The National Plan to Prevent the Sexual Exploitation of Children

DEVELOPED BY THE NATIONAL COALITION TO PREVENT CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION
National Plan to Prevent the Sexual Exploitation of Children

The purpose of this plan is to help assure all children have childhoods free from sexual abuse and exploitation in both physical and digital environments and have opportunities to develop into healthy adults capable of having healthy relationships. The plan addresses the need to reduce the societal demand for commercial and individual exploitation of children and outlines a strategy to prevent children from being perceived and used as sexual commodities.

The plan is to keep prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation in the forefront of people’s minds and hearts in such a powerful way that the normalization of such exploitation for individual or commercial gain becomes socially, economically, politically, and spiritually unacceptable in our communities, nation, and the world.
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National Plan to Prevent the
Sexual Exploitation of Children

More than 30 major agencies and experts nationwide have collaborated to develop this first coordinated, collective national plan to focus on prevention to end demand for the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. It supports comprehensive prevention strategies, but pays special attention to primary prevention and positive youth development—actions that take place before child sexual abuse or exploitation has been perpetrated in order to:

- Promote norms that support healthy behaviors, images, and messages.
- Support environments and education that promote healthy development, relationships, and sexuality.
- Collaborate with media, industry, and policy makers to develop and implement strategies to prevent child sexual exploitation.
- Reduce the commercial and individual demand for sexual exploitation of children by countering normalization.

The plan defines the nature and scope of the problem; acknowledges the need to build on the foundation of existing research, advocacy, and treatment; discusses the value of a national plan; encourages the development of policy; and describes a range of actions from individual to corporate strategies to stop the demand for and prevent child sexual exploitation.
The Significance of a National Plan

A national plan to prevent child sexual exploitation and promote the healthy development of young people offers the promise of a number of critical outcomes.

- **Increase the Likelihood that Childhoods are Free From Sexual Exploitation** - A reduction in the perpetration of child sexual abuse and exploitation, whether for personal gratification or financial gain, means fewer victims and more children growing up free from the trauma and health costs from such victimization.

- **Strengthen and More Fully Engage Communities** - Increase the ability and willingness of those not directly involved in this work (e.g., community members, industry, media, policy makers, other professionals) to take effective action to prevent child sexual exploitation and to end the demand for sexually exploitive products and markets.

- **Improve Response for Victims** - Support the improvement of victim advocacy and treatment services for all victims through agency collaboration and integration of existing exploitation prevention services.

- **Promote Better Awareness-to-Action** - Encourage increases in programs, education, conditions, and environments that foster the safe and healthy development of children and youth and encourage them to thrive.

  - Encourage adults to recognize and advocate for the worth and value of all children while discouraging anything that feeds the perception that children and youth are objects for sexual use or economic gain. Rather than focusing solely on what children need to do to protect themselves, the focus is on what actions adults need to take so children are not vulnerable to becoming compliant victims who are taught to self exploit or victimize others.
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The Significance of a National Plan

- Teach adults and children to understand the harm from treating others as sexual objects to be used, bought, or sold whether online or in-person. Provide a clear and consistent message that sexually abusing and exploiting children is harmful and wrong.

- Encourage adults and children to participate in child sexual abuse and exploitation prevention programs that integrate digital, cellular, and face-to-face realities; are designed to address both risk and protective factors; and are based on evidence of effectiveness.

- Encourage all organizations serving children to include prevention trainings for all staff, volunteers, and older youth who supervise younger children.

- Empower adults and children (e.g., all bystanders) to speak up and counter, confront, stop, or report incidents of normalization of sexual harm, sexual abuse or exploitation.

- **Enhance Positive Social Norms and Organizational Practices**
  - Clearly and consistently recognize the harm and speak against sexual objectification, exploitation, commoditization, and hypersexualization of children and youth.
  - Take decisive action against factors that feed the demand for sexual exploitation of children and youth.
  - Recognize the individual and social costs of abuse and exploitation and adequately address the harm to victims.

- Direct more resources into prevention and positive development rather than solely after-the-fact interventions.

- **Get Everyone Involved** – A national plan aids in the development of more effective prevention programs and strategies along with a broad-based movement to help assure the social change needed for public safety and public health and the protection of all children against sexual exploitation.

- **Promote Efforts to End the Demand** – Ending the individual demand for materials that sexually exploit children and the commercial opportunity to profit from creating and disseminating such material requires a multifaceted approach. This approach should:
  - Address the need to better understand the factors that promote sexual interest in children and youths.
  - Advocate for specialized assessments and treatment for those with sexual behavior problems in addition to criminal justice approaches. Advocate for efforts that reduce chances of recidivism.
  - Reduce internal and external barriers to prevention such as ease with which such destructive peer support networks and sexually exploitative materials are accessed.
  - Counter destructive social norms such as minimizing the harm in sexually exploiting children and youths as well as the general normalization of sexual exploitation.
  - Advocate for evidence-based public policy to address ending the demand.
Sexual abuse and exploitation of children is a major problem shown to affect the health and well-being of individuals, families, communities, and society. However, investment in prevention of the problem has not increased. It is time to invest in prevention.

Dr. David Finkelhor and Lisa Jones’ often cited 2006 research states that after years of increases, reports of sexual abuse declined. Between 1990 and 2004 substantiated reports of sexual abuse were down 49%. Unfortunately there continues to be significant numbers of children sexually abused and exploited.

- One study shows 25% of females and 16% of males have experienced sexual abuse as children.
- The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) studies show sexual abuse has been associated with significant negative short-term and long-term health impacts for the victims.
- Each week the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children’s (NCMEC) CyberTipline® receives an average of more than 2,000 reports concerning child sexual exploitation. Approximately 90% of those reports are of suspected images/videos depicting a child being sexual exploited.
- It is conservatively estimated that 244,000 children per year are currently at risk of becoming victims of commercial child sexual exploitation (prostitution of children).
Depending on the study and definition, the:

- Average age at which girls first become victims of prostitution is 14.6
- Runaway and throwaway youth living on the streets for longer than 7-10 days7 are at greater risk of resorting to or being coerced into “survival sex.”8
- Estimated cost of child sexual abuse in the United States is $23 billion annually.9

Technology has created unprecedented access to sexually exploitive materials, removed protective barriers and created opportunities for some to commit sexually exploitive acts or sexual offenses.

Research is only beginning to reveal the ways in which this overwhelming flow of exploitive material is adversely impacting individual values, family relationships, gender socialization and what we identify as not only normal and acceptable, but preferable.

- The production and distribution of abuse images of children is a multi-billion dollar industry.10
- Since 2002, in their work attempting to identify victims, analysts at NCMEC have reviewed more than 18.5 million images and videos of pornography depicting children.11
  - In more than 70% of these pornographic images, the children are sexually abused and further exploited by someone they know and trust.12
  - 39% of these offenses are perpetrated by family members.13
  - Of growing concern is the increasing percentage of images produced by the children themselves.14
- One study of male undergraduates revealed a surprising level of sexual interest in children.
  - 21% reported sexual attraction to some small children.
  - 7% admitted to the likelihood of having sex with a child if they could avoid detection and punishment.15
- One study suggests that child pornography-related offenses may be a stronger indicator of pedophilia than sexual molestation against a child.16
- Repeated exposure to pornography is also a growing problem:
  - Legal pornography is a multi-billion dollar a year business and is significantly larger than the illegal child pornography business. There is growing attention to legal pornography as a public health issue.17
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• It is commonly noted that boys see their first pornography by age 11.\(^\text{18}\)

• Studies suggest that repeated exposure to especially violent pornography has significant negative impacts on socialization, attitudes, and beliefs.\(^\text{19}\)

• This onslaught of negative images comes at a time when adolescent brains are still developing – while they are working to establish their values, sexual identity, and relationship skills.\(^\text{20}\)

**The harm of child sexual exploitation goes beyond the numbers of reported or even estimated victims. The harm includes sexual objectification and the treatment of exploitation as normal.**

• It is estimated that $15 billion is spent annually by companies marketing all types of products to children.\(^\text{21}\)

• Children see an average of 30,000 ads per year.\(^\text{22}\)

• Exposure encourages children to value possessions above all else, see themselves as commodities, and view sexual objectification as normal.

• Based on a review of more than 300 studies, the American Psychological Association concluded that exposure to items such as sexualized images, lyrics, fashion, and role models made girls think of and treat their own bodies as sexual objects. The report sites research linking sexualization with eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depression or depressed moods in girls and women.\(^\text{23}\)

• One study found that approximately 4% (or 1 in 25) of 10 to 17 year olds surveyed had been asked to send sexual pictures of themselves to someone on the Internet.\(^\text{24}\)
How We Can Accomplish the Goals of Prevention (Six Action Areas)

I – RESEARCH

Goal: Promote the use of research to guide prevention practice and to serve as a catalyst for positive change.

Steps Toward Research Promotion

Advocate for more effective tools to assess the scope and nature of the full range of child sexual exploitation.

- Use existing research and case trends to advance the understanding of the range of motivations for perpetration as well as the various linkages between types of abuse and exploitation – technology facilitated and otherwise.
- Use research to help determine the factors sustaining the demand for sexual exploitation and sexually exploitive materials.
- Advocate for more research to advance the understanding of the problem and effective prevention and positive developmental practices.
- Translate and disseminate research into effective prevention and positive developmental practice and use research findings to serve as a catalyst for positive change.

What You Can Do Right Now To Promote Research

- Advocate for federal and state funding priorities that support research in this area.
- Encourage the incorporation of program evaluation research into all prevention and positive development initiatives.
- Encourage the development of research initiatives that increase our understanding of the factors supporting the demand for sexually exploitive materials so they can be targeted in future prevention efforts.
II. PUBLIC AWARENESS

Goal: Increase public awareness of child sexual exploitation and of effective prevention strategies.

Steps to Increase Public Awareness

- Frame prevention and positive developmental messages in a way that increases understanding of effective prevention strategies tackling root contributions to the problem, positive developmental approaches that may help avoid the problem, and motivating more effective action for the social change needed to support prevention.

- Disseminate these messages through technology or mass media efforts.

- Increase effective educational efforts including those that promote healthy environments, relationships, and sexuality as key components of primary prevention.

What You Can Do Right Now To Enhance Public Awareness And Action

- Assist your organization in the development of prevention and positive development messages that increase the public’s understanding of what constitutes effective prevention strategies.

- Promote educational efforts in schools and your community that increase adult’s, children’s, and youth’s knowledge about healthy development including sexuality and positive relationships.

- Develop and disseminate materials that educate the public regarding the role of profit and the media in promoting the normalization of sexual exploitation and sexual objectification, as well as strategies to counter such trends including the importance of focusing on policies and organizational practices that will counter such normalization of sexual harm.
III. END THE DEMAND

Goal: Identify and reduce the factors that fuel the demand for child sexual exploitation.

Steps to End the Demand

- Identify strategies that allow professionals and interested persons to be actively involved in ending the demand for sexual exploitation and sexually exploitative products.
- Reduce the profitability of sexually exploitive practices for corporations and individuals.
- Reduce public accessibility to material that sexually exploits children.

**What You Can Do Right Now To End The Demand**

- Advocate for legislation that sanctions businesses profiting from the exploitation of children and decreases the profitability of sexually exploitive materials.
- Encourage the development of more effective hardware and software programs (e.g., filters) or other means that limit access to sexually exploitive materials.
- Create “grassroots” campaigns in your community to create “stop feeding demand” or “sexual exploitation free” households, businesses, and communities. Such campaigns should strive to make it clear to children and youths, community members, professionals, and decision-makers that normalizing child sexual exploitation, products, and media containing exploitive content are not acceptable.
- Educate community members about the harm done by sexually exploitive media and social norms – such as references to children and teens in legal adult pornography – and engage them in prevention actions.
IV. POLICIES AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

Goal: Encourage the development and implementation of local, state, and national policies and organizational practices to advance primary prevention and strengthen comprehensive prevention measures.

Steps to Enhance Policies and Practices

Identify and advance organizational policies and practices based in research or best practices that promote positive development and comprehensive child sexual exploitation prevention (e.g., perpetration prevention, engaging males and bystanders, reducing the number of runaways, and countering normalization, technology-facilitated exploitation, commercial exploitation, child modeling sites, prostituted children and other child sex trafficking).

- Create standards to encourage organizations, industries, and communities committed to ending child sexual exploitation to take effective prevention action (e.g., reduce access to sexually exploitive depictions of children, adopt resolutions to be child sexual exploitation free, ban ads that sexually objectify children, ban messages that sexually degrade or violate children, set limits to “sex sells” if it means exploitation of children, challenge legal adult pornography that includes sexual references to children).

- Promote prevention programs and strategies that are evidence-based and adapted to the needs of various communities, organizations, agencies, and institutions.

- Disseminate information about policies and organizational practices designed to advance prevention and positive development.

What You Can Do Right Now To Promote Policies And Organizational Practices That Counter Sexual Exploitation

- Assist your organization in the development of practices and policies that counter normalization of sexual harm, sexual exploitation, and objectification.

- Assess your organization’s programs to determine which are supported by evidence and which require additional documentation or further development to bolster effectiveness.

- Consider adoption of prevention programs and positive development approaches that are evidence-based.

- Promote policies that create a solid foundation for the expansion of prevention efforts.

- Check with your County Commissioners to see if they are aware of the National Association of County Administrators (NACo) priority related to child sexual exploitation prevention. Work with county commissioners and administration to advance county prevention and health promotion practices.
V. COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES

Goal: Promote multidisciplinary and creative collaborations to align resources to foster successful prevention and positive development initiatives.

Steps To Encourage Collaborative Practices

- Promote local, state, and national coordination of, and collaboration among, organizations already working to prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation, along with reaching out to community leaders and potential partners such as those in industry, media, faith, and arts.
- Encourage prevention and positive development activism and advocacy.
- Inspire and engage “Prevention Champions.” Develop influential voices inside and outside of the networks of professionals already doing this work. Increase the numbers of leaders who can advance comprehensive and effective prevention efforts based in research, victim’s needs, and that are culturally relevant.

What You Can Do Right Now To Enhance Collaborative Practices

- Set a goal for your organization to create or reestablish six linkages in the next six months that will foster a stronger prevention and positive developmental response to child sexual abuse and exploitation and countering normalization of sexual harm.
- Identify at least two “Prevention Champions” during the next six months who can create a spark for local prevention efforts.
- Meet with agency and organizational leaders (that you’ve recently contacted) and develop a plan to use “Prevention Champions” to further efforts to prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation.
VI. FUNDING

Goal: Increase the dollars invested in prevention and positive development in proportion to the harm done and the costs of child sexual exploitation.

A Minnesota report shows sexual violence, including crimes committed against children, costs 3.3 times as much as alcohol-impaired driving in the state. The costs break down to $1,540 per resident, and half of these costs result from child sexual assault. Yet there are no state funds for prevention and limited federal dollars to do anything to stop it from happening.25

Steps to Enhance Prevention and Positive Development Funding

- Advocate for funding increases to expand prevention and positive development research, policy development, collaboration, and awareness-to-action efforts for prevention. These dollars are to be in addition to those to advocate for and treat victims and those to assess, treat, and monitor those who have offended.
- Include financial support for prevention measures in related efforts to respond to sex crimes.

What You Can Do Right Now To Improve Prevention and Positive Development Funding

- Enhance your skills and those of your staff around funding by seeking out free or low-cost trainings provided in your community. Look for training that enhances grant-writing skills, foundation-proposal skills, and fund-raising. Contact non-profit business mentoring organizations for assistance (e.g., local retired business alliance members) in addition to pursuing training.

- Participate in processes within federal funding agencies for developing funding priorities. All major federal funding agencies (e.g., National Institute of Mental Health, Centers for Disease Control, National Institute of Justice) seek input on their priorities. Respond and advocate for prevention and positive development funding.

- Meet with local and state decision-makers to educate them about the importance of funding prevention and positive development efforts. Help them understand that no public health crisis has ever been eradicated by simply treating the victims and perpetrators after the fact. It is only when prevention is adequately funded that problems of this nature can be eradicated.
Plan Prepared by the National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Exploitation

This plan was prepared by the National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Exploitation. The Coalition was initiated and is supported in part by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and the work of all its members.

The individuals and organizations listed are or were part of the Coalition and have endorsed the general concepts underlying this plan. As with all documents covering a broad area, it is important to recognize that the degree of commitment to particular items in this plan may vary from organization-to-organization. The plan does, however, represent the input from all representatives and their commitment to advance the plan in ways that fit within their missions and the larger Coalition goals.

- Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood. Representative: Josh Golin
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention & Control. Representative: Sandra Alexander* & Corrine Graffunder
- ConnectSafely.org. Representative: Larry Magid
- Sharon Cooper, MD
- Darkness to Light. Representative: Pat Patrick
- DSM Consulting. Representative: Joan Tabachnick
- ECPAT-USA. Representative: Carol Smolenski
- Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Program. Representative: Brad Russ
- Keith Kaufman, PhD
- Mary Leary, Esq.
- Mayo Child & Family Advocacy Program. Representative: Jennifer Fisher*
- Minnesota Department of Health. Representative: Patty Wetterling*
- National Alliance of Children’s Trust & Prevention Funds. Representative: Teresa Rafael
- National Alliance to End Sexual Violence. Representative: David Lee*
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. Representative: Ernie Allen & Julie Patrick***
- National Children’s Advocacy Center. Representative: Deborah Callins*
- Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers. Representative: Maia Christopher
- California Coalition Against Sexual Assault/Prevention Connection. Representative: Suzanne Brown McBride & David Lee*
While the individuals listed below are no longer acting participants in the Prevention Coalition, their efforts and the time they volunteered greatly contributed to the development and progress of the group.

- Gail Burns-Smith
- Dr. Trisha Folds Bennett
- Lisa Fujie Parks
- Barbara Rawn
- Pat Stanislawski

* Connotes member of the Steering Committee
** Connotes Prevention Coalition Chair
*** Connotes Administrative Assistant to the Prevention Coalition
Glossary

**Child**: A person who has not attained maturity or the age of legal majority. While this varies from state to state, the federal definition of the age of legal majority in most circumstances is someone who has not yet attained the age of 18. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as every human being below the age 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.\(^2^6\)

**Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)**: Practices by which a person, usually an adult, achieves sexual gratification, financial gain, or advancement through the sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child.\(^2^7\)

**Groomed**: Process by which child molesters lower inhibitions of their victims. It can begin innocuously, creating trust.\(^2^8\)

**Normalization**: The process by which an idea, concept, or behavior becomes an accepted part of societal culture. Once this occurs, something that was once clearly understood as abhorrent or harmful becomes considered “just the way it is.” With more barriers removed and further normalizations it becomes viewed as beneficial or even preferential – the thing to have, the way to be, the expected behavior.\(^2^9\)

**Pornified**: Transformation of a person, an object, or sexual behavior into pornographic standards. All sex or sexually explicit images are not pornography, yet sex has become equated with pornography and pornography equated with sex.\(^3^0\)

**Positive Development**: The mix of positive opportunities, supports, resources and relationships made available to children and youth from their parents, other adults, peers, socializing institutions such as schools, and the communities they live in which increases the likelihood that they are healthy, caring and responsible.\(^3^1\)

**Prevention**\(^**\)**: All approaches, programs, and strategies that address a specific behavior – before or in response to – it being acted upon.

\(^\star\star\)**Prevention Definition Note**: There is not a common definition of what prevention is. Advancing a common definition is a critical goal for this Coalition. For now a composite of definitions is being used.

- **Comprehensive**: A comprehensive strategy would include a coordinated national plan, multiple approaches, and thorough evaluation of existing programs and assure sufficient resources to simultaneously address the current victims and perpetrators; while effectively preventing any further child sexual abuse.\(^1^2\) Comprehensive efforts are also commonly referenced as including work
across the socio-ecological model or the Spectrum of Prevention. Effective prevention strategies must target not just individual behaviors but also the environment in which they occur.

- **Prevention Strategies – Before**

  **Primary Prevention:** is what happens proactively for the general population, before a problem arises. Conditions are created for a healthy environment that encourages a state of health and well-being for everyone and that make the healthy choice the easy choice.

- **Prevention Strategies – After**

  **Early Intervention or Secondary prevention:** is what happens at the earliest sign of a problem, or whenever a person or group can be identified “at risk” of developing a problem.

  **Tertiary prevention:** is what happens to intervene in the family cycle of violence or to prevent recidivism or relapse. This level of prevention is to address the harm and to treat.

**Sexual Objects:** Made into a thing for others’ use.
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Endnotes


4 Collins, Michelle. Executive Director of Exploited Children Services of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, Alexandria, Virginia: August 2008 [hereinafter Collins].


6 Ibid. op. cit. n. v.

7 Ibid. op. cit. n. v. Estes notes in the Executive Summary, “The percentages of runaway and thrownaway children away from home for 1 week or longer reported in rows 1-4 of Column B are based on incidence rates reported in NISsmart-1 (Finkelhor, 1990).”

8 Ibid. op. cit. n. v. Estes also notes, “In a nationally representative sample of runaway and homeless youth, Greene et al. (1999) found that only about 8.5% of runaway and homeless youth were residing in shelters; the vast majority of runaway and homeless children (91.5%) were living on the street. Greene et al. estimated the incidence of “survival sex” among runaways and homeless children to range from 8.5%-27.5%, albeit Greene recognized their estimates to be low. Our field research, indicated that, among runaways and homeless youth, approximately 30% of shelter youth and 70% of street youth engaged in prostitution in order to meet their daily needs for food, shelter, drugs, and the like.” (Executive Summary, 28). See also: Greene, J. M., S. T. Ennett, and C. Ringwalt. (1999) Prevalence and correlates of survival sex among runaway and homeless youth. American Journal of Public Health. 89(9): 1406-1409. See also: Edwards, J. M., B. J. Iritani, and D. D. Hallfors. (2006) Prevalence and correlates of exchanging sex for drugs or money among adolescents in the United States. Sexually Transmitted Infections. 82(5): 354-358.


12 Ibid. op. cit. n. iv. According to Collins, these statistics do not reflect the entirety of exploited child cases, only a small sample group of identified victims whose case files are analyzed for statistical information. As of November 2008, over 1700 children have been identified through the Child Victim Identification Program (CVIP).

13 Ibid. op. cit. n. iv.


15 Briere, J, & M. Runtz. (1989) “University males’


28 Ibid. op. cit. n. xxvi, p. 904.


35 Ibid. op. cit. n. xxiv.


37 Ibid. op. cit. n. xxiii.
For more information about the Coalition, please visit us online at:
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