

“SEXTORTION” - Advice for Parents and Grandparents

When the Judicial Police (PJ) issue a national alert, in this case only the fourth this year, then it is a serious matter; none more serious than their recent one over criminal activities known as “SEXTORTION”

The warning concerns a significant increase in complaints regarding this crime over the last three to four months. In Lisbon alone there were 50 new complaints.

So what is Sextortion?

Sextortion is a form of sexual exploitation where one individual threatens to reveal sexually explicit images of another person unless that person meets specific demands. The perpetrator may have obtained the images in various ways such as through hacking or the image may have been shared consensually through sexting, the latter being the exchange of sexual messages or images often of oneself. Regardless of how the image was obtained, if the sharing of that image is not consensual, the perpetrator is engaging in an act of abuse by using intimate images to exploit the victim.

In the recent cases the PJ stated that “the victims pay 100, 200, 500 euros, so that images are not released to their friends and family. Criminals are hidden in fake social networking profiles in accounts registered abroad. It is a crime with many features and that often comes from countries where cooperation is very limited”.

A disturbing trend

A recent report by the Internet Watch Foundation and Microsoft found that younger and younger children are appearing naked in images and videos on the web, including sexually explicit material.

The "disturbing trend" of young children as young as seven who appear naked in the content on the internet has been posted by themselves or surreptitiously recorded by a third party, the study found.

The survey identified nearly 4,000 images and videos in a snapshot covering three months last autumn of whom 667 were 15 years old or younger and 286 thought to be under 10.

Essential things to tell your child

- ✚ Messages and images put out on the internet can stay there forever. Once you press ‘Send’ you lose all control and ownership. Think before you send.
- ✚ Never post or send an image of yourself that you wouldn’t want your family, teachers or prospective employers to see.
- ✚ Creating, sending, collecting or asking for sexually explicit images of anyone under the age of 18 is illegal. These images could be classed as child pornography.
- ✚ Always talk to a trusted adult if you ever receive a message or image that makes you feel uncomfortable or scared.
- ✚ Nobody else owns you or your body, so don’t give them ownership.
- ✚ Learn how to use the security features on your phone to block, filter or report what is sent to you.
- ✚ It’s not only strangers that can be a danger. If someone you know passes on an inappropriate image it can damage you for years to come.

Sexting Statistics

Should parents and grandparents be concerned about sexting?

Yes - especially when you read some of the sexting statistics below. Kids are sexting to people they only met online, they are sexting to boyfriends and girlfriends or potential companions. Some of the teenagers are sexting out of peer pressure. Some just do it for fun. But they are doing it and parents and grandparents need to be aware of the potential dangers of sexting and risks of sextortion.

A survey this year found that 20% of teenagers have sent or posted nude or semi-nude pictures or video of themselves, including 11% of young teen girls ages 13-16.

- 36% of teen girls and 39% of teen boys say it is common for nude or semi-nude photos to get shared with people other than the intended recipient.
- 66% of teen girls and 60% of teen boys say they did so to be “fun or flirtatious” — their most common reason for sending sexy content.
- About 2 in 5 teens say they tell their parents very little or nothing about what they do and where they go online.

According to the UK’s National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) young people may see 'sexting' as harmless activity, however, taking, sharing or receiving an image, even voluntarily, can have a long-lasting negative impact such as:

- It may be common but 'sexting' is illegal. **By sending an explicit image, a young person is producing and distributing child abuse images and risks being prosecuted, even if the picture is taken and shared with their permission.**
- It's easy to send a photo or message but the sender has no control about how it's passed on.
- When images are stored or shared online they become public. They can be deleted on social media or may only last a few seconds on apps like Snapchat, but images can still be saved or copied by others.
- These images may never be completely removed and could be found in the future, for example when applying for jobs or university.

Do you know what your kids or up to when using Skype and Facebook? These are the most common ways sexting is carried out by children. Its important children know the risks.

The National Crime Agency (NCA) report that “With smartphones and tablets, and new apps emerging all the time, this behaviour is becoming quite normal for teenagers. But it can be alarming for mum and dad who might not know how to help when things go wrong”. A new campaign which aims to give parents the tools to deal with their children sexting is being launched by the NCA’s CEOP Command, through educational films and can be viewed at www.thinkuknow.co.uk.

Sextortion Gangs

These gangs or individuals usually operate in the following way.

- An offender makes contact with a young person. This can happen anywhere online, including on a social network, in a chatroom, in a game or even on their mobile.
- The offender begins a conversation and tricks the young person into sending them an indecent picture, appearing naked or performing sexual acts on webcam. They trick them in a variety of ways including: pretending to be a girl or boy of the same age, pretending to be someone the child knows, flirting with them or sending them sexual pictures or videos.

- The offender records the webcam footage. They then threaten to share the video with the young person's friends or family if they don't perform more sexual acts. Some young people have been threatened for money or told to hurt themselves.

In May 2014 an INTERPOL-coordinated operation targeting organized crime networks behind 'sextortion' cases around the world, resulted in the arrest of 58 individuals, the seizure of over 260 desktop and laptop computers, mobile phones, and pornographic material.

Dealing with Sextortion

Parental guidance for children is essential. Obvious advice is not to take ones clothes off or perform intimate acts in front of a webcam or store such images on a computer or smartphone. Ensure up-to-date internet security software is loaded and switched on, to avoid the possibility of someone remotely controlling your webcam.

It is important that children don't respond to blackmail threats. If a compromising photo or video appears on a website or social media site, report the images and ask for them to be removed and the perpetrator to be blocked. However difficult it is, don't be too embarrassed or ashamed to report sextortion, otherwise it will probably continue and others may become victims too.

David Thomas

President, Safe Communities Portugal

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