

Understanding sextortion and what you can do to support young people

In today's digital age, young people face unique challenges in navigating the online world. One such challenge that has emerged in recent years is sextortion, a form of online blackmail where individuals are coerced into providing sexual images or videos, which are then used as leverage for further exploitation. Sextortion can have devastating effects on victims, leading to emotional distress, reputational harm, and even long-term psychological trauma. Recognising the severity of this issue, professionals play a crucial role in supporting young people and providing them with the necessary resources to combat sextortion effectively.

Sextortion typically begins with an initial contact online, often through social media platforms, online forums, or messaging apps. Perpetrators may use various tactics to manipulate and exploit their victims, including threats of exposure, coercion, or promises of affection or attention. Once victims are coerced into providing explicit images or videos, perpetrators use these materials to extort further images, money, or other forms of exploitation.

How it can affect young people

Experiencing sextortion can profoundly affect young people, often exacerbating feelings of vulnerability and distress. As young people navigate their formative years, they are particularly susceptible to the emotional toll of sextortion. The violation of privacy and trust inherent in sextortion can lead to intense feelings of shame, embarrassment, and self-blame. These emotions may be magnified in adolescents and teenagers who are still developing their sense of self and identity.

Moreover, the pervasive nature of digital communication means that the consequences of sextortion can extend far beyond the initial incident. Young people may fear the social ramifications of having explicit images or videos circulated among their peers or posted online. The fear of judgment and social ostracisation can further isolate victims, exacerbating feelings of loneliness and despair.

In addition to the psychological impact, sextortion can also have tangible consequences on young people's daily lives. The stress and anxiety caused by sextortion may manifest in physical symptoms such as difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite, and increased irritability. These symptoms can impair academic performance, disrupt social relationships, and hinder overall wellbeing.



Professional Support

Professionals working with young people, including educators, counsellors, social workers, and mental health professionals, play a critical role in addressing sextortion and providing support to those affected.

Here are some ways professionals can offer assistance:



- **Education and Awareness:** Professionals can educate young people about the risks of sextortion and empower them with the knowledge to recognize warning signs and protect themselves online. Workshops, presentations, and educational materials can raise awareness and promote safe online behaviour.
- **Confidential Counselling:** Offering confidential counselling services provides a safe space for young people to discuss their experiences with sextortion and seek guidance without fear of judgment or repercussion. Trained counsellors can provide emotional support, help victims navigate their options, and develop coping strategies to manage the psychological impact of sextortion.

FREE counselling for young people

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- **Legal Guidance:** Professionals can provide information about legal rights and options available to victims of sextortion, including reporting the crime to law enforcement, obtaining protective orders, and pursuing legal action against perpetrators. Legal advocacy services can guide victims through the legal process and ensure their rights are protected.

Click [here](#) for more information about reporting a crime.

- **Referrals to Support Services:** Connecting victims with support services like [Victim Support](#), crisis hotlines (like [Shout](#), [Papyrus](#) or [Samaritans](#)) and mental health resources, can provide additional support and assistance beyond what professionals can offer directly. These organisations often specialise in supporting victims of sexual exploitation and can provide specialised services tailored to their needs.

Available resources

Numerous resources are available to support young people affected by sextortion and assist professionals in their efforts to combat this form of online exploitation.

Some key resources include:

Victim Support: Victim Support offers comprehensive assistance to victims of sextortion, providing emotional support, practical guidance, and access to resources. They have trained professionals who specialise in supporting individuals affected by various forms of exploitation, including online blackmail.

The Metropolitan Police Service: Metropolitan Police actively provides support and assistance to victims of sextortion through dedicated units, such as the Child Abuse and Sexual Offences Command (CASO) and the Cyber Crime Unit.

Childline: Childline actively offers confidential support and counselling services to young victims of sextortion and other forms of online exploitation. The helpline actively provides emotional support, information, and guidance to victims.

Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP): CEOP, part of the National Crime Agency in the UK, offers resources and support for victims of online sexual exploitation, including sextortion, as well as educational materials for professionals and young people.

Stop Sextortion: Stop Sextortion is an international campaign aimed at raising awareness about sextortion and providing support and resources to victims. The campaign offers educational materials, reporting tools, and support services for victims and professionals.

Sextortion poses significant risks to young people in the digital age, but with the support of professionals and access to resources, victims can receive the assistance they need to navigate this challenging experience. By raising awareness, providing support services, and advocating for the rights of victims, professionals can play a crucial role in combating sextortion and promoting online safety for young people.

