

TIPS2PROTECT AGAINST SEXTORTION FOR PARENTS AND TRUSTED ADULTS

KNOW THE THREATS

Sextortion is a form of online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) and is a growing crisis impacting kids and teens. According to a recent study by THORN:

- Approximately one in three (36%) kids and teens reported being solicited to send explicit images by someone they only knew online. Among those who did, more than half (58%) said the request happened within the first day of connecting.
- One in four kids and teens reported receiving at least one online request for a sexual image or interaction in exchange for something of value before turning 18¹.

Among kids and teens who had a commodified sexual interaction as a minor:

58%

received money in exchange for sexual content or activity.

33%

gained social rewards (e.g., more followers or invites).

28%

received material goods (e.g., clothing or beauty products).

9%

received gaming currency.

Online predators increasingly exploit youth directly through digital devices, often while kids and teens are at home. These attacks — especially financial sextortion — are frequently orchestrated by international crime groups who target boys ages 15 to 17. In 2024 alone, more than 21 suicides were linked to victims of financial sextortion².

SEXTORTION: HOW IT STARTS AND HOW IT EVOLVES:

- **Online Grooming:** Gaining trust through attention and flattery, then introducing sexual content.
- **Traditional Sextortion:** Blackmailing a victim into providing or continuing to share explicit images.
- **Financial Sextortion:** Demanding money or gift cards to keep illicit content private.
- **Sadistic Sextortion:** Demanding suffering or submission through violence, self-harm or destruction. Often coordinated through organized, online groups³.
- **Cyberbullying:** Digital threats and harassment that may become criminal. Sextortion can evolve into a form of cyberbullying.

For more information, visit dhs.gov/know2protect/key-definitions.

¹ thorn.org/blog/commodified-sexual-interactions-how-money-and-clout-are-obscur-ing-risk-for-youth-online

² networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/Yahoo-Boys_1.2.24.pdf

³ thorn.org/research/library/sexual-extortion-young-people

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REAL-LIFE CASES WITH LIFE-THREATENING RESULTS

Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) is a world leader in combatting crimes against children. HSI investigates criminals who use online platforms to commit crimes against victims, including children and teens living in the United States. The crimes often begin on the internet using forms of online enticement and grooming and can potentially evolve into sextortion or other offenses, including human trafficking. HSI and the Federal Bureau of Investigation received more than 13,000 financial sextortion reports between October 2021 and March 2023 that involved at least 12,600 victims who were primarily boys. The sextortion resulted in at least 20 reported cases of death by suicide⁴.

It is vital to create open lines of communication with kids and teens so they know they have a trusted adult that they can go to for help if something happens. They must understand that they are not alone, there is help and they are victims in these situations.

WHAT PARENTS & TRUSTED ADULTS CAN DO:

- Monitor privacy settings across all devices and apps.
- Teach kids and teens to recognize manipulative online behavior.
- Encourage kids and teens to come to you if something feels wrong — without fear or shame.
- Stay calm and offer support if they disclose harm or exploitation.
- Visit dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/24_0920_k2p_top-10-tips2protect.pdf for more information.

For age-specific guidance and conversation starters, visit dhs.gov/know2protect/take-action and parents.thorn.org.



Case Example: James Woods

James, a high school senior and track star, died by suicide in November 2022 after being targeted on social media by an online predator in the Ivory Coast as part of a sextortion scheme. This online predator posed as an attractive young woman of similar age to James. Their conversation turned sexual. After explicit images purporting to be from the young woman were sent to James through social media, the “young woman” asked James if he wanted to see her naked in a video chat and convinced James to share a compromising video of himself, which was then screen-shotted by the online predator and used to sextort the victim. James died by suicide after being financially sextorted for 19 straight hours. During those horrific 19 hours, the predator eliminated James’ desire to live and the hopes he had for the future. James received over 200 messages falsely claiming that he would face jail time for sending nudes, that his parents would stop loving him and that he would never be able to run track again or go to college. The online predator convinced James that he had no other choice than to take his own life and James sadly died by suicide shortly after the encounter⁵.

⁴ [fbi.gov/news/press-releases/sextortion-a-growing-threat-targeting-minors](https://www.fbi.gov/news/press-releases/sextortion-a-growing-threat-targeting-minors)

⁵ [yahoo.com/news/james-woods-parents-speak-sextortion-120239262.html](https://www.yahoo.com/news/james-woods-parents-speak-sextortion-120239262.html)



Together We Can Stop Online Child Exploitation™
To learn more, visit know2protect.gov



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HOW2RESPOND

Take immediate action if you know or suspect a child or teen in your care is a victim of online CSEA.

- Remain calm.
- Consider putting the device in airplane mode and ensure Bluetooth and Wi-Fi are turned off so evidence cannot be remotely erased, deleted or altered by the offender.
- Save all communication — do not delete.
- Contact law enforcement and ensure they can access the device.
- Do not send images from your child's device to any other device. It is illegal to disseminate CSAM.
- Report the incident to law enforcement.

HOW2REPORT

You can submit a report in one of the following ways:

- Call the Know2Protect Tipline at **833-591-KNOW (5669)**. All information received via the Tipline will be reviewed by appropriate personnel and referred to Homeland Security Investigations field offices for potential investigation.
- Contact your local, state or tribal law enforcement officials directly. In an emergency, call **911**.
- Submit a **CyberTipline** report with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at report.cybertip.org.

Visit dhs.gov/know2protect/how-to-report to learn more.

Resources

- **Survivor Support Page:** Know2Protect shares resources and tips on how to help victims of online CSEA. Visit dhs.gov/know2protect/survivor-support to learn more.
- **Take It Down:** The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children offers a free service to help remove online nude, partially nude or sexually explicit photos and videos taken before age 18. Visit takeitdown.ncmec.org to learn more.
- **THORN:** Trends in Financial Sextortion: An investigation of sextortion reports in National Center for Missing and Exploited Children CyberTipline data. Learn more at thorn.org/research/library/financial-sextortion.



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