



LET'S CHAT

ONLINE SAFETY

Moray

Sextortion



Online Safety Tips for Parents and Carers

Sextortion happens when an individual manipulates, coerces, or threatens a child into providing sexually explicit images or videos, & then uses these materials to extort or exploit them further. Sextortion can happen anywhere, although it mainly occurs on the digital platforms where children are already spending their screen time.

Predators often pose as girls of a similar age and use fake accounts to target young boys, deceiving them into sending explicit photos or videos, they then threaten to release the compromising materials unless the victim sends payment or more images. All age groups and genders are being targeted, but a large proportion of cases have involved male victims aged between 14-18. Ninety one per cent of victims in UK sextortion cases dealt with by the Internet Watch Foundation in 2023 were male

Things to know about Sextortion

It's on the rise - There was a 25% rise in child abuse image offences recorded by UK police in 2022/23. A recent NSPCC investigation into child abuse images on social media showed that Snapchat was involved in almost half (44%) of instances. Meta-owned platforms Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp were used in a quarter of offences.

It's low risk and high reward for criminals - Organised crime gangs take full advantage of the fact that sextortion can be deployed with relative ease, at a distance and in high volume, the risk reward ratio for criminals is high. The exact figures of those affected in the UK and in fact globally are hard to quantify as the majority of incidents go unreported, which is a factor criminals rely on. It is estimated that thousands of adults and minors are targeted each year. Sextortion victims are silenced by fear, a sense of being alone, embarrassment and desperation. How will being exposed impact them and those around them, now and in the long term? This concern may be exacerbated with children if they are worried about damage to a parent's reputation, which can be a strong influence in them remaining silent or giving in to demands.

How is it done? - Although every case of sextortion is unique, there are common themes, patterns and tactics. Generally, the attack may take one of two approaches. In the first, the victim may receive an email from a criminal in which they claim to already have revealing photos or videos of them. The criminal will then threaten to share the image or video if the victim does not send more pictures or money. The second approach, which increasingly is involving young people, starts when the victim believes they are communicating with someone their own age, often a 'young girl' who is interested in a relationship. The criminal will often approach victims on dating apps, social media or gaming sites. They will then use any means – gifts, money, flattery, lies – to get a young person to share an image. In either instance, once the criminal has the image, they then threaten to distribute it with the victim's inner circle, generally friends and family, unless they agree to pay a ransom, or provide more images. Offenders can also create a fake image of them.

How do they pick their victims? - Targets are often victims of circumstance, unlucky to fall foul of a chance criminal, who may be targeting numerous victims. Victims are typically males aged between 14-18, however, victims can be younger as they have lied about their dates of birth to join popular social media sites or gaming platforms. Offenders are usually located outside of the country of the victim. Money plays a major part in cases of sextortion, but unfortunately, payment is no guarantee that the sexual blackmail will end. Often, this demonstrates to the criminal that you are willing to pay they may then come back and demand money in increasing amounts if any is sent following the initial request.



How can you do to help?

Remember - Criminals prey on the fear of exposure and the anguish it will cause, especially for children who may feel they cannot ask for help or report the abuse when they are caught in this cycle.

Discuss online safety - Young people should understand how sextortion crimes occur, openly discuss online safety and learn what preventative measures they should take across online platforms.

Report - Encourage your children to report suspicious behaviour and speak up if they have any concerns, however embarrassing it may be. This removes some of the criminals' leverage.

Be selective - Encourage children to think about what they share online, especially personal information, friends lists and passwords.

Enhance security settings - Keeping friend lists private, only sharing posts with friends and only accepting follows and friend requests from people you know reduces the risk of being targeted.

Do not share intimate images or videos - Even with people you know, videos can be recorded, images can be saved or have screenshots made from them, and easily published online where they can be shared and copied further.

Known who you're talking to - Be conscious of who you are interacting with online, even if they claim to be someone you know – there is no way to verify this from a picture or video. Criminals can pretend to be anyone online. Be suspicious of someone asking to move the conversation to another platform, this can be done to gain more information to exploit if the original platform doesn't allow picture sharing or access to contacts or personal information.

Remember - The recorded statistics of those impacted by sextortion and online blackmail schemes represents only a fraction of the true number. We must remain vigilant to the threat, (especially as criminals' tactics evolve, specifically involving the use of AI) and continue to exercise caution when communicating in the digital world. It is also vital to grow the conversation around this issue and raise awareness, especially for youngsters. Only by talking about it can we help remove the leverage that criminals prey on.

If you discover your child has been a victim

Discovering that your child has fallen victim to such a distressing crime can be devastating. In all cases it's crucial to respond swiftly, empathetically, and effectively. Even though sextortion is committed virtually, it can have serious impacts offline. After the threats and aggression, victims may feel alone, ashamed, scared, and these feelings can lead to children resorting to self-harm.

Although payment may seem like the easy way out, the advice is never to pay the ransom – the criminals are in fact more likely to come back with further demands. Instead, cease all communications and preserve any emails or messages as evidence. You can de-activate some social media accounts rather than deleting, this allows you to retain messages without receiving further correspondence. Even if content is ultimately published online, this does not mean there are not remedial measures that can be taken, and various legal tools can be deployed. Engaging in a peaceful and honest conversation is a helpful approach for you and your child to understand what's happening in a supportive manner. Although these kinds of discussions can be overwhelming, it's important to let your child know that you're asking questions because you care about their well-being and want to help. Reassure your child that your intention is not to punish them – sometimes children hesitate to share their concerns because they worry their internet access or device will be taken away.

Where to go for help

If you are concerned and need help to deal with this issue with your child, here is a list of organisations that can support you:

[Moray Protects](#) website - Provides information, advice and support on all areas of public protection.

[Internet Watch Foundation](#) – provide support to removes explicit images or videos of children.

[Police Scotland Website](#) and helpline – 101 for non-emergency support.

[Parents Protect](#) website and helpline (0808 1000 900) – works to prevent child abuse.

[Safer Schools Scotland](#) website and app - contains advice and guidance on a range of topics.

[National Crime Agency](#) - Protects the Public from serious and organised crime

Childline's [Report Remove](#) - helps young people under 18 in the UK to confidentially report sexual images and videos of themselves and remove them from the internet.

