



Speak out to break down the wall that makes underage prostitution invisible

What if my child was a victim of sexual exploitation in prostitution?

A guide for all parents to know, understand and (re)act



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Table of Contents

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF MINORS: A POORLY UNDERSTOOD REALITY	4
SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN PROSTITUTION: EVERYONE CONCERNED!.....	6
CONFRONTED WITH THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF MY CHILD IN PROSTITUTION: WHAT CAN I DO?	8
WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT OR IF MY MINOR CHILD IS A VICTIM OF PROSTITUTION?	8
MY CHILD IS A VICTIM OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN PROSTITUTION, EVEN OCCASIONALLY: WHO SHOULD I TELL AND WHAT SHOULD I DO?	11
YOU ARE NOT ALONE AND YOU CAN GET HELP!	12
WHAT ROLE CAN I PLAY IN PREVENTING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF MINORS IN PROSTITUTION?.....	13
PARENT, BUT NOT ONLY.....	16



You're probably not used to seeing the words **"prostitution"** and **"minors"** associated.

And yet, hard as it may be to believe, this phenomenon exists, growing year after year, affecting several thousand **young people** in France alone and affecting all social backgrounds.

As **parents**, the pillars of your children's education, we are convinced that you can play a key role in the fight against under-age prostitution, because you have the power to positively influence your children's lives.

In this **guide**, we will share with you **information and advice** on how to **understand, prevent and (re)act** in the face of this difficult-to-understand phenomenon.





SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF MINORS: A POORLY UNDERSTOOD REALITY

A lack of comprehensive data regarding the issue of prostitution of minors is also observed at the EU level. The available data indicate that the prostitution of minors primarily involves teenage girls between the ages of 14 and 17, but the involvement of boys has also been reported in several countries in the region. More data are available on the issue of child trafficking.

According to the latest available, between 2017 and 2018, almost every fourth victim of trafficking in the EU is a child, 78% of child victims were girls, 60% of the child victims were trafficked for sexual exploitation and three-quarters (75%) of all child victims in the EU were EU citizens (European Commission, 2021, p. 12).

However, what everyone agrees on is that it affects young people in towns and cities as well as the countryside; it is found in all regions; it is present at all social levels and in all categories of the population.

In recent years, there has been an explosion in the number of cases of minors in prostitution.

The growth of this phenomenon is insidious because, on the one hand, the victims do not always consider themselves to be victims and, on the other hand, the act of prostitution is often invisible (advertisement on the Internet, meeting in flats via rental platforms such as Airbnb, etc.).

Prostitution takes many forms, but has only one definition:

As defined in the Optional Protocol to The Convention On The Rights Of The Child On The Sale Of Children, Child Prostitution And Child Pornography “child prostitution is the “use of a child in sexual activities for remuneration or any other form of consideration”

(OHCHR,2000).

The remuneration here is not always money, but sometimes gifts, which gives young people the feeling that they are doing someone a service, not prostituting themselves.

What is done in this field at EU level

At the EU level, the European Commission adopted a comprehensive strategy in July 2020 to combat child sexual abuse – both offline and online. The primary objectives of this strategy are to enhance existing EU measures for safeguarding children from sexual exploitation and to address emerging challenges, particularly in the digital media context.

The strategy focuses on verifying compliance with EU regulations, developing sector-specific rules for law enforcement agencies and the private sector for detecting and reporting child sexual abuse on the internet. It centres on establishing an EU centre for preventing and combating child sexual abuse by focusing on transferring knowledge and networking within the EU. It also aims at improving how children are protected against sexual violence through networking different actors in global alliances.



SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN PROSTITUTION: EVERYONE CONCERNED!

Sexual exploitation of children in prostitution is a complex and protean phenomenon that concerns us all, whether within our own families or in our wider environment.

As a parent in particular, it's very complicated to know whether my child is in danger or already a victim. By observing them, I can spot the tell-tale signs.

This list is not exhaustive, of course, and facing some of these difficulties does not necessarily mean that my child is in a situation of sexual exploitation.

On the other hand, I must be concerned to rule out this danger.





Signs that should alert me



My child uses his or her phone all the time

What social networks are installed on his or her phone?
Are there any exchanges with strangers?
Does answering messages or calls seem to be a priority at all times?



My child seems to have addictions

Drugs and alcohol are often used to help cope with the situation or by pimps to encourage prostitution.



My child's behaviour is changing

I notice sleep disorders, emotional hypersensitivity, loss of self-confidence, depressive attitudes, high anxiety...



My child is having difficulties at school

Repeated absences, drop in school results, difficulty concentrating during lessons... I discuss this with his teachers.



My child has new things or objects that I don't know the origin of

I try to find out the identity of the person offering these gifts



I notice physical trauma on my child's body



My child talks to me less and less

I can't talk about everything the way I used to. My child shuns me when it comes to talking about his life, his emotions, his relationships...



My child runs away and is increasingly absent from the family home, particularly in the evenings

(going out to nightclubs, etc.).



My child is being bullied at school



I have the impression that my child is cutting himself off from his or her usual circle of friends



My child's clothing style is changing



My child is meeting new people I've never heard of

I'm trying to understand how the meeting went.
I try to understand what they do together when they see each other.



CONFRONTED WITH THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF MY CHILD IN PROSTITUTION: WHAT CAN I DO?

I find it hard to believe, to accept that it's happening to my own child... I want to "close my eyes", to pretend it doesn't exist... I'm ashamed and afraid of how others will look at me, I'm worried, and a little lost too...

These are all feelings that upset me and that every parent experiences. As a parent, I want to protect my child.



WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT OR IF MY MINOR CHILD IS A VICTIM OF PROSTITUTION?

First of all, I need to be aware that my **child is a victim**. Even if he/she denies or minimises the reality of the situation, he/she needs support and to feel safe at home: kindness, listening, understanding, trust, dialogue and tolerance must guide my action.

As a **parent**, I have to realise that I'm **also a victim!**

I authorise myself to involve my family and other people I trust.

I can rely on others to find the best strategy, the key to encouraging listening and dialogue with my child and making him/her aware of the situation.

Certain members of my family or those close to my child can help me do this. I identify the people likely to have the greatest impact on my child, his/her “role models”, the people he/she trusts and who will be able to manage his/her own emotions. I take the plunge and dare to share my concerns with them. Perhaps these people are already aware of the situation...

I use fundamental principles to approach and talk to my child

If I see an opportunity, if I feel that dialogue is possible:

- **I choose an appropriate time and place** to broach the subject. My child needs to be calm and feel safe to express him or herself.
- **I don't judge or punish my child** so as not to provoke a blockage and risk breaking off all dialogue
- **I try to point out and make my child aware of what he would 'gain' by getting out of this situation**, particularly in terms of health, well-being and self-respect
- **I respect and accept what comes out of our discussions** since establishing dialogue is already a major step forward.

I have to be aware that there can be progress along the way, but there can also be setbacks.

- **I would like to thank my child for being so open with me and reaffirm my full support.**

My child is in denial, refuses to talk about prostitution: he/she is not ready or I am not the right person.

- I leave documents at his disposal to make him/her aware of the dangers he/she is exposed to.
- I offer him/her the opportunity to meet professionals, on a confidential basis, to discuss subjects such as health, sexuality, his/her well-being, his/her approach to social networks, etc.

Helping my child over the long term also means not forgetting myself!

Time and patience are two fundamental parameters to integrate. I'm preparing myself to deal with situations that may take a long time to resolve or deal with, and that will put my nerves and my family to the test.

To do this, I take care of myself and those around me: I allow myself to consult a psychologist, a marriage counsellor, occupational medicine, etc. and I look at the possible repercussions on the members of my family (reputation, "what people will say") in order to preserve the family balance.



MY CHILD IS A VICTIM OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN PROSTITUTION, EVEN OCCASIONALLY:

WHO SHOULD I TELL
AND WHAT SHOULD I DO?

To protect my child and prosecute clients and pimps, I'm not acting alone!

I call on the police and the courts to report the situation and even to lodge a complaint against those who are exploiting my child:

I raise the subject with the senior school administrator, the child protection services.... and I try to create a network of people who are mobilised to support and protect my child.

My child has run away or disappeared:

Go as quickly as possible to the nearest police or gendarmerie station to report your child missing.

Perhaps my child will talk more with a third party than with me. Using a third-party mediator can help.

Professionals involved in social and educational action, such as child protection services, can help me.



YOU ARE NOT ALONE AND YOU CAN GET HELP!

The sexual exploitation of children in prostitution is a social phenomenon that can affect any family. You are not alone!

You may feel powerless and isolated, but you and your child can find different types of support.

In each country, there are organisations related to child protection and social services that can support you if you face difficulties with your child.

Some European and international organisations also exist that will for sure be able to help.

One example is ECPAT. ECPAT is a global network of civil society organisations working together to end the sexual exploitation of children. It coordinates research, advocacy and action towards the aim of ending the sexual exploitation of children. Their website: <https://ecpat.org>

What you need to keep in mind

There is not only one single way to proceed. Indeed, you or your child can also confide in your family doctor, school nurses or psychologists, social services assistants... and contact family planning, medical and psychological centres...

Don't be afraid to call on these committed, caring professionals!



WHAT ROLE CAN I PLAY IN PREVENTING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF MINORS IN PROSTITUTION?

Prevention is a major and extremely complex issue when it comes to underage prostitution. It must be everyone's concern, with each of us acting at our own level.

What can I do as a parent to try to protect my child?

Some principles I can follow:

From an early age, I gradually build up a relationship of trust with my child by getting him or her to talk to me about a variety of subjects:

- **Consent and respect for other people** and their boundaries
- The **relationship with the body**: body image and body acceptance
- **Sexuality and sexual relationships**: prevention and protection measures
- **Healthy and unhealthy relationships**: in friendship and in romantic or sexual relationships
- Questioning **male-female relationships and the nature of friendships and romantic relationships**, so that they can better identify unhealthy relationships and the risks of being taken over.
- The issue of **harassment**, particularly in schools

- **Violent behaviours** including gender-based violence and bullying: to recognize risks and enact protection strategies
- **Gender roles and stereotypes**
- **Cyber security**: risks and prevention measures to navigate the online environment, including preventing online grooming
- **Pornography, as a non-realistic portrayal of sexuality.** It often conveys violent images and dissociates the physical relationship from the emotions, contributing to the idea that the body can be a commodity to be taken advantage of.

I get him/her to **question his/her own behaviour**, particularly with friends and in groups: we can find ourselves on the “other side of the fence” and unconsciously adopt “harmful” attitudes.

I suggest that he/she adopts a **supportive attitude towards his/her friends.**

When it comes to all these subjects, I may not feel very comfortable, and that’s perfectly normal!

I use existing media on the Internet that use their codes and that are meaningful to them!

For example, this short video explains the concept of consent with a cup of tea.



www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZWvrXVavnQ

If my child has mental disabilities, I contact professionals to find accessible and adapted communication media

I do not hesitate to take part in **local initiatives** proposed by professionals and parents' associations (conferences, meetings, etc.) on **certain subjects related to childhood, adolescence** and their problems.

Finally, as a parent, I can also lobby my child's school to introduce awareness-raising and prevention initiatives at school, from an early age.



PARENT, BUT NOT ONLY...

To combat a scourge, it is important that it is known and understood by as many people as possible.

That is why you also have a role to play by paying attention to the young people in your circle of family and friends.

You can also talk to others about this subject and share this guide, which will undoubtedly be more useful than you think!





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