

Beat: News

FBI Warns of Increase in Sextortion Schemes Targeting Young Boys

Coercing Young Boys Through Social Media

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USPA NEWS - The FBI Los Angeles Field Office is warning parents and caregivers about an increase in incidents involving sextortion of young children. The FBI is receiving an increasing number of reports of adults posing as young girls coercing young boys through social media to produce sexual images and videos and then extorting money from them.

Sextortion begins when an adult contacts a minor over any online platform used to meet and communicate, such as a game, app, or social media account. In a scheme that has recently become more prevalent, the predator (posing as a young girl) uses deception and manipulation to convince a young male, usually 14 to 17 years old, to engage in explicit activity over video, which is then secretly recorded by the predator. The predator then reveals that they have made the recordings and attempts to extort the victim for money—threatening to post the video online. Many of the targets are overseas and will often demand money in increasing amounts if any is sent during the initial request.

Sextortion is a crime. The coercion of a child by an adult to produce what is considered Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) carries heavy penalties, which can include up to a life sentence for the offender. To prevent continued victimization, it is imperative children come forward to someone—a parent, teacher, caregiver, or law enforcement. Children may feel a sense of embarrassment from such a traumatic experience. However, sextortion offenders may have hundreds of victims worldwide, so coming forward to help law enforcement identify, and ultimately apprehend suspects, may prevent additional incidents of sexual exploitation from occurring.

To date, FBI Los Angeles has received dozens of complaints involving boys who were reported victims of sextortion; mostly for money, although others were reportedly sextorted for additional images.

“With the ubiquitous nature of modern technology, our children are increasingly vulnerable targets for online predators,” said Kristi Johnson, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI Los Angeles Division. “The most effective way to disrupt these criminals is through awareness, education, and having important discussions with your children about their online safety. If you need some support in doing so, you can find more information and resources at fbi.gov/sextortion.”

The FBI provides the following tips to protect you and your children online:

Be selective about what you share online, especially your personal information and passwords. If your social media accounts are open to everyone, a predator may be able to figure out a lot of information about you or your children.

Be wary of anyone you encounter for the first time online. Block or ignore messages from strangers.

Be aware that people can pretend to be anything or anyone online. Videos and photos are not proof that a person is who they claim to be.

Be suspicious if you meet someone on a game or app and they ask you to start talking to them on a different platform.

Encourage your children to report suspicious behavior to a trusted adult.

If you believe you or someone you know is the victim of sextortion:

Contact your local FBI field office (contact information can be found at www.fbi.gov), the FBI’s Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) at www.ic3.gov, or the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (1-800-the-lost or Cybertipline.org).

Do not delete anything before law enforcement is able to review it.

Tell law enforcement everything about the encounters you had online; it may be embarrassing, but it is necessary to find the offender.

In 2021, the IC3 received over 18,000 sextortion-related complaints, with losses over \$13.6 million. This number reflects all types of sextortion reported, not just this specific scheme.

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