

Teenage prostitution



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Although Teen Prostitutes live in the same cities and towns as ordinary teenagers across the United States, their world is very different. They are here in our communities, and yet they are hidden from most people. They are kids, and yet the life they live separates them from most other kids and from normal teenage activities and concerns. They are criminals, but they are the victims of repeated crimes. They are family members, but most have not known a family's love and support. They have independence, but they do not have freedom.

They are earning money, but they live in poverty. They are sexually active, but without intimacy. They have escaped one set of rules but are forced to obey other, harsher ones. The world of prostitution is so separate from the ordinary world that most people rarely catch more than a glimpse of it. If they pause to wonder about a teen prostitute's life—to ask what it's really like, what would make a young person want to live like that, or what prostitution does to a teenager—they will not find many clues in the ordinary world.

Even when the news tells of the death or the arrest of a young prostitute, it rarely explains anything about the world that young person lived in. Looking behind the surface of that separate world is one way to see how teen prostitutes really live. Even from an early age, these kids often have a different and painful experience of the world. The steps they take to avoid being hurt in the ordinary world often lead them, unknowingly, into the separate world of prostitution.

Exploring what prostitution means to the kids who are involved in it helps show what has worked and what hasn't in helping teen prostitutes return to

the ordinary world. For some teens, prostitution is a kind of turned-around way of trying to get the financial support and love that they need, but that their families haven't been able to provide. Yet their families may cling to a respectable image that is not connected to the harsh realities their child must cope with on the street.

Lacking parental support and love, these teens would have a very difficult time trying to cross back into the world where they grew up. These teens, like too many other runaways and hustlers on the streets of America's cities, have moved into a life separated from everyday concerns and values. The stories told by these and many other street kids show how different their lives are from the lives of most American teenagers. While all teens share many of the same hopes and wishes, these teenagers face quite different worries and problems. Their stories are a window into the separate world of prostitution.