is a victim of a crime and therefore needs protection and assistance.



### SEVERE AND LONG-LASTING HARM TO CHILD VICTIMS

These crimes can have serious and traumatizing outcomes for children, including a feeling of hopelessness, depression, anxiety, and fear. In some instances, the psychological trauma may drive child victims to self-harm practices and suicide attempts.



### A BROAD VARIETY OF OFFENDERS IN CYBERSPACE

The number of online exploiters is growing. While some may pursue personal gratification, others may be motivated by commercial gain. Even though there is no "typical" offender, they may be working solo, in offender communities, or groups.



### REPORT IF A CHILD IS A VICTIM OF EXPLOITATIVE OR ABUSIVE SEXUAL ACTS ONLINE.

For successful intervention, it is essential to identify and protect child victims and investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate these criminal activities in the digital space. Report a concern by contacting the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at 1-800-THE-LOST or [CyberTipline.org](https://www.cyberTipline.org).

**CAMPAIGN PUTTING AN END TO THE ONLINE EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN:  
PREVENTING VICTIMIZATION AND STRENGTHENING CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS**

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