Sextortion

What is Sextortion?

Sextortion is a financial cyber crime that exploits a young person's trust and seeks to control them through the threat of public humiliation by releasing or threatening to release nude or semi-nude images to the public. After the explicit imagery is captured by the sexual predator, it is used to blackmail the young person into sending more images, money, or in some cases, into recruiting more victims. **Images can be both real or generated by AI**. It can happen to anyone, although the National Crime Agency has reported that while sextortion is prevalent amongst all age groups and genders, *males between 14–18 are more likely to become victims of this crime*.

How Does Sextortion Happen?

Typically, sextortion begins when a criminal pretending to be a child or young person connects to and strikes up a friendship or relationship with a young person online. Initially, this will appear entirely innocent as they bond over shared interests. A young person may meet someone on a social media platform, a dating app, or even a gaming platform such as Roblox. Soon, the interactions take an unexpected turn towards sexual topics, initiated by the other person. The young person is encouraged to share explicit photos or engage in intimate acts on camera, not realising the digital trap being set. The perpetrator captures and saves these intimate images to use as leverage to manipulate and control the young person.

The threat of exposure can seem extremely real when the perpetrator searches through the young person's social media platforms to find their close friends and family members' accounts. The sudden realisation of being trapped in a sextortion scheme induces panic and a range of negative emotions in the young person. They may feel violated, afraid, ashamed and embarrassed. Sadly, in some cases, the distressing psychological impact can even lead to thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

How Can Parents and Scottish Archery Child Protection Officers Help?

1. Educate Yourself

Start by educating yourself about sextortion, its tactics, and the impact it can have on young people. Being able to recognise the signs that a child in your care is involved in sextortion is essential, as well as knowing how approach them and respond appropriately. Stay calm, reassure the young person they are not at fault and then take the necessary steps.

2. Open Communication

Maintain open lines of communication with young people in your care and ensure they understand who they can reach out to as their trusted adult. Create a non-judgemental space where they can share any concerns or incidents regarding sharing images and sextortion.

3. Online Safety Education

Teach young people about online safety and the potential risks they may encounter. Discuss the importance of robust privacy settings, as well as the risks of taking and sharing intimate images, videos and disclosing personal information. Whether it be with friends, people they think they know or strangers, it is essential to make sure young people are aware of the concerns and risks surrounding online "friendships" and over-sharing as well as what support they can access and where to find it if they become a victim of sextortion.

4. Establish Boundaries

Set clear boundaries regarding online conversations. Discuss the importance of consent and help young people understand what is appropriate and what crosses the line. Encourage them to go to their trusted adult if they are suspicious or uncomfortable with any online interactions.

5. Review Privacy Settings

If you or your child encounter any suspicious activities or individuals online, report them to the relevant authorities or the platform's support team. By reporting such incidents, you contribute to the overall safety of the online community.

Responding to a concern about Sextortion

RECOGNISE

Know the signs of sextortion.

RESPOND

It is important to remind a young person in your care who is a victim of sextortion that they are not alone, and they are not at fault. Help and support are always available.

- **REASSURE** the young person that they are not at fault.
- **STAY CALM** – this is one of the most vulnerable moments in a young person's life, so be aware of how you respond as this may have an adverse effect and make them more fearful.
- **IGNORE** perpetrators demands and **do not pay up**. There is no guarantee that this will stop the threats. The perpetrator's motive is to get money, so once you have shown you can pay, they will likely ask for more and blackmail may continue.
- **CONTACT** the police immediately – time is of the essence! **If a child in your care is in immediate danger, ring 999.**
- **AVOID** deleting anything that can be used as evidence, such as messages, images, telephone numbers, and bank account details.
- **SCREENSHOT** evidence of blackmail including usernames.
- **END** all communication on every channel.
- **BLOCK** the offender on all platforms and change your password.
- **REPORT** the individual to the relevant platform and the IWF.
- **SUPPORT** the young person after the incident. Studies have shown that a suicide prevention plan is often needed after incidents of sextortion, even if the young person appears to be okay and resilient, as they may try to keep their worries to themselves.

Papyrus

Papyrus is a charity dedicated to preventing suicide in young people. They have a 'Suicide Safety Plan' to ensure that feelings of despair and hopelessness are managed.

CHILDLINE

Childline is a free service where young people can call or live chat with an expert at anytime. No problem is too big or too small, and someone will be there to talk to them and help the through their issue.

REPORT

Internet Watch Foundation

The IWF help to remove online child sexual abuse imagery hosted anywhere in the world. You can report an explicit image of a child on their website, and they provide advice and guidance for supporting victims. You can choose to remain anonymous or give your details.

Report Remove

The Report Remove tool is a service provided by Childline and the IWF, that allows young people to report sexual images or videos of themselves that they have shared online in order to have them removed. This service is confidential and provides advice and guidance throughout the reporting process.

Child Exploitation and Online Protection

CEOP is the UK's National Crime Agency's child protection command, working to protect children from online sexual abuse. You can report explicit images of a child online directly to CEOP through their website or by calling 0800 80 80 100.

Google

You can report non-consensual or explicit images on Google directly by clicking the 'report abuse' link below the image or through their online form.