



SEXUAL EXPLOITATION EDUCATION

MALE VICTIMS by WALKING WISE



NOTE TO PRESENTER

Log in to WalkingWise.com and refer to the Implementation Toolkit for classroom teaching tips.

Most importantly:

DEFINE SCHOOL POLICY

Establish a sexual exploitation reporting protocol with a trauma-informed response. The Walking Wise Implementation Toolkit provides a sample protocol.

AGE & AUDIENCE

This presentation can be edited by following the procedures on page 3 to align with your school policies, specific age groups, and the involvement of at-risk audiences.

SUPPORT PROCEDURE

Provide your students with guidance on how to access immediate help or arrange a private meeting with a social worker, counselor, nurse, school resource officer, or another trustworthy staff member to report concerns about themselves or a peer.

SECOND SAFE ADULT

Ensure a second trustworthy adult, such as a teacher, is present in the learning setting to observe student reactions and identify those who may benefit from a follow-up meeting. This person should remain focused and free from other duties during the presentation.

NOTE TO PRESENTER

This PDF contains the same content as the PowerPoint presentation but has been condensed into fewer pages for easier reference. For live presentations, please use the PowerPoint version. It reveals bullet points one at a time.

Meaningful learning takes time. By introducing topics gradually over several years, educators can create steady growth in awareness and understanding.

Our recommended teaching plan offers a long-term path for middle and high school students to build knowledge and confidence.



6-YEAR TRACK

PARENTS & STAFF

#1 Myths & Reality

6th GRADE

#2 Trustworthy vs. Unsafe Adult

#3 Grooming Process

7th GRADE

#4 Pornography Link

#5 Sextortion Scheme

8th GRADE

#6 Male Victims

#7 Runaways as Targets

#8 Rural Risks

9th GRADE

#9 Human Traffickers

#10 Female & Peer Recruiters

10th GRADE

#11 Family Secret

11th GRADE

#12 Hidden Buyers

NOTE TO PRESENTER

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- Insert new PowerPoint slides.
- Remove the Walking Wise logo and copyright "@2026 Walking Wise" from the new slides.
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NOTE TO PRESENTER

The presenter is welcome to customize this Walking Wise presentation according to the instructions provided on this page.

For revision requests, please email us at: support@WalkingWise.com.

CONTENT NOTICE

We'll be discussing serious safety issues today.

Some topics may be difficult to hear.

If you ever feel uncomfortable, you can step out and speak with a trustworthy adult for support.

You're not alone—help is available.

NOTE TO PRESENTER

Trauma-Informed Delivery Guidelines

To support a safe and effective learning environment, please follow these guidelines:

- Present the information in a calm, matter-of-fact way and avoid sensational or alarming language.
- Avoid graphic details. Focus on helping students understand behaviors, risk, and ways to stay safe.
- Never blame victims. Responsibility always belongs to the person who caused harm.
- Maintain a steady, composed tone. Students often mirror the presenter's emotional cues.
- Do not ask students to share personal experiences or disclosures.
- If students laugh or react awkwardly, respond neutrally and gently redirect the focus.
- Pair all risk information with needed resources, practical solutions, and support options.
- Reinforce that students are not alone and that trustworthy adults are available to help.

STATISTICS

Why Study Results Can Vary

- **Some crimes are never reported, making it hard to reveal the entire issue.**
- **Studies collect information in different ways, leading to different results.**
- **Small studies may not represent everyone.**

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In this presentation, we'll discuss statistics, but it's important to note that while statistics provide valuable insights into an issue, they cannot be relied upon entirely.

Here are a few reasons:

UNREPORTED

Victims often do not report the crimes committed against them due to fear, shame, retaliation, or manipulation. Also, many don't realize that what is happening to them is a crime.

INCONSISTENT COLLECTION

Areas may define sexual crimes in various ways or use different methods to collect data, making it hard to compare information.

FOCUS GROUPS

Small or specific focus groups participating in a study or survey may not accurately reflect the diversity or experiences of the broader population.

WHY LEARN ABOUT THIS



KNOWLEDGE serves as a powerful defense against sexual predators.

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Education is one of the strongest tools for prevention.

When young people understand how predators operate, they are better able to recognize manipulation and avoid dangerous situations.

Reinforce that awareness increases safety.

PREVENTION EDUCATION



SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

includes grooming,
sextortion, pornography
& sex trafficking.

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SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Taking advantage of another person for their own benefit, especially in a sexual way, often using pressure, tricks, or control.

Below are different forms of exploitation:

GROOMING

Building trust, dependency, or an emotional connection to manipulate someone.

SEXTORTION

Threatening to share embarrassing or sexual images, videos, or information to pressure someone into following demands.

PORNOGRAPHY

Involving someone in creating sexual images who is under 18, or someone who is pressured, or unable/unwilling to give consent.

SEX TRAFFICKING

Manipulating or forcing someone into sexual activity in exchange for money or something of value.

Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 (Legal Definition):

SEX TRAFFICKING is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person under the age of 18 for the purpose of a commercial sex act.

TVPA link: Retrieved April 14, 2026, from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-106hr3244e nr/pdf/BILLS-106hr3244enr.pdf>

VOCABULARY



Words to Understand

- **Vulnerable**
- **Predator**
- **Sterotype**
- **Myth**
- **Humiliation**
- **Survival Sex**



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Understanding vocabulary terms related to the behaviors of sexual predators can empower young people to recognize warning signs of harmful situations.

Knowing these terms helps them identify manipulative tactics that unsafe people (predators/traffickers) use to build trust and exploit vulnerabilities.

With this knowledge, young people are better equipped to spot red flags, understand that these behaviors are abusive, and feel more confident reporting predators to trusted adults or authorities, potentially preventing further harm.

VOCABULARY

PREDATOR

A person who harms, abuses, or takes advantage of others for personal gain.



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What percentage of sex trafficking victims in the U.S. are believed to be MALE?

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Source

Swaner, R., et al. (2016, June). Youth involved in the sex trade: A national study, p. 36. U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved November 23, 2024, from <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/grants/249952.pdf>

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What percentage of sex trafficked victims in the U.S. are believed to be MALE?

- A) Up to 6%**
- B) Up to 16%**
- C) Up to 36%**
- D) Up to 46%**

ANSWER

Up to **36%** of U.S. trafficking victims are believed to be male.

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Swaner, R., et al. (2016, June). Youth involved in the sex trade: A national study, p. 36. U.S. Department of Justice.

n = 341

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Traffickers exploit similar vulnerabilities to groom and coerce all young people and genders.

A 2016 national report revealed the following about sex trafficking victims: 36% of victims were male, 4% are transgender females, while less than 1% were transgender males.

Source

1. Swaner, R., et al. (2016, June). Youth involved in the sex trade: A national study, p. 36. U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved November 23, 2024, from <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/grants/249952.pdf>



This 3-minute Walking Wise animated video series teaches how sexual predators use manipulation, intimidation, and coercion to exploit young people.

NOTE

Log in to Walking Wise.com to watch the three-minute animated video with audiences.

Is animation appropriate for teens?

Yes, even businesses worldwide use explainer-style animation as a training tool for their employees.

VOCABULARY

STEREOTYPE

An idea or belief about a group of people that is not always true.



STEREOTYPES

What are common stereotypes about males and females?



STEREOTYPES

Examples of Stereotypes

- Males are better at **math**, while females are better at **reading**.
- Males **hide their feelings**, while females show **emotions**.
- Males can cause **harm**, while females are more likely to get **hurt**.

Stereotypes can affect how people are treated.

For boys, messages like “be tough” or “don’t cry” can make them feel ashamed or weak for speaking up.

This is especially important in cases of abuse or exploitation, because it often prevents boys from reporting harm or asking for help.

VOCABULARY

MYTH

A false belief commonly held by a group of people.



TRAFFICKING MYTH

Stereotype & Myth

- Males are victims of **labor trafficking**.
- Females are the victims of **sex trafficking**.

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Myths can prevent people from seeing the real problem.

In the case of this trafficking myth, both males and females can be victims of both labor and/or sex trafficking.

Myths often cause people to overlook signs or red flags that someone is being harmed.

TRAFFICKING MYTH

How does the myth that only females are sex trafficked impact males?



TRAFFICKING MYTH

Impact of the Myth

- Male victims may go unnoticed.
- Abuse against males may be taken less seriously.
- Fewer support services are available to help males.



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OVERLOOKED CASES: Sometimes, because of stereotypes, adults may not realize that boys can be victims. This can include family members, teachers, doctors, or law enforcement officers. As a result, some boys who need help may go unnoticed.

UNDERESTIMATED IMPACT: Harmful experiences can affect boys just as seriously as girls. However, some people may not fully understand how much it can harm boys emotionally. This can lead to misunderstandings about what boys are going through.

LACK OF RESOURCES: Because fewer cases involving boys are reported, people may not realize how often this happens. This can lead to fewer support services being created for boys, even though they need help too.

Source

1. United States Department of State (2023, June). Overlooked for Too Long: Boys and Human Trafficking. Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking In Persons. Retrieved on December 30, 2024, from <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Overlooked-for-Too-Long-Boys-and-Human-Trafficking.pdf>

VOCABULARY

HUMILIATION

The strong feeling of shame or embarrassment caused by how someone is treated.



MESSAGES ABOUT MALES



Stereotypes about males often make it harder for them to ask for help.



MESSAGES ABOUT MALES

Impact of Social Messages

- Males may **blame themselves** because they may think only girls can be victims.
- Males may **fear** others will make wrong assumptions about their identity.
- Males may feel **shame** because they were unable to stop what happened.

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United States Department of State (2023, June). Overlooked for Too Long: Boys and Human Trafficking. Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking In Persons.

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MALE IDENTITY: From a young age, boys often receive messages that they should be strong and not show emotions. Movies, games, and superheroes sometimes reinforce this idea by showing boys as powerful and girls as more vulnerable. These messages can make it harder for boys to admit when they need help.

FEAR & CONFUSION: Boys who are harmed may worry that others will misunderstand them or make wrong assumptions about who they are. This can leave them feeling confused, worried, or unsure about how to talk about what happened.

SELF-BLAME: Many boys may blame themselves for what happened, even though it is never their fault. Because of this, they may keep it a secret rather than ask for help.

Source

1. United States Department of State (2023, June). Overlooked for Too Long: Boys and Human Trafficking. Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking In Persons. Retrieved on December 30, 2024, from <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Overlooked-for-Too-Long-Boys-and-Human-Trafficking.pdf>

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What age group of males is most commonly targeted by traffickers?

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Source

Swaner, R., Labriola, M., Rempel, M., Walker, A., & Spadafore, J. (2016, March). Youth Involvement in the Sex Trade: A National Study, pp. 40, 41. CourtInnovation.org. Retrieved November 25, 2024, from <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/grants/249952.pdf>

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What age group of males is most commonly targeted by traffickers?

- A) 9 to 12 years old**
- B) 13 to 17 years old**
- C) 18 to 24 years old**

ANSWER

Ages 13 to 17 are when males are commonly targeted by traffickers.

NOTE TO PRESENTER:

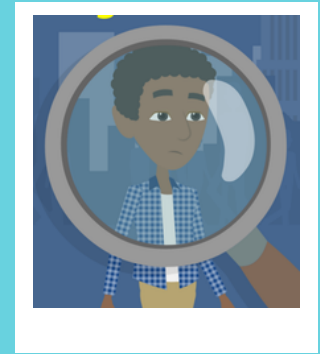
A 2016 national study reported: 77% of all respondents (199 underage youth) indicated that their first trafficking experience took place while under the age of 18. The average age was 15.8 years old.

Source

Swaner, R., Labriola, M., Rempel, M., Walker, A., & Spadafore, J. (2016, March). Youth Involvement in the Sex Trade: A National Study, pp. 40, 41. CourtInnovation.org. Retrieved November 25, 2024, from <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/grants/249952.pdf>

UNRECOGNIZED

Why can it be harder to notice or recognize male victims?



UNRECOGNIZED

Why Some Victims Are Overlooked

- People may assume males are **willing** participants.
- Adults may be **less protective** of males than of females.
- Warning signs may be **misunderstood or unnoticed**.



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NPR News, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/05/24/999726614/growing-number-of-male-survivors-talk-about-being-a-sex-trade-victim>

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MISUNDERSTOOD SITUATIONS: Sometimes people assume boys are choosing or causing situations, instead of recognizing that they may be experiencing harm. This can lead people to misunderstand what is really happening.

LESS WATCHFUL PROTECTION:

Adults and community members may not watch over boys as closely as girls. They may believe that boys are not at risk or that they can take care of themselves.

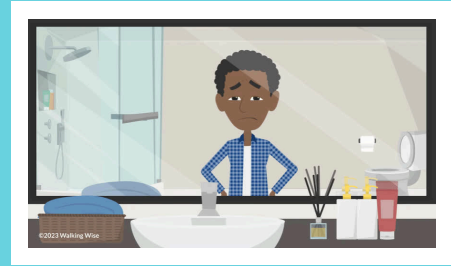
LIMITED AWARENESS: When people don't realize that boys can be victims, they may overlook or misunderstand important warning signs. This can delay help for someone who needs support.

Source:

1. NPR News, 2021. Retrieved January 15, 2026, from <https://www.npr.org/2021/05/24/999726614/growing-number-of-male-survivors-talk-about-being-a-sex-trade-victim>

UNREPORTED CRIME

What happens when crimes are kept a secret?



UNREPORTED CRIME

Impact of Not Asking for Help

- Victims **do not receive the help** they need to stop the crime.
- Victims often experience **stress, sadness,** or may **use substances** to cover their pain.
- **Fewer support systems** are offered to males.

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UNADDRESSED EFFECTS: When boys do not get help, the effects can last a long time. They may feel very sad or stressed, or struggle to make safe choices. This is why getting help early is important.

MISSING INFORMATION: If harmful situations are not reported, they are not counted. This means adults may not fully understand how often this happens or how many boys need help.

LESS SUPPORT AVAILABLE: When people don't realize how big the problem is, fewer programs and resources may be created to support boys. This can make it harder for them to get the help they need to heal.

VOCABULARY

VULNERABLE

More likely to be hurt, tricked, or taken advantage of by others.



INCREASED RISK

What could make someone vulnerable to being targeted?



INCREASED RISK

Risk Factors: Difficulty at Home

- Unable to access **basic needs** such as food.
- Not having **a stable place to live.**
- **Experiencing rejection** by family.

Source:

Kinnish, K., Barba, A., Blacker, D., Dierkhising, C., Garrett, R., Grady, J.B., Greenbaum, V.J., Griffin, D., Rubiales, R., Spring, G., Wozniak, J., and Child Sex Trafficking Collaborative Group. (2021). Child sex trafficking: Who is vulnerable to being trafficked? Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. Retrieved January 16, 2026, from https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/child_sex_trafficking_who_is_vulnerable_to_being_trafficked.pdf

INCREASED RISK

Risk Factors: Social Challenges

- Facing **bullying, loneliness, or low self-esteem.**
- Being easily influenced by **peer pressure.**
- Spending a lot of time with **online-only friends.**

1. Kinnish, K., Barba, A., Blacker, D., Dierkhising, C., Garrett, R., Grady, J.B., Greenbaum, V.J., Griffin, D., Rubiales, R., Spring, G., Wozniak, J., and Child Sex Trafficking Collaborative Group. (2021). Child sex trafficking: Who is vulnerable to being trafficked? Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

2. Thorn. (2025). Sexual Extortion & Young People: Navigating threats in digital environments.

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Source:

1. Kinnish, K., Barba, A., Blacker, D., Dierkhising, C., Garrett, R., Grady, J.B., Greenbaum, V.J., Griffin, D., Rubiales, R., Spring, G., Wozniak, J., and Child Sex Trafficking Collaborative Group. (2021). Child sex trafficking: Who is vulnerable to being trafficked? Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. Retrieved January 16, 2026, from https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/child_sex_trafficking_who_is_vulnerable_to_being_trafficked.pdf

2. Thorn. (2025). Sexual Extortion & Young People: Navigating threats in digital environments. Retrieved January 16, 2016, from <https://www.thorn.org/research/library/sexual-extortion-young-people/>

INCREASED RISK

Risk Factors: Emotional & Physical Challenges

- **Having no interest** in school or other activities.
- Experiencing **neglect or abuse**.
- Living with physical or mental **health challenges**.
- **Using substances**, such as drugs or alcohol.

Source:

Kinnish, K., Barba, A., Blacker, D., Dierkhising, C., Garrett, R., Grady, J.B., Greenbaum, V.J., Griffin, D., Rubiales, R., Spring, G., Wozniak, J., and Child Sex Trafficking Collaborative Group. (2021). Child sex trafficking: Who is vulnerable to being trafficked? Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. Retrieved January 16, 2026, from https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/child_sex_trafficking_who_is_vulnerable_to_being_trafficked.pdf

RISK FACTORS

What activities could make it easier for someone to become targeted?



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NOTE TO PRESENTER

TRAFFICKING RISK FACTORS

- Experience neglect, mental, physical & sexual abuse
- Food insecurity, unhoused, or lack of basic needs
- Poor self-esteem
- Struggles academically or has learning differences
- Lacks peer relationships or is a target of bullying
- Submits to peer pressure
- Unmotivated to achieve in school or activities
- Unprotected use of social media platforms
- Intellectual disabilities or mental health issues
- Older boyfriend, girlfriend, or partner
- Family rejection over sexual orientation
- Drug and alcohol use
- Romantic partner uses drugs
- Isolated by a romantic partner or friend
- Family member abuses drugs or alcohol
- Unstable home life or unhealthy family dynamics
- History of running away
- Lives in foster care or a group home
- Unhoused or lives in a homeless shelter
- Lives near a wealthy tourist location

- Targeted by cults or gangs, or is a cult or gang member
- Family member participates in trafficking
- Exposed to prostitution within the neighborhood
- Involved in the Juvenile Justice system

Source:

1. Thorn. (2025). Sexual Extortion & Young People: Navigating threats in digital environments. Retrieved January 16, 2016, from <https://www.thorn.org/research/library/sexual-extortion-young-people/>

Kinnish, K., Barba, A., Blacker, D., Dierkhising, C., Garrett, R., Grady, J.B., Greenbaum, V.J., Griffin, D., Rubiales, R., Spring, G., Wozniak, J., and Child Sex Trafficking Collaborative Group. (2021). Child sex trafficking: Who is vulnerable to being trafficked? Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. Retrieved January 16, 2026, from https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/child_sex_trafficking_who_is_vulnerable_to_being_trafficked.pdf

RISK FACTORS

Common Risks Factors for Males

- Online friendships with strangers
- Gaming platforms with unknown players
- Sharing private images (sexting)
- Running away from home



1. Thorn. (2025). Sexual Extortion & Young People: Navigating threats in digital environments.
2. Kinnish, K., Barba, A., Blacker, D., Dierkhising, C., Garrett, R., Grady, J.B., Greenbaum, V.J., Griffin, D., Rubiales, R., Spring, G., Wozniak, J., and Child Sex Trafficking Collaborative Group. (2021). Child sex trafficking: Who is vulnerable to being trafficked? Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.

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Source:

1. Thorn. (2025). Sexual Extortion & Young People: Navigating threats in digital environments. Retrieved January 16, 2016, from <https://www.thorn.org/research/library/sexual-extortion-young-people/>

Kinnish, K., Barba, A., Blacker, D., Dierkhising, C., Garrett, R., Grady, J.B., Greenbaum, V.J., Griffin, D., Rubiales, R., Spring, G., Wozniak, J., and Child Sex Trafficking Collaborative Group. (2021). Child sex trafficking: Who is vulnerable to being trafficked? Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. Retrieved January 16, 2026, from https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/child_sex_trafficking_who_is_vulnerable_to_being_trafficked.pdf

RISK FACTORS

Tricky Online Strangers

- Predators often pretend to be the **same age** and have **things in common**.
- They **build trust** before making awkward or unsafe requests.



RISK FACTORS

Tricky Online Strangers

- They often try to move **the conversation** to a private chat.
- Sometimes they suggest **meeting in person** for an adventure.

RISK FACTORS

Tricky Online Strangers

- They pretend to have a **romantic interest**, which can cause them to lower their guard.
- Predators often **send sexual photos FIRST**, then request one in return.

RISK FACTORS

Homelessness

- **Running away** leaves teens without protection.
- Staying with friends (**couch surfing**) often doesn't last.
- Teens without housing may feel pressured to engage in **"survival sex"** for food and shelter.

VOCABULARY

SURVIVAL SEX

When someone is pressured to exchange sexual activity for basic needs such as food, shelter, or safety.



RISK FACTORS

Substance Use & Addiction

- Predators may target teens by giving them access to **free drugs and alcohol.**
- Predators often use substances to **build trust and gain control.**

SUBSTANCE USE & CONTROL: Sometimes, people may use drugs or alcohol to cope with stress, pain, or difficult experiences. This can make it harder for them to think clearly or make safe decisions.

Predators may use substances to gain trust or control. For example, they might offer drugs or alcohol to make someone feel dependent on them.

If someone is already struggling with substance use, it can make them more vulnerable to being taken advantage of, especially if someone is providing those substances.

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT



The developing brain can increase a teen’s vulnerability.



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

At about what age is the male brain fully developed?

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Source:

Casey, B., Jones, R. M., & Somerville, L. H. (2011). Braking and Accelerating of the Adolescent Brain. *Journal of Research on Adolescence: The Official Journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence*, 21(1), 21–33. Retrieve January 15, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2010.00712.x>

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

At about what age is the male brain fully developed?

- A) 16 years old
- B) 18 years old
- C) 20 years old
- D) 25 years old

ANSWER

The male brain is fully developed
at about **25 years old.**

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Casey, B., Jones, R. M., & Somerville, L. H. (2011). Braking and Accelerating of the Adolescent Brain. *Journal of Research on Adolescence: The Official Journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence*, 21(1), 21–33.

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BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Although the brain's size may no longer grow, it is not fully developed until young people are in their twenties. Some studies suggest that for males, the age is closer to twenty-five.

Source:

Casey, B., Jones, R. M., & Somerville, L. H. (2011). Braking and Accelerating of the Adolescent Brain. *Journal of Research on Adolescence: The Official Journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence*, 21(1), 21–33. Retrieve January 15, 2026, from <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2010.00712.x>

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

The Brain Is Our Control Center

- The brain **grows to its full size** in teenage years.
- Brain development continues until about **age 25**.
- The brain's **prefrontal cortex** helps with **decision-making and self-control**.

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Casey, B., Jones, R. M., & Somerville, L. H. (2011). Braking and Accelerating of the Adolescent Brain. *Journal of Research on Adolescence: The Official Journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence*, 21(1), 21–33.

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BRAIN DEVELOPMENT: Even though the brain may look fully grown, it is still developing into a person's twenties. This means young people are still learning how to make decisions and handle challenges.

BRAIN FUNCTION: The front part of the brain supports important skills such as making good choices, planning ahead, and controlling impulses. Since this part is still developing, it can be harder for teens to pause and think before acting.

DECISION-MAKING & RISK:

Because these skills are still growing, young people may sometimes take risks without thinking about the consequences. People who want to take advantage of others may exploit this by pressuring teens into making quick or unsafe decisions.

Source:

Casey, B., Jones, R. M., & Somerville, L. H. (2011). Braking and Accelerating of the Adolescent Brain. *Journal of Research on Adolescence: The Official Journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence*, 21(1), 21–33. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2010.00712.x>

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Prefrontal Cortex: The Brain's Control Center

- **Decision-Making:** Helps us decide what to do
- **Plan Ahead:** Think about the future
- **Self-Control:** Stop and think before acting
- **Understand Consequences:** Predict what might happen next
- **Problem-Solve:** Figure things out
- **Manage Emotions:** Helps us stay calm and in control

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Cleveland Clinic. (2025). Prefrontal cortex. Cleveland Clinic.

49

The prefrontal cortex serves as the brain's control center and often does not fully mature until about age 25.

Source

Cleveland Clinic. (2025). Prefrontal cortex. Cleveland Clinic. Retrieved March 2026, from <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/body/prefrontal-cortex>

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Pausing Gives Time To Think

- Teen brains are **still learning** how to make safe decisions.
- Feeling **strong emotions** or excitement in the moment is normal.
- It can be **hard to slow down** and think about consequences.
- Learning how to **make decisions** is part of growing up.

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Teen brains are still developing, especially the parts that support decision-making and self-control.

This is completely normal, but it can make it easier to act on impulse, especially in emotional or exciting situations.

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

How Predators Might Take Advantage

- They may pressure teens to **act quickly.**
- They might say, **“Don’t tell anyone.”**
- They may offer something that **seems exciting or special.**
- They try to **stop teens from pausing to think it through.**

It's important to understand that predators take advantage of young brains by creating a sense of urgency, secrecy, or excitement, so teens don't stop to think.

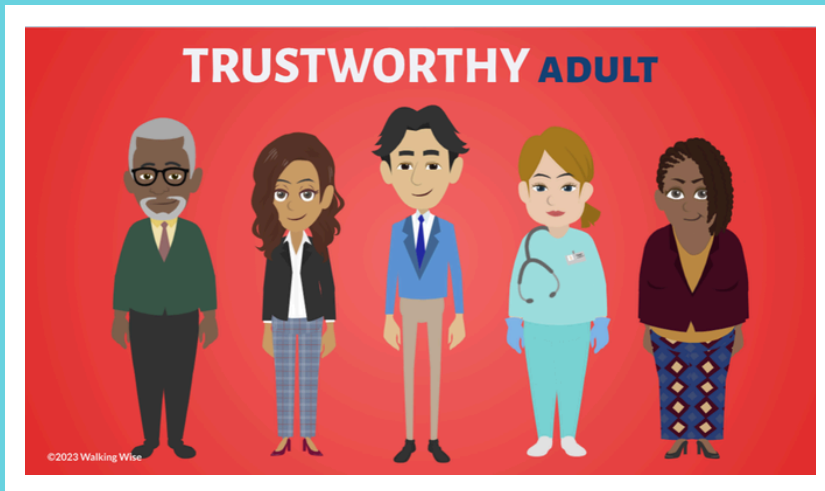
BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Pause. Think. Then Decide.

- **Pause:** Take a moment before responding.
- **Think:** Does this feel safe or right?
- **Check:** Take time to talk to a trustworthy adult.
- **Walk Away:** It's okay to say 'no' or leave.

Slowing down when making decisions is a powerful safety skill.

ASK FOR HELP



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Walking Wise asked a focus group of survivors:
What do you think young people should know about sex trafficking?

ANSWER

The survivors agreed that the most vital information teens should know is how to ask for help.

At the top of their list:
Tell a TRUSTWORTHY adult.

ASK FOR HELP

Here are ways young people can ask for help.



ASK FOR HELP

How to Ask for Help



- If you are in immediate danger, dial 911.
- If the sexual predator IS a family member, tell a trustworthy adult.
- If the sexual predator is NOT family, tell a parent or guardian
- If you are a student in school, tell a trustworthy teacher, coach, school nurse, social worker, counselor, resource officer, or principal.
- To gain internet access for help, use computer at your school or a public library.

24-Hour Hotline for Help

- ✓ National Human Trafficking Hotline 888-373-7888 or TEXT 233733
- ✓ Rescue America 833-599-FREE (3733)
- ✓ National Sexual Assault Hotline 800-656-HOPE (4673)
- ✓ National Center for Missing & Exploited Children 800-THE-LOST (843-5678)
- ✓ National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-SAFE or TEXT 88788
- ✓ National Runaway Safeline 800-RUNAWAY (786-2929)

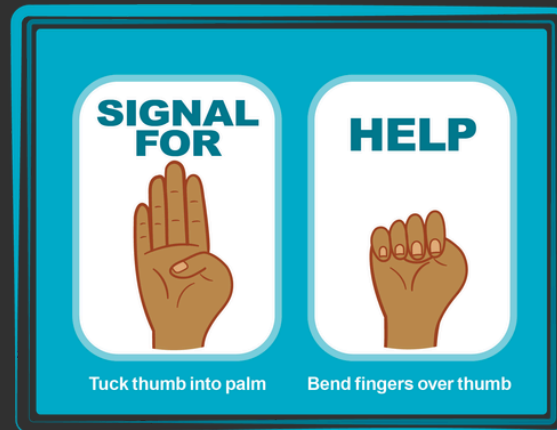
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NOTE TO PRESENTER

Presenters may ask their audience to consider adding a few "hotline for help" phone numbers to their cell phone contacts or take a photo of this slide.

HAND SIGNAL FOR HELP



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Source: Canadian Women's Foundation, April 2020

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Although the hand signal for help has not yet achieved universal recognition, it may quietly get someone's attention in urgent situations.

SILENT

It can be used silently.

UNTRACKABLE

It leaves no digital footprint.

CONCEALED

It can be done secretly when a perpetrator is in the vicinity.

SIGNALS DISTRESS

A distressed facial expression can help others recognize that help is needed if the hand signal is not understood—but it is important not to alert the predator/trafficker, causing harm.

Source

Canadian Women's Foundation, April 2020

Thank you!

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NOTE TO PRESENTER

To access additional resources on male victims, please refer to the last page of Lesson Plan #6 on the Walking Wise Learning Platform.

We welcome your feedback at support@WalkingWise.com.