

What is 'sextortion'?

[source www.parentinfo.org]

Sextortion is a type of online blackmail where people are tricked into performing sexual acts on webcam and then blackmailed to pay a sum of money in order to avoid images or videos being shared with friends and family on their social media contact lists. There are a wide range of motives behind this type of financial crime. For some offenders, it is purely a financial gain whereas for others there may be some form of sexual gratification.

In 2018, there were over 1700 reports of this type of crime in the UK and this is likely to be the tip of the iceberg. Many victims do not come forward to report this kind of incident as they are embarrassed or do not know where to go for support.

The concern is that since 2011 at least five young men in the UK were victims of sextortion and committed suicide as a result (three of these were young people, and two were in the last two years).

How does sextortion work?

There is evidence that it is quite often committed by organised crime groups overseas, but there are also offenders within the UK. For these groups, it's seen as a low-risk way to make money and they can potentially reach many people easily online.

Offenders will attempt to befriend victims online by using a fake identity (often a young woman). They may send lots of 'friend requests' in the hope that someone will engage with them if they have mutual friends. They chat with the victim and then ask to speak on camera. Offenders use a fake recording to convince the other person they are who they say they are. The offender aims to trick the person into performing a sexual act on camera, whilst recording the interaction. They will then threaten to share any sexual images/videos with the person's friends and family unless the victim pays a sum of money via Paypal or other means.

Offenders put huge pressure on victims by demanding that money is paid within a short time period, for example within one hour, which can make the situation very intense and time-critical. Those who have been tricked often believe if they pay the sum of the money the situation will go away, but offenders are very likely to demand more.

Where does it happen and who do they target?

Financial extortion of this kind can happen on any site with a video function. Offenders are often indiscriminate in their targets and people are usually caught through a 'scattergun' approach where they pursue anyone who they manage to trick into sexual activity, regardless of age or gender. Evidence from cases suggests that where victims are children,

older teenage boys might be particularly vulnerable to this type of online crime - the youngest victim known to police was a 13-year-old boy.

The important thing to know is that if the initial payment is not made, and the victim walks away, offenders often disengage as their motive is financial and not sexual. However, it is important to note that offenders with a specific sexual interest in children are likely to continue to seek contact with a child online.

Advice for parents

Talk to your child

As always, the best piece of advice is to talk to your child about what they do online, and what they would do if someone blackmailed them. Young children may not understand the concept of blackmail so try to explain that some people may try to trick them into doing things online in order to get money from them. Tell them that with any form of blackmail, the best thing to do is walk away and seek help. Let your child know that they can always come to you for help, and they will not be blamed, no matter what has happened. Ensure your child knows that you understand how embarrassing some situations may be, but they will not be in trouble for anything that happens online.

Responding to blackmail

Speak to your child about how to manage any money they have. Make sure they know that they should never pay someone - online or in real life - to prevent something bad from happening. In many cases of blackmail, victims who do appease the offender continue to receive demands. The less they engage with the offender the better, as they are more likely to disengage if they believe they won't get what they want. If anything has happened to your child and they are receiving demands (for money or otherwise), contact the police and support your child to disable their social media temporarily so they cannot be contacted by the offender.

What to do if you are worried

If you are worried about online financial extortion, there is support available:

Tell your child about CEOP. If someone is threatening them with a sexual image or picture, [they can report to CEOP here](#) (or you can report as a parent) using an online form. The reporter will be contacted by a social worker at CEOP who will help them and make a plan about what to do next. The social worker will not make any judgement about what has happened, they deal with these types of cases every day. They will not place any blame on your child whatsoever. The social worker will talk to you and your child about their options, and will always consider your opinion when deciding what to do next. If you decide you don't want to report to the police, CEOP will not put any pressure on you to do so.

If a video or image has been shared of your child, report it to the platform it is hosted on, using their online reporting process - a video can be blocked and an alert can be set up in case it resurfaces. You can also Block or Report any users who are blackmailing or threatening you.

There is further help and support available here:

[CEOP](#)

[Thinkuknow](#)

[What parents need to know about 'sextortion' | Parent Info](#)