

# **Catholic Mutual...CARES for Kids**

## **What is Sextortion?**

We live in a digital age filled with wonderful tools that allow us to stay connected, learn, and share the gospel. However, this same technology can also be used by those who seek to harm others. One growing danger, especially affecting our youth, is a crime called sextortion.

### **What is Sextortion?**

Sextortion is a form of online exploitation where someone threatens to share intimate or explicit images of another person unless they send more pictures, money, or perform other harmful acts. The person making the threats may pretend to be someone they are not, often using fake identities and social media accounts to build trust. This is not just a moral concern—it's a serious criminal offense.

### **How Does it Happen?**

Most sextortion cases start on social media, gaming platforms, or chat apps. Here's what it might look like:

- A stranger or fake profile sends a friend request, usually posing as a teen or attractive peer.
- They quickly try to gain trust before requesting or coercing photos.
- Once a photo is sent, they demand more—or threaten to send the image to friends or family. They may also demand money to “delete” the images.

This is not the child's fault. These predators are calculated, patient, and know how to manipulate emotions like fear, shame, and secrecy.

### **Who is Being Targeted?**

Sadly, many victims are teenagers who are tricked into sending a personal or private photo to someone they believe is a friend or potential romantic interest online. Once the photo is shared, the criminal then demands more images or money and threatens to send the original image to the victim's family, friends, or school if they don't comply. Below are the main groups that are currently being targeted:

- **Primarily youth aged 10-17**, but adults can be targeted too.
- Both **boys and girls** are being targeted, but boys are increasingly at risk in money-related scams.

## Response and Prevention

Many victims often feel ashamed and may try to handle it alone. It is important to teach young adults that no one has the right to pressure them into sending anything that makes them uncomfortable. If a teen comes forward as a victim of sextortion, below are ways to respond:

- Stay calm and supportive. Do not blame the victim.
- Do not pay or comply with the perpetrator's demands.
- Report it to law enforcement or the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center ([IC3.gov](https://www.ic3.gov)) immediately.
- Keep all communications and evidence.
- Once all evidence has been recorded, there are resources to assist in getting explicit content removed from the Internet if they were taken before you were 18 years old ([takeitdown.ncmec.org/](https://takeitdown.ncmec.org/)).

Start conversations with your children and teens about internet safety. Let them know they can always come to you without fear of punishment if something feels wrong online. Know what apps your children use. Encourage them to keep their accounts private, avoid talking to strangers online, and report any suspicious behavior. Help your child understand that no mistake defines them.

## References

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