Sextortion: What Parents Should Know

How Do the Offenders Gain Access?

The victim often knows their offender, who is typically a current or former romantic partner. In other instances, the offender is someone the victim only knows online. In financial sextortion, the offender often makes initial contact online and victimization happens quickly after that. Additionally, the offender might create explicit content using generative AI and use it to victimize the child.

1 Approach

The offender typically initiates contact with a victim on a social media platform, using it to learn about the child’s interests, friends, school, family, etc. They then ask the child to move to a second or third platform that uses encrypted messaging systems. The sextortion may also be perpetrated by an ex-romantic partner who received the image from the victim.

2 Coercive Tactics

Offenders use various tactics, such as offering something of value (money, drugs) in exchange for sexual material, pretending to work for a modeling agency, pretending to be younger and appear to have a romantic interest, creating fake sexual material of the child or hacking accounts to steal sexual images.

3 Threats

The offender may use the threat of spreading the image to force the victim into staying in or returning to the relationship, acquiring additional sexual content or obtaining money from the child. They may also threaten to physically assault the child or their family, or ruin the child’s life with false narratives.

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What Can You Do?

1 Get Involved
   - Actively participate in your children’s digital lives.
   - Regular check-ins about online interactions should be the norm.
   - Set online and offline behavioral expectations.

2 Talk About Sexuality and Relationships
   Have regular discussions about your family’s expectations and values regarding sex and relationships. Discuss the characteristics of healthy relationships, such as having and respecting boundaries and practicing consent. Explain that both pressuring someone and being pressured into uncomfortable or unsafe sexual behaviors are not okay. Help children understand that they should never forward sexts they may receive from others, as limiting the image’s spread reduces the risk of it falling into dangerous hands.

3 Empower Your Child
   - Provide resources that your child can reach out to, such as TakeItDown.NCMEC.org and CyberTipline.org.
   - Teach your child how to report someone.
   - Remind them that sextortion is a crime, it is not their fault and you are here to help them.

For more resources, visit NCMEC.org/NetSmartz