

# Working to Combat the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children: Action in the Christian Faith Community

*If you hold back from rescuing those taken away to death, those who go staggering to the slaughter; if you say, "Look, we did not know this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it? And will he not repay all according to their deeds?*

*Proverbs 24:11-12*

While many Americans know that children are sold for sex overseas, too many believe the U.S. is immune from this crime. The commercial sexual exploitation of children is indeed a reality in the United States. It is one of the worst forms of child abuse. Children deserve to live in a safe, healthy, and loving environment free from abuse or threats of violence. Unfortunately, there are criminals – both traffickers and buyers of sex – who do not believe or adhere to even such basic values. Christians are called upon by God to challenge injustice and cherish all children. Just as Jacob acknowledged the gracious gift God had given him in his own children (Genesis 33:5), we should do the same not only for our own children but *all children*. They are each a gift and, as with us, God has counted each hair on their heads (Matthew 10:30). How will we answer Him when He asks if we did all we could to protect them?

This short resource was created to provide Christians with ways to make an impact. At the end of the resource, you will find links to national organizations, videos, books and other resources that could be helpful in your activities and community efforts.

## ***Before You Begin: Food for the Mind and Heart***

*...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

*Micah 6:8*

Due to the intense love we have for our most vulnerable, peoples of all faiths and political persuasion feel compelled by the issue of child sex trafficking and sexual exploitation. In fact, this crossover appeal is an incredible benefit to the fight against sex trafficking of children. It helps us become more effective because we are stronger together than working apart. Although good people may disagree on some finer points of addressing this crime, we have great reason to come together to fight for victims and work for their protection.

This strength is especially important as we realize how difficult a challenge we face. The children at risk are our own. The men who buy sex from them are from our communities; they are fathers, sons, teachers, judges, taxi drivers, and local leaders. If we are to stop all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children, we must address how demand fuels this abuse. Combating and preventing this crime requires patience, self-reflection, collaboration, and faith.

Here are just a few things to keep in mind while looking for ways to prevent abuse and make an impact for victims:

- Working with trafficking victims can be challenging. The abuse they have suffered is a source of trauma and healing takes time; it requires patience from those who help them. Understandably, it also takes time to build their trust. When Christians serve them and their needs, they serve Jesus.
- Many survivors have been wounded by people and clergy in their churches. Effective services provided by agencies/organizations include a variety of approaches that must be respected by caregivers and volunteers. These services must respect trafficking survivors' choices and self-determination; attempting to control their choices, even if well-intentioned, can be harmful. We best demonstrate God's healing love through actions rather than words.
- Men are not the enemy. Although demand for sex, both actual and virtual (pornography) is the root of the problem and buyers/users are overwhelmingly male, honorable men are key to changing the culture of tolerance. Engage the men in your community and call upon them to be role models for male youth. The Man Up Campaign ([www.manupcampaign.org](http://www.manupcampaign.org)) and The Defenders USA (<http://www.sharedhope.org/thedefenders>) are examples of programs that men in your community can support.

- Overwhelmed with a need to make a big difference, good people may gravitate only toward the grandest of actions (i.e., opening a shelter or saving a child from the streets) and feel that anything else is small and won't make an impact. This cannot be farther from the truth and may come from a place of pride (Phil. 2:3). There is a broad spectrum of needs, both great and small, in the anti-trafficking movement. Let experts explain what their needs are and respond accordingly. The ultimate impact of meeting a seemingly small need may not be immediately obvious.
- Perhaps the most common pitfall is discouragement, abandoning the cause and the call because it is just too overwhelming. Always keep in mind that it is about one life at a time. Think of the parable of The Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:12-14) in which a shepherd leaves his flock in order to find the one sheep that is lost.
- When the children of Israel finally went into the Promised Land, the Jordan River parted to allow them to pass but only after they first stepped into it (Joshua 3:15-17). This is good symbolism for us as we work to fight trafficking. We may not see where our struggle is leading, but we need to step out in faith. We must do the things we feel called to do without being able to see the endpoint. Moses led his people on an incredible journey of faith but he never entered the Promised Land.

## **Overview: the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the U.S.**

***“What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.”***

**Matthew 18:12-14**

The issue of child sex trafficking and exploitation is complex. Here is a basic overview of the issue. For further reading on the topic, please see the end of this resource for recommendations.

- When a child under 18 is induced to perform a commercial sex act, sex trafficking has taken place. It does not require movement of the child over state borders, although movement is common. Commercial sexual exploitation includes the use of children for prostitution, sex tourism, creation of pornography, and sexual performance.
- Victims come from a variety of racial, ethnic, geographic and economic backgrounds. They come from big cities and small towns.
- Runaway and homeless youth are especially vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation. A history of sexual or physical abuse can also put a child at high risk for sex trafficking.
- Traffickers often use emotional manipulation to lure children into their sphere of control. All traffickers use violence to keep children in line. Although some victims do not have a trafficker in their lives, all sexually exploited children experience violence at the hands of buyers/offenders.
- Regardless of gender, home situation, trafficker involvement, or other risk factors all commercially sexually exploited children experience violence and danger at the hands of buyers/offenders. This violence and the act of selling sex itself have physical and mental health consequences for the child. These include substance abuse, sexually transmitted infections, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, suicidal ideation, and self-mutilation.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Praying for Help and Healing***

*Many Psalms seem to fit the distress experienced by a person trapped in sexual exploitation. These Psalms can be used for prayer with a victim of trafficking. Note especially Psalms 10, 140 and 142.*

*Read the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and substitute the imagery of the traveler for the image of a beaten and raped child.*

*Mercy includes concern and care for those that are traffickers and buyers. Many of them learned to abuse from being abused themselves. Justice is appropriate but we should not withhold our compassion and prayers.*

<sup>1</sup>Shared Hope International (2009), *The National Report on Domestic Trafficking: America's Prostituted Children*, pgs 36 and 42.

## Fourteen Ways Christians Can Participate and Make a Difference

*Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. -- Proverbs 3:27*

Whether you have an hour, a day, or a week to dedicate, there is something for everyone. Here are 14 ways that you can help:

1. Become well educated on this issue. Make sure you understand the issue and learn as much as possible about what life is really like for sex trafficking victims. Then educate others.
2. Learn how to identify a victim of human trafficking or child sex trafficking and where to report it. Links to information on signs of trafficking are included at the end of this document. [Put the National Human Trafficking Hotline in your cell phone today: 1-888-3737-888](#). You can report the production or distribution of child pornography to the National Center of Missing and Exploited Children's Child Pornography and Sexual Exploitation Tipline: 1-800-843-5678.
3. Act responsibly. Matthew 10:16 warns us to "be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." You should not attempt direct street outreach without training from someone who knows the streets. Without proper training you can put the child at increased risk of violence, not to mention your own safety. Please don't pay a child for time to talk in the hopes of rescuing her. Go through the appropriate and proper channels to assist victims.
4. Volunteer and mentor. Look for opportunities to serve in homeless shelters, soup kitchens, pregnancy resource centers, etc. All of these services are serving trafficking victims sometimes without realizing it.
5. Develop a relationship with a service provider so that they can get to know and trust you. For example, let them know that if a child expresses spiritual interest, you are available to mentor, do a Bible study, etc. This may be a place where you can volunteer and assist in whatever ways the organization feels best fits their needs.
6. Educate your fellow church members at community events and fairs. Download materials from the websites listed at the end of this document and share information about federal or state legislation and the issue in general.
7. Encourage your congregation to use the resources listed here for their book clubs or movie nights. A list of films and books on human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation are listed at the end of this document.
8. Donate professional assistance. Shelters and outreach organizations may need doctors, therapists or even dentists to provide pro bono services for victims of sex trafficking. The organization may need a lawyer, accountant, or marketing expert to assist them on a project. Reach out to your local human trafficking coalition, shelters and/or organizations to see how you can provide your expertise.
9. Donate to your local trafficking or runaway shelter. Runaway and homeless children are highly vulnerable to exploitation. Providing shoes, warm clothes, and other items to the shelter will give children some of the necessities of life. Call your local runaway program to find out what they need. You can locate your local shelter using the map here: <http://www2.ncfy.com/locate/index.htm> Click on your state and then "Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs."
10. Schedule a speaker to visit your congregation. There are many experts on the sex trafficking of children and a few survivors who wish to share their experience to raise awareness. Ask area organizations for recommendations on a local voice.
11. Call your local organizations to find out what they need and help raise the necessary funds. Organizations that assist victims and prevent abuse have little funding available to them. Do not feel your church has to raise \$500K for a new shelter in order to help. A small infusion of funds could help an organization do things it has wanted to do, like conduct research, fix a leaky roof, or buy a van to reach children in crisis who call for help. Some traffickers engage in the horrific practice of tattooing their victims, "branding" them like property. Raising funds for tattoo removal is also a way to bring healing.
12. Support state and federal legislation. Political advocacy at the national, state and local levels is an effective way to respond to the Gospel call to protect the poor and oppressed. Keep an ear to the ground for state and federal legislation aimed at addressing the issue of human trafficking, child sex trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, etc. Information on federal legislation in 2011 is included in the next section.
13. Write about it. If you write a personal blog, take part in your church newsletter publication, or develop other forms of media, consider addressing the topic of child sex trafficking and exploitation in your writing.
14. Talk about it, lead by example. If you are a church or community leader, engage your community in a dialogue about the sex trafficking of children and the broader topic of commercial sex and the sexualization of children. You don't have to be a public official or expert. Every parent, older brother or sister, or aunt or uncle is a model for the children in their lives.

### *The Power of Small Things*

*"We cannot do great things on this Earth, only small things with great love."*

*Mother Teresa*

*"My personal life may be crowded with small, petty incidents, altogether unnoticeable and mean, but if I obey Jesus Christ in the haphazard circumstances, they become pinholes through which I see the face of God, and when I stand face to face with God I shall discover that through my obedience thousands were blessed."*

*Oswald Chambers  
My Utmost for his Highest, P.313*