

Financially motivated sexual extortion: alert for education settings

Globally, there has been a large increase in reports of children and young people being forced into paying money or meeting another financial demand (such as purchasing a pre-paid gift card) after an offender has threatened to release nudes or semi-nudes of them. This is financially motivated sexual extortion, a type of online blackmail often referred to in the media as 'sextortion'.¹ It is a form of child sexual abuse.

Financially motivated sexual extortion is usually carried out by organised crime groups (OCGs) based overseas who are typically motivated by money. These groups target all ages and genders however, a large proportion of cases have involved male victims aged 14-18.

Here is what you need to know as education professionals to recognise the signs of this form of abuse, understand how to respond, and increase awareness and help seeking behaviours amongst children and young people.

What we would like you to do

- Develop your understanding of financially motivated sexual extortion using this alert and read the recently updated '[Sharing nudes and semi-nudes' guidance](#) published by the UK Council for Internet Safety
- Refer concerns, if disclosed or discovered, to local police and/or local authority children's services through your safeguarding procedures
- Avoid using [victim-blaming language](#) and support children and young people in getting their images removed
- Whilst the responsibility is not on the child, know how you can support children and young people to understand how they can respond safely to requests or pressure to provide nude or semi-nude images or videos

¹ Financially motivated sexual extortion is also referred to as sexually coerced extortion.

What it looks like

Child victims may report being:

- contacted by an online account that they do not know but appears to be another child or young person. They may also be contacted by a hacked account of a child or young person they do know and the communication feels unfamiliar
- quickly engaged in sexually explicit communications, which may include the offender sharing an indecent image first
- moved from a chat on social media, an online platform or game to a private messaging app that is an [end-to-end encrypted chat platform](#)
- manipulated or pressured into taking nude or semi-nude photos or videos
- told they have been hacked and the offender has access to their images, personal information and contacts (whether this is true or not)
- blackmailed into sending money or meeting another financial demand (such as purchasing a pre-paid gift card) after sharing an image or video, or the offender sharing hacked or digitally manipulated/[AI-generated images](#) of the child or young person and making the threat of sharing them wider

Be aware that OCGs may target multiple children and young people within an education or wider social setting, as it is more likely that a child or young person will accept a friend request or communicate with someone they don't know if they believe they are a 'mutual friend'.

If a child or young person has disclosed an incident like this, your designated safeguarding person should immediately refer it to police and/or local authority children's services through your safeguarding procedures.

Delivering preventative education

Make sure that the education your setting delivers helps children and young people to:

- recognise what a financially motivated sexual extortion attempt might look like

- understand healthy and unhealthy behaviours within relationships, including recognising that any pressure put on them to send images is abusive
- identify how to seek help from trusted adults if anyone is putting pressure on them to share images, including reporting routes within, and outside of, your education setting

[Register for a free CEOP Education account](#) for guidance, resources and training to help you do this. Resources such as the [11-18s website](#) and [supporting toolkit](#) can help you to deliver sessions that develop these key skills.

Use the template letter attached to this alert to support parents and carers to talk to their child about financially motivated sexual extortion and understand how they can help them if they become a victim.

If you plan to raise awareness of financially motivated sexual extortion via your education setting's social media channels, use the template letter to identify the core messages to communicate in the post and link to the letter itself.

Visit the UK Safer Internet Centre for [a downloadable list of resources](#) from industry, law enforcement and non-government organisations for use with children, young people, parents and carers, and professionals.

Supporting victims

A child or young person who is a victim should be supported in the same way as with any other type of child sexual abuse.

You should:

- reassure them that they are not alone and that the adults around them will do all they can to help and support them
- remain solutions-focused and avoid victim-blaming language. Where a child or young person has shared an image, remember that they have been groomed and manipulated into doing so, and they are **never responsible for their abuse**
- work with the child or young person to determine their preferred approach for you or another appropriate professional to inform parents and carers

- support parents and carers to find further support for them and their child – a letter for parents and carers has been provided with this alert to support you with this
- help the child to remove or prevent images being shared online by following these three steps:
 1. Use [Report Remove](#), the Internet Watch Foundation and Childline’s tool, to report images that have been shared or might be shared online.
 2. Use [Take It Down](#), a tool provided by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, to help them remove or stop the online sharing of images across participating online platforms.
 3. Report directly to the platform or app that the incident has occurred on. See Internet Matters for advice on [where to report online issues on major social media platforms](#).

In rare cases, financially motivated sexual extortion has been linked to self-harm and suicide. Be aware of changes in behaviour that may suggest a child or young person is at risk of developing or experiencing poor mental health.

If you have a mental health concern about a child that is also a safeguarding concern, follow your setting’s child protection policy and speak to your designated safeguarding person. Only appropriately trained professionals should attempt to make a diagnosis of a mental health problem.²

Make sure that children and young people are aware of what local and national mental health support services are available to them. Child support services like Childline that can act as a gateway to wider support.

Adult victims

Adults that have experienced financially motivated sexual extortion can use the [Stop Non-Consensual Intimate Image Abuse tool](#) to immediately prevent their content being shared online across [StopNCCI.org’s Industry Partners](#). They should also report the incident to the police and the platform or app that the incident has occurred on

² Further information can be found in the Department for Education’s statutory safeguarding guidance [‘Keeping Children Safe in Education’](#).

Parents and carers template letter

Dear parent/guardian,

All schools in the UK have recently been sent information from the National Crime Agency, raising awareness of the recent rise in reporting of financially motivated sexual extortion (a type of online blackmail often known in the media as 'sextortion'). Children and young people worldwide are being targeted.

This type of crime involves an adult offender (often from an organised crime group based overseas) threatening to release nude or semi-nude images and/or videos of a child or young person, unless they pay money, or meet another financial demand, such as purchasing a pre-paid gift card.

Victims of any age and gender can be targets, however a large proportion of cases have involved male victims aged 14-18.

A child or young person is never to blame if they have been a victim. Offenders will have tricked, groomed and/or manipulated them into sharing an image.

Find out more about online blackmail on [CEOP Education's parents and carers website](#).

Talking to your child

It's important to have frequent, open and non-judgemental conversations with your child about relationships, sex and being online to build trust and support them if something goes wrong. Financially motivated sexual extortion should be included in those conversations. Here are some tips about how to approach this:

- **Chat regularly about their life online:** have ongoing conversations with them about their life and time online. Continue to take an interest as they grow, explore new apps and sites together and talk in a balanced way, considering the benefits and the potential harms.
- **Talk about where to find information about relationships and sex:** organisations like [CEOP Education](#), [Childline](#) and [Brook](#) have age-appropriate advice topics such as sexual communication and image sharing. This will help your child to understand what unhealthy relationships look like, such as applying pressure and blackmail; and give them trusted sources of information to explore these topics.

- **Review privacy settings:** talk to your child about the importance of using privacy settings on their accounts to restrict who can contact them. Read CEOP Education's advice on [how to talk your child about their privacy settings](#).
- **Make sure they know where to go for support:** let them know that they can come to you with any concerns and won't be judged. It's also important to make them aware of other trusted adults or sources of support, if they feel they can't talk to you, such as Childline.
- **Make sure they know where to report:** remind your child how you can help them to report an incident to the police or using the CEOP Safety Centre. Let them know that if a nude or semi-nude of them has been shared without their consent, they can take these 3 steps to try and get them removed:
 1. Use [Report Remove](#), a tool from Childline and the Internet Watch Foundation. Your child can use this to remove images that have been shared or might be shared.
 2. Use [Take It Down](#), a tool from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Your child can use this to remove or stop the online sharing of images or videos.
 3. Report directly to the platform or app that the incident has occurred on. For advice on how to report to major social media platforms, visit [Internet Matters](#).

To learn more about what resources are available to help you support your child, visit the [UK Safer Internet Centre](#).

What can I do if this has happened to my child?

If your child tells you that someone is trying to trick, threaten or blackmail them online:

- **Don't pay, do stop contact and block:** you may be tempted to pay, but there is no guarantee that this will stop the threats. As the offender's motive is to get money, once you have shown you can pay, they will likely ask for more and blackmail may continue. If you have paid, don't panic but don't pay anything more. Help your child to stop all communication with the offender and block them on any accounts that they have been contacted on.
- **Avoid deleting anything:** try not to delete anything that could be used as evidence such as messages, images and bank account details.

- **Report to the police or CEOP:** call 101 or 999 if there is an immediate risk of harm to your child. Or you can use the [CEOP Safety Centre](#) to report any online blackmail attempts.

If it has already happened and your child has shared an image and sent money to someone exploiting them:

- **Reassure them that they've done the right thing by telling you:** make sure they know they are not to blame for what has happened and they have done the right thing to ask for your help.
Children and young people's mental health may be negatively impacted by experiences of exploitation; you can [find advice on looking after your child's mental health from the NHS](#).
- **Report to the police or CEOP:** call 101 or 999 if there is an immediate risk of harm to your child. Or you can use the [CEOP Safety Centre](#) to report an incident. If your child is 18 and over, call 101 or 999 if they are at risk of immediate harm.
- **Report any images or videos that have been shared:** help your child to remove images that are online or prevent images being shared online by following these three steps:
 1. Use [Report Remove](#), a tool from Childline and the Internet Watch Foundation. Your child can use this to remove images that have been shared or might be shared.
 2. Use [Take It Down](#), a tool from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Your child can use this to remove or stop the online sharing of images or videos.
 3. Report directly to the platform or app that the incident has occurred on. For advice on how to report to major social media platforms, visit [Internet Matters](#).