

The Metaverse: A New Virtual World that Can Breed Child Abuse and Sex Trafficking

Call to action for digital and virtual reality safety: The Metaverse is a prime target for children at risk of abuse and recruitment into sex trafficking.

SARASOTA, FL, UNITED STATES, April 3, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [New reports](#) suggest that online technology's push into the new metaverse could also be a haven for child sex predators.

Sexual predators are beginning to contact and abuse children in the Metaverse (a virtual-reality space in which users can interact with a computer-generated environment along with other users) and experts warn parents to take preemptive steps to protect their kids.

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month, and [Selah Freedom](#), one of the nation's largest anti-sex trafficking organizations, wants to continue to raise awareness of the connection between child abuse and sex trafficking. The Sarasota-based nonprofit points to the increasingly powerful social media

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trafficking.



SELAH FREEDOM

NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

1 in 10

The number of children that either has, is, or will experience abuse by the time they are 18.

Source: Data published 2013 by Catherine Townsend

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Child Abuse Statistics are Staggering in the U.S.

that has lured thousands of minors, particularly the Metaverse, that enables predators to form a bond with a child in eight minutes. The metaverse presents an extraordinary challenge for parents and it's critical for parents to have a good understanding of boundaries for their family, especially helping their kids to understand that child abuse is in every zip code in America. The metaverse carries seismic opportunities for predators to influence them and potentially lure them into a life of sex

Child sex trafficking happens in every single community in our nation. According to the [Florida Dept. of Education](#), child abuse and sex trafficking data shows staggering numbers that continue to rise each year:

- As many as 300,000 school-age children are at risk for sexual exploitation each year in the United States.
- One in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually assaulted by the age of 18.
- Up to 90% of minor victims are under the control of a trafficker (Shared Hope, 2014)
- Approximately one in seven youth online (10 to 17 years old) received a sexual solicitation or approach over the Internet.
- There are 800,000 kids missing, many of which are runaways.

The infographic features a teal background. At the top right is the 'SELAH FREEDOM' logo. The main headline reads 'More than 600,000 children are abused in the U.S each year.' Below this, it states 'Many Sex Trafficking survivors report being abused as children.' and 'Child Abuse Prevention is a priority.' A stylized white icon of a person hugging another person is on the right. At the bottom left is a circular seal for the National Children's Alliance. At the bottom center, it says 'Visit SelahFreedom.com/Prevention for youth and Parent resources.' At the bottom right, it lists the 'Information Source: National Children's Alliance'.

Selah Freedom is dedicated to help eradicate this issue both in Florida (the third largest state for sex trafficking) and at the national level. At the heart of their mission, one of their five initiatives offers a national Prevention program that can serve educators, caregivers and other organizations a K-12th grade curriculum and training for adults. Selah Freedom reports that 94% of trained youths indicated that they know the body safety rules to keep themselves safe; 92% can name three safe adults they can talk to if they feel unsafe; 91% know the difference between a secret and a surprise. Selah Freedom has trained 27,347 youth and adults to stay safe and act against child abuse and sex trafficking.

Selah Freedom also provides a 6-month mentorship program for at-risk girls and boys, ages 12-17, to equip them with the tools to avoid sex trafficking, make healthy life choices, develop positive relationships, and encourage their growth and restoration of personal power, which sex trafficking strips away.

Selah Freedom says that data is showing that often in domestic sex trafficking situations, traffickers will make the child victim feel dependent on prostitution for life necessities and survival. For example, a pimp will lure a child with food, clothes, attention, friendship, love, and a seemingly safe place to stay. After cultivating a relationship with a child and engendering a false sense of trust, the trafficker will begin engaging the child in prostitution. It's also common for traffickers to isolate victims by moving them far away from friends and family, altering their physical appearances, or continuously moving victims to new locations. In many cases, victims become so hardened by the environment in which they must learn to survive, that they are incapable of leaving the situation on their own.

The Foster Care System is a huge target for predators and children and are often previous

victims of sexual abuse and trafficking and wind up again falling into the hands of adults looking to harm them. Some of these interactions originate online and now through the metaverse, and sadly this abuse has become normal to these kids and the cycle continues. Victims of child abuse and sex trafficking, however, come from all backgrounds in terms of class, race, and geography (i.e., urban, suburban, and rural settings).

Another big challenge in the fight against child abuse and sex trafficking is faced by law enforcement agents. Sex trafficking investigations often require a robust multijurisdictional response, with multiple agencies playing a critical role in ensuring the protection of victims and effective prosecution of offenders. The method by which most traffickers identify, recruit, market, and maintain their victims results in a unique combination of sustained violent criminal behavior with reluctant victims and witnesses. Although interviews of sex trafficking victims frequently identify traffickers and other accomplices, some child victims may resist identifying their traffickers because of fear or other means of manipulation that the trafficker/pimp has exercised over them.

Furthermore, the victim may only know their traffickers' street name and cannot fully identify their traffickers.

Even more disturbing, child sex trafficking victims are often not recognized as victims and may be arrested and jailed. The dangers faced by these children—from the traffickers, their associates, and from customers—are severe. These children become hardened by the treacherous environment in which they must learn to survive. As such, they do not always outwardly present as sympathetic victims. They also frequently suffer from short-term and long-term psychological effects such as depression, self-hatred, and feelings of hopelessness. These child victims also need specialized services that are not widely available given they often have illnesses, drug addictions, physical and sexual trauma, lack of viable family and community ties, and total dependence—physical and psychological—on their abusers.

"Child Abuse isn't a topic that's going to be going away. It's a topic that's going to be sadly escalating," says Stacey Efaw, Executive Director, Selah Freedom. "We've seen the breakdown of families in America. We're seeing the power of social media and now the metaverse. As a result, children are affected. We just have to turn the TV on and see children out of control and a lot of it's coming from what they're seeing."

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