



Sexual Exploitation of Teens



missing children's
network
Keeping hope alive

OUR MISSION

Founded in 1985, the MISSING CHILDREN'S NETWORK offers front-line services to families who are searching for their missing child. Our staff accompanies, supports, and counsels families, while working closely with police, media, and other organizations dedicated to searching for missing children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The MISSING CHILDREN'S NETWORK staff would like to thank all those without whom it would have been impossible to develop this guide:

Special thanks to all the parents who trusted us by sharing the distress they experienced when faced with the path taken by their teenage daughters.

We wish to thank the Department of Justice Canada - National Victime Fund for its support in the creation of this resource booklet.

© 2018 Missing Children's Network

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without the prior permission of the Missing Children's Network.

A stylized, light green map of the province of Quebec is positioned in the background of the page. It is partially obscured by a large, solid lime green shape that resembles a drop or a splash, which is located on the left side and extends towards the center. The map shows the outline of the province, including its major geographical features like the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Saguenay Fjord.

THE FAMILY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

When a teenager disappears, our family assistance team will evaluate the situation and, if appropriate, issue a missing person report that will be distributed throughout Quebec thanks to a network of contacts that includes the media, hospitals, shelters, police services, etc. We maintain ongoing contact with all those involved in order to ensure follow-up on information that can help locate the teenager. Whether by phone or in person, we make ourselves available to support parents, take steps on their behalf, or simply listen, reassure, and provide them with the necessary resources.

This booklet was developed to inform and guide parents or those close to a young person facing sexual exploitation, to enable them to better understand the issues and mechanisms involved in this issue, and to answer their questions.

Note: The feminine has been used in this text to facilitate reading, and because the problems experienced by boys who have been sexually exploited are different from those of girls, and may be the subject of another document.

THE HARSH REALITY

One of the worst situations parents may have to deal with when their teenage daughter runs away (or even before she leaves), is learning how she has had to survive, namely by immersing herself in the world of sexual exploitation. The sexual exploitation of teens can take many forms, such as prostitution, pornography, stripping, dancing topless, escort services and erotic massages. It is important to note that all forms of sexual exploitation are illegal under the Criminal Code of Canada and should be reported immediately.



Unfortunately, this type of exploitation is widespread enough to justify producing a booklet on the subject. We wish to help families gain a better overall understanding of the problem so that they can gain a new perspective on the situation and on teenage girls.

First of all, it is important to know that, behind almost every case, there is an adult who is responsible for the process leading to the exploitation of a young person. Whether we call him enabler, pimp, or even the boyfriend, he is the one who will manage all the hard-earned money. It is thus difficult to view these young girls as voluntary sex workers, in full control of their fate. Therefore, we will not use the terms prostitute or escort because these minors are duped by false promises, threatened, intimidated, exploited by adults, and are vulnerable due to being runaways or having difficult living situations - they are victims!



SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND CANADIAN LAW

“Sexual abuse or exploitation of children and adolescents occurs when an older child, adolescent, or adult, abuses a younger child or adolescent for sexual purposes, including involvement in prostitution, pornography, and the production of pornographic material.”

CAN YOUNG GIRLS CONSENT TO PROSTITUTE THEMSELVES?

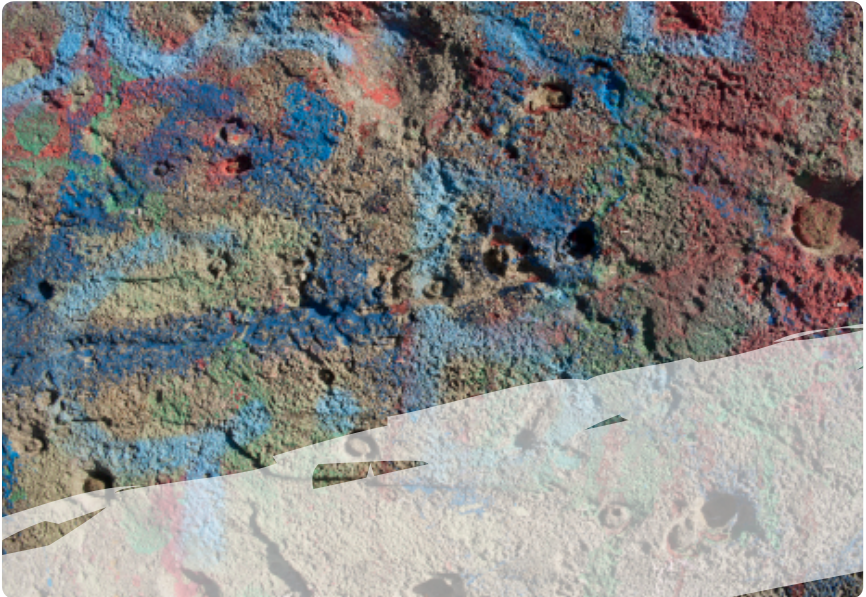
The age of consent to sexual activity (voluntary and without exchange of money) has been 16 years since May 1, 2008, under the Tackling Violent Crime Act. However, when the sexual activity qualifies as sexual exploitation, as in the case of juvenile prostitution or pornography, the age of consent is 18 years-old.

Source :

Department of Justice Canada, 2010, justice.gc.ca

The key encounter: street gangs

In order to work in the sex trade, minors must have access to a network that allows them to move around, to find accommodation, to obtain fake identity cards, not to mention benefit from some form of “protection”. Most of the time, it is an organized group that is responsible for orchestrating this downward spiral, specifically: the street gang.



Research and interviews conducted with young women who have been victims of sexual exploitation as teenagers reveal that gangs use direct and effective strategies to subtly introduce them into the prostitution milieu. Too often, the context of running away represents a perfect opportunity to recruit young people because:

- Runaways need a good Samaritan who will provide them with shelter and clothing. However, this “hand-out” must be paid for.
- Young people will sometimes join friends who are already under the influence of a gang or a pimp.
- Having nowhere to go and fearing the police, they will find safety with the group.

Recruitment: before or while running away

Gang members know where to find girls they intend to prostitute, since they:

- Hang out in places where young people can be found: bus terminals, parks, etc.
- Take in runaway girls: recruiters know the habits of young vulnerable girls, without resources or contacts and, above all, without money.
- Use Internet and social media: an ideal place to make contacts and develop a trusting relationship. A great way to get to know a young woman's problems, to give her support, love, and to offer her help.
- Recruit through other girls: unfortunately, too often, teenage girls will share the contact information of "good guys" who can help them the next time they run away.



A GRADUAL PREPARATION FOR PROSTITUTION

Despite efforts at prevention, recruitment and seduction techniques have changed very little and always work well with young people. Why? Because these men offer what every teenager is looking for: the dream of a better future, freedom, the idea of “false” financial independence, love, belonging to a group, and a sense of security.



The great game of seduction

Usually the main goal is to develop a romantic relationship with a young girl, or even with several girls in different environments. These young affluent men know how to make her happy and offer her the lifestyle and attention she is so desperately seeking. As she is later introduced to his group of friends, she becomes part of the “gang”. Then comes the moment when:

- The friend asks to be reimbursed for everything he has paid for; nothing is free, after all...
- He needs a “favour”, done out of love, to help him out of his temporary financial difficulties: to pay off a debt by spending the night with someone he knows, for example.
- He uses a strategy of “destroy to rebuild”, i.e. targeting her vulnerability (hang-ups concerning her physical appearance), reinforcing her self-esteem, and then developing a pattern of domestic violence, alternating between the honeymoon phase and violence.

Isolation from family and friends

- To gain more control over the young girl, the “boyfriend” tries to physically and psychologically isolate her from family and friends. Among other things, phone calls are screened and going out alone is forbidden.
- The relationship will be marked by signs of jealousy, possessiveness, and control. The young girl becomes his property – she will be watched closely. Unfaithfulness to the boyfriend or to gang members comes at a high cost, and the young girl risks being subjected to physical and psychological violence.

Desensitization: disassociating body from feelings

It has been established that quite often a planned “ritual” is carried out to reach the next step that will ultimately lead to prostitution. The act will occur either in the form of a game or sexual assault. While under the influence of alcohol or drugs, the young woman is encouraged, or coerced, to have sex with several people. She will then be “sold” the idea that if she has already had relationships with several people, without deriving pleasure, she can certainly spend the night with just one customer, especially since she can be paid for doing so.



PREVENTING THE FALL: CLUES TO WATCH FOR IN YOUR TEENAGER

New clothes, cell phone, items she has gotten or paid for without you knowing;

Changes in physical appearance, hypersexualization, more mature behaviour;

Neglects her old group of friends;

Secretive behaviour: calls, sneaking out;

Spending time with an older boyfriend, or older friends;

Change in habits: going out more often, trouble with authority, running away for short periods of time.

Of course, these are also typical teenage behaviours and may have no connection with sexual exploitation.

Becoming a victim of trafficking for sexual exploitation

Juvenile prostitution by gangs can sometimes be described as “trafficking” for the purpose of sexual exploitation, since they engage in the sexual services trade by sending adolescent girls to another city or province, under the supervision of another group or pimp. The isolation, the language barrier, the lack of knowledge about services and even the place where they are situated, makes them hostages, and at the mercy of their exploiters.

Who are they and what motivates them?

To be able to help these young girls, it is necessary to understand their personal dynamics. It is not just chance that propels a young girl in this direction. Personal history, current or past difficulties, mental health issues, addiction problems, combined with a key encounter with one or more ill-intentioned individuals; and there you have all the pieces of the puzzle starting to fall into place.

PERSONAL FACTORS MAY “PREDISPOSE” A YOUNG GIRL TO FIND HERSELF IN THIS ENVIRONMENT:

A way out

A study conducted in Quebec¹ with adolescent girls who had been involved in prostitution reported that they had all experienced one or more of these four situations in their families: illness of a parent (physical or mental), physical or sexual violence, a feeling of not having been loved enough or abandoned, and

strictness or lack of freedom in the family environment.

Feelings of acceptance and self-worth

The great gift that a gang offers its members is being accepted regardless of one's faults, academic results, family wealth, or the status of the parents. Hanging out with older men who have cars, who get to cut in line at bars or clubs, while both intriguing and intimidating other students at school, can all be rewarding for someone who has a fragile self-esteem.

Belonging to a group

As dysfunctional as it may seem, gang dynamics provide an opportunity to create a sense of belonging, one of the most pressing needs in adolescence. Most young people want to join a group in high school: it can be a sports team, a music group, the debate club, but also a street gang.

Love

The young girl discovers feelings of love: a grand encounter with a man whom she is willing to follow everywhere, who knows exactly how to maintain the emotional bond and how to play with her feelings.

Physical appearance and body image

Adolescence is an extremely difficult period for self-image, especially for young girls. The search for affirmation of her self-worth, which is often linked to her body, unfolds through the gaze of others. The importance placed on the body keeps young girls from focusing on developing other personal skills and qualities. They come to value themselves based only on the sexualized gaze of men, so much so that over time, all their personal values are based only on their physical attributes.

As shocking as it may seem, there are "good" reasons why young girls remain in these conditions. Even worse, sometimes they will go back to the gang even after having filed a complaint. Any situation, however abusive it may be, nevertheless brings its share of benefits and advantages. As in any family, there are pleasant moments within the gang, emptiness that is filled, and the discovery of strong emotional bonds. There is also manipulation, domination, and a dynamic of "conjugal" violence that is difficult to accept and leave.

¹ [Fournier, Michèle (2003), "Jeunes filles affiliées aux gangs de rue à Montréal : cheminements et expériences", Les Cahiers de recherches criminologiques, cahier 39.]

Between a rock and a hard place: Choosing the lesser of two evils

For many young people, returning home after having run away can mean going back to many more years to a strict environment, far from the freedom they now have, or simply to conditions that seem unbearable according to the current needs, fears, and feelings. Even if they realize that their life on the run is filled with abuse and extremely difficult, they at least feel that they have “chosen” the situation.

The benefits: the ones that are easier to believe...

- Even if some days are difficult, they have a deep inner feeling that “everything will settle down”, that things will get better with their boyfriend, and that their lifestyle will improve.
- Feel safe from previously experienced distress (in a youth group or their family environment).
- Think they have found/regained a family that accepts their weaknesses, faults, and past problems.

RESEARCHERS HAVE ESTABLISHED FOUR PROFILES

** Only for information purposes: the aim of grouping by category is to summarize profiles in broad terms, but fundamentally we prefer to see people as unique, with their own histories.*

SUBMISSIVE YOUNG GIRLS: initially roped in through love, easily influenced, with low self-esteem, they have deep emotional needs and quickly become emotionally dependent. To regain the love or esteem of the boy they love, they will obey his orders, whatever they may be.

SEXUAL SLAVES: forced to prostitute themselves full-time, without being asked for their opinion, they no longer have power over their lives. Getting the girls addicted to certain drugs becomes an effective way of controlling them.

- These young girls, like all of us, dream of having a better life: to make money quickly, to have control over one's life, and become independent.

Fear...

- Fear of reprisals: one does not leave a criminalized environment easily. Terrorized by the idea of being beaten, found again, taken back.
- May have been threatened that their families will be attacked if they leave the gang or speak out.
- Shame and fear of being rejected by their families once they find out what they did.
- Other young women in the gang may be asked to intimidate, beat, or threaten them.

OF TEENAGE GIRLS THAT JOIN STREET GANGS:

ADVENTURE-SEEKERS: these older girls approach gangs of their own initiative to make money through prostitution, and perceive themselves as partners. Expensive drug use can become part of the picture. They are often entitled to a share of the profits and are valued by the gang if they recruit as well. However, they (wrongly) believe that they will be able to enjoy this way of life without any consequences. The more money they make, the more the gang will do everything in its power to make them “submissive” as well.

INDEPENDENTS: keeps a business relationship with the gang: if necessary or if requested, they may accept to “help out” with activities such as prostitution or others (such as being informants, spies, lookouts). However, it is not certain that they will maintain this status for long, since it is always more advantageous for the gang to retain total control over young girls.

Source : Jeunes filles sous influence, prostitution juvénile et gangs de rue, Michel Dorais et Patrice Corriveau (2006).

As in the case of hostage victims, Stockholm syndrome has also been observed among these young girls. This is a psychological reaction experienced by the victim of a tormentor in which, surprisingly, the victim develops sympathy, trust, and even a desire to defend the tormentor. Sometimes aware of the manipulation they are being subjected to, some young girls think that prostitution is a lucrative way of providing for themselves for a long time and to stay on the run. However, a pimp is needed to ensure their safety. Nonetheless, this position is dictated by the instinct to survive, not by the desire to use this means.



What is the role of the parent?

It is absolutely necessary to understand the issues and what your teenager is experiencing, to be able to intervene...

YOU, AS PARENT-OBSERVER, NEED TO TAKE A STEP BACK TO BETTER UNDERSTAND

Listen, be welcoming, do not say anything: even if you are devastated by the accusations she makes against you, you must listen to them, all of them. It is in her grievances, her shortcomings, and her pain that you will find the answer that you are looking for: what do those surroundings, that life, the gang give her?

Do not forget that she is a victim: compassion must prevail over judgment, do not develop the idea that she likes what she does. She is in a survival situation...

Put your teenager's needs/emotions/distress above your own. This is about your role as a parent, not you as a person. Share your emotions, sorrows, and needs with other adults and those around you. Your teenager is already well aware of the pain you feel in relation to what she is doing, so mentioning it will not bring any productive or positive results. Guilt only eats away at people for a while, before rendering them aggressive towards those who provoke such a heavy and destructive emotion in them.

Take her where she is at; the last few weeks have completely changed her life. She is no longer a little girl, she believes she is independent and autonomous, has plunged into a particular universe, has spent time with adults and been in adult situations. You will have to get to know her again.

Don't look for the people responsible; look for solutions. It is already too late to rewrite this chapter. There are still many more pages to be written, together, and in collaboration. This horrible period will certainly have an impact on the days to come, but the future is still wide open, she is only at the beginning of her life.

STÉPHANIE, WHO IS FAMILIAR WITH THE WORLD OF PROSTITUTION, AS WELL AS WITH SEVERAL "SURVIVORS", TELLS US:

"For me, everything is about RECOGNITION. When you're 15 years-old, whether you've been doing badly in school for a long time, you're no good at sports, or your mother yells at you because you haven't cleaned your room, you're so far from being recognized for anything. You finally get recognition, in the bar when you're dancing on stage. At the end of the night, when you're the one who makes the most money and your pimp, or your boyfriend if you want to call him that, is proud. He takes you shopping the next day, alone without the other girls, and promises you a trip or an apartment. The other girls are jealous! You're the best, even if it's at nude dancing: you're proud. Recognition and success – it's been a long time since you've had a taste. In one night, you make more money than your own mother makes in a month; that's success. Today, I have a little girl and I know that if we don't give her recognition, she will go looking for it elsewhere, even in the dives where I and a lot of other girls have passed through, or been working, just to get patted on the back and be finally told: you're the best..."

YOU, AS PARENT-ACTOR; INTERVENING DIRECTLY

If she has a significant addiction problem, which influences her behaviour (prostitution for money, endangerment, impaired judgement), that is the first problem to solve before going any further.

Help her to find success outside of the gang: she has to find other ways to foster her self-esteem. She has to find satisfaction, recognition, and pleasure. It is necessary to compete against what the gang environment brings her in terms of social, emotional, psychological, and family benefits.

Identify the advantages versus

the disadvantages: by maintaining a healthy dialogue and positioning yourself as an attentive listener who does not judge, you will be able to talk rationally about your child's lifestyle. By asking questions, try to see what she sees as positive and be the devil's advocate. Let her bring up the negative aspects and find alternative ideas that will draw her away from her current lifestyle.

Offer something better: suggest alternatives; listen, then look at possible strategies with her. Stay with other family members? Set up her in an apartment? Help her find a job? Enroll her in adult education classes?

Help her to think about her future: we all have goals and dreams at every period of our life. What does she want? How can she get there? How can you support her desire to achieve these goals?





YOU, AS PARENT-EXTRA; PRESENT, BUT IN THE BACKGROUND...

Keep reminding her that you will always be there when needed: she may push you away, reject you, but be patient and do not give up.

Build a safety net even if you have to withdraw personally: without approving of what she does, remain available if she needs help, at any time, no questions asked.

Give her time to step back; still in opposition to authority, she will not readily admit that she made a mistake. Time will pass, she will experience other things, meet other people, and will slowly see the drawbacks of the environment she once knew.

SHOULD SHE BE FORCIBLY REMOVED FROM HER ENVIRONMENT?

Depending on the young girl's age, mental health issues or substance abuse problems, and the risks to her safety (which, of course, always exist), caution should be exercised in deciding on the approach to take.

Locate her and bring her back to safety? Even then, the group home or family environment must be able to offer her all the necessary resources and support and hope that she does not want to leave again. Is this realistic?

The closer she gets to the age of majority, the sooner she will be "legally free". Maintain contact and a relationship of trust with her, even if you hate what she does and the people she hangs out with. This could also be a way of intervening without intervening.

Threats, fear, and coercion are the strategies the gang uses with your daughter. Do you want to use the same forms of control yourself? This is something that should be discussed as a family, with the teenager, and counsellors.



BEWARE OF DEEP BETRAYALS (BROKEN PROMISES, LAYING TRAPS): this very “tough” world in which she has been making her way has taught her mistrust, she is now able to feel people out quickly, she is no longer naive and has been deceived repeatedly. If she can no longer count on you, who can she count on?



In conclusion, never hesitate to ask for help or seek professional advice. The more you know about yourself, your teenager, and the topic, the more confident you will be in your ability to help and intervene. No matter how things develop: stay present, available, and maintain contact.

Also, don't forget to take care of yourself. Look at this situation as if you were running a marathon. It is necessary to be in good physical and psychological shape, to spend a certain amount of energy on a daily basis, but to avoid exhausting yourself. Find someone who can listen to you, without judging. Try to carry on with activities that help take your mind off things and keep some personal time for yourself, your partner and for your leisure activities.

Do not hesitate to contact the MISSING CHILDREN'S NETWORK at 514 843-4333 for advice or simply to be heard or listened to.

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

PARENTS EN MARGE DE LA RUE

Information and support service for parents whose children are experiencing problems related to running away, prostitution, or other street activities. Individual and group support.

Tel. : 514 849-7117

enmarge1217.ca/un-soutien-aux-parents/

LIGNE-PARENTS

Hotline for parents

Tel. : 1 800 361-5085

ligneparents.com

CENTRE D'AIDE AUX VICTIMES D'ACTES CRIMINELS (CAVAC)

Tel. : 1 866 532-2822

cavac.qc.ca

SPVM (CITY OF MONTREAL POLICE SERVICE)

Prevention and information on street gangs

spvm.qc.ca/fr/jeunesse/parent-gangs-de-rue.asp

RESOURCES FOR YOUTH

PIAMP : PROJET D'INTERVENTION AUPRÈS DES MINEUR(E)S PROSTITUÉ(E)S

Tel. : 514 284-1267

piamp.net

LA MAISON DE MARTHE (Quebec City), *support for victims of sexual exploitation*

Tel. : 418 523-1798

maisondemarthe.com

HELPLINE FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS

Tel. : 514 933-9007

Tel. : 1 888 933-9007 (toll free)

agressionssexuelles.gouv.qc.ca

EN MARGE 12-17

Shelter for youth 12-17 year-old

Tel. : 514 849-7117

enmarge1217.ca

LE BUNKER

Shelter for young people 12-21 year-old

Tel. : 514 526-7677

danslarue.org



950 Beaumont Avenue, Suite 103, Montreal (QC) H3N 1V5
Telephone : 514 843-4333 Fax : 514 843-8211
missingchildrensnetwork.org

