



SEXTORTION 101

What is sextortion?

When a person threatens, manipulates, or coerces a child after acquiring sexual imagery or videos of the child. The offender typically threatens to release the imagery of the child unless the child creates more imagery or sends money. Children are then coerced by the offender to comply with the demands, possibly over and over again, manipulated by the threats received from the offender.

What are the two most common types of sextortion?

Sexually Motivated Sextortion:

The offender obtains a nude or sexual image/video of the child. The offender then threatens to release that imagery to family, friends, church, school, or other places the child might fear exposure. This tactic is used to get more imagery, and often more egregious sexually based content. The threats escalate quickly, and frequently result in requests for video, live streams, and could lead to the child meeting the offender in person.

Financially Motivated Sextortion:

This scheme is most often perpetrated by large (organized crime) groups. After the imagery is obtained, the child is threatened with its release to friends, family, etc., unless the child sends some financial compensation to the offender. This financial demand can be procured in the form of gift cards (apple, online game rewards, etc.) or via apps like cash app.

What type of child is sextorted?

Assuming your child wouldn't be a victim of sextortion can unfortunately make your child more vulnerable to sextortion. Any child can be sextorted using any vulnerability.

The truth is, sextortion more often effects kids from "normal" families, without behavioral issues, or a history of abuse. In financially motivated sextortion, offenders sometimes target kids who might have "more to lose" by the threat of releasing imagery so they can assure the child will comply.

Statistically, male teens are the target of financially motivated sextortion.

When a child is sextorted, how do they feel?

Most often, children will not tell anyone they have been sextorted. Children feel stuck since they are so vulnerable after sending sexual imagery of themselves and receiving threats from the perpetrator. The spiral of feeling stuck quickly leads to hopelessness, and has many times led to suicide. Parents often learn about their child being sextorted from law enforcement, or after something tragic has happened.

Many teens fear getting in trouble with their parents, schools, or even law enforcement, and are sometimes told this will happen by the offender. This is what leads a child to feel they have no way out other than to comply, and helps adults understand why children won't seek help.

How is a child sextorted?

For a child to be vulnerable to sextortion, a child needs internet access or the ability to communicate with others through an electronic device. The child must have the ability to take pictures or videos, whether on a personal device or a device that belongs to the family, a friend, or school. Many times, the offender is posing as a teen or child of the opposite sex, with actual nude imagery of a teen or child that age, and they use this to initiate contact with the victim. People often think the conversation must go on for a long period of time before a child sends nude imagery, but in most cases, the trading of nude imagery has become so common place amongst teens, that the imagery is sent within the first few minutes of contact.

This is why sextortion can happen relatively quickly after the offender and child meet, since offenders are posing as a similarly aged child and capitalizing on the reality that trading sexual content is a common occurrence between teens. Both types of sextortion offenders are increasingly threatening, but the sexually motivated will require more sexual imagery, whereas the financially motivated will demand money and may threaten violence to the child or their family.

How can I report sextortion?

Sextortion should be reported to the online application(s) where the abuse occurred. You can make a cyber tip to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). Law Enforcement agencies equipped to take the report include local, or state agencies, the U.S. Secret Service, Homeland Security Investigations, or the FBI (IC3). These offenders (especially the financially motivated) are often in other countries, so the need to involve reporting agencies is important.

Please also refer to our guide – “My Child has been Sextorted – What Now?” for more support.

How can I prevent sextortion?

Understanding the reality of sextortion is the first step towards prevention. Afterwards, having honest conversations with your child and getting involved with your child’s online activity and device usage is going to establish that prevention foundation. The key to successfully keeping your child safe from online abuse will be to continue those conversations and regularly checking your child’s device.

When it comes to your child's devices, consider two straightforward rules: no devices in the bathroom or bedroom. This helps eliminate opportunities for a child to create sexual imagery.

Having these conversations now may help to ensure your child knows they can bring this to you, and may prevent a tragedy. Having age appropriate, open communication about all things is really the key strategy.

Sextortion Myths:

- Only children with vulnerabilities like being low income, high risk, or those who frequently engage in risky behaviors are victims of sextortion
- Children never take or send nude imagery
- Sextortion only happens on the “dark web”
- Children would tell if it’s happening to them, or would disclose about sexual imagery or “nudes” they’ve taken of themselves
- If we comply with the demands of the offender and send money or images, it will help the situation

Children have resorted to suicide to remove themselves from their reality after being sextorted. THE NECESSITY OF OPEN, HONEST CONVERSATION ABOUT THIS AND OTHER TOPICS CANNOT BE STRESSED ENOUGH.

Conversation Starters With Your Child:

- Have you heard of Sextortion?
- Tell me what you know about children sending naked pictures of themselves to people.
- Do you know someone who has dealt or is dealing with a situation like sextortion?
- If something like sextortion happened to you, how would you feel? You could always come to me even if you think it couldn’t be fixed.
- Having conversations online with people you don’t know in real life isn’t safe and can lead to situations where you feel stuck or pressured. When is the last time you felt stuck or pressured?
- If someone online demands you to do something, don’t listen. If you feel scared and did what they demanded, you can come tell me and I will help.
- People online pretend to be someone else. How would you feel if you had been talking to someone you thought was a friend, but they were actually an adult?

Get Involved:

- Understand the applications and commonly visited sites/apps your child uses. Learn what your child is doing on their device, and then dig in to how these apps are commonly used by offenders to prey on kids. By learning this information, you are better equipped to detect when something might be happening.
- We suggest as a helpful way of having this conversation, and learning what your teen/child is doing online, is asking them to show you how the applications and sites they are using work. Sit down and have them walk through the apps on their phone, explaining in an open dialogue how these work, and asking questions about them. This has the potential of allowing for open communication, without making the child feel they are at risk of being in trouble.

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