

PARENTING

Who You Are Matters: Combating Trafficking Every Day

Zach and Sasha have two school age children Tim (11) and Amy (14). Zach works at a tech company and coaches their son in soccer. Sasha spends her time with her children and all of their activities. The parents are actively involved in their children's lives and care deeply about protecting them from harm. Though they do not know much about human trafficking, they are proactive about learning and doing all they can to ensure Tim and Amy are safe.

Sasha, Zach, and Amy attended the orientation night for Amy's new high school. There, Sasha and Zach went to an information session for all parents about internet safety related to on-campus internet use and internet at home including social media websites, apps, and online games. They also learned about cyber bullying and different forms of blackmail/extortion that can affect high school students.

Sasha spends a lot of her time taking Amy and her friends to volleyball games and practices. She is able to hear what Amy and her friends are talking about, what is going on in school, and what the latest trends are. Sasha hears the girls talking about photos that are taken and shared, and how some kids at school are contacted by unknown people online. Sasha takes this opportunity to share with Amy's friends about websites like [netsmartz.org/teens](https://www.netsmartz.org/teens) that educate teens on digital safety. She also lets Amy's friends know that they can always come to her if they ever feel afraid or uneasy about a person or situation.

Tim is in middle school. Boys his age are beginning to access materials online that are degrading and demoralizing. They are at risk of becoming desensitized to issues and crimes that should naturally be concerning. Zach learns more about the connection between pornography and sex-trafficking. He looks for resources that will help him talk with Tim about this so that he can help Tim grow to value, not degrade, others. Zach also seeks to serve as a positive male role model to Tim's male (and female) friends. He stays mindful of how he could use his soccer team or coaching role to make a positive impact in his community.

By focusing on addressing vulnerabilities and empowering their children, Zach and Sasha are able to combat human trafficking and prevent exploitation in their community by continuing to parent well. Their dedication and involvement in their children's lives has great impact.

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According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, approximately 300,000 children and youth are at risk for exploitation every year in the United States. Protecting children from harm is no longer simply an issue of educating them about strangers. Parents must confront digital safety, digital citizenship, and other mobile concerns in addition to addressing the physical safety of their children.

Consider how you can incorporate the following with your children, grandchildren, or other young people in your life:

- Learn the signs of sex and labor trafficking. Know what to look for to identify trafficking of boys and girls. Learn how traffickers target vulnerable youth.
- Talk with your children about internet safety, sexting, social media, and inappropriate web content. Utilize the tools and conversation guides at netsmartz.org/parents.
- Install filters on your family's digital devices to block content that may be dangerous.
- Program the National Human Trafficking Hotline (888-373-7888) into your family's mobile devices, and bookmark humantraffickinghotline.org on your computers so that you and your family can quickly and anonymously report any suspicious activity.
- Role play with your children about how they would respond if someone approached them and offered them a modeling job or asked to run away with him/her.
- Advocate for your children's schools to include human trafficking in their curriculums (nesteducators.org) and for the administrators, teachers, and school counselors to be trained on the protocols for addressing potential instances of trafficking.
- Share your family values and be open with your children on topics of healthy relationships, intimacy, and creating safe boundaries.
- Mentor vulnerable youth in your community formally or informally, and let your children's friends know that you are a safe adult to talk to if they need help.
- Ask your children regularly if they have concerns they want to talk about or if they have any worries about their friends or relationships.

When we engage together, miracles happen. Eradicating human trafficking will not be an easy task, but the steps to engaging the fight are simple. For more information about combating human trafficking and protecting vulnerable populations as a business, individual, or organization, visit engagetgether.com.