

# Watch out: Huge rise in the online sextortion of boys

The Internet Watch Foundation has reported more incidents of 'sextortion' in the first six months of 2023 than in the whole of 2022.

## What is sextortion?

Sextortion is a type of blackmail where someone threatens to reveal sexually explicit images and/or videos of a victim. Often the threat is that the blackmailer will share the explicit images with the victim's friends and family. Typically, the blackmailer is demanding more explicit content or money.

Although sextortion can be committed by an ex-partner (where the photos were given with consent), it can also be undertaken by an online groomer who manipulates someone to get photos.

Whether done by an ex-partner or an online stranger, sextortion is illegal in the UK and is punishable with a maximum sentence of 2 years in prison.

## Who is being targeted?

The Internet Watch Foundation has reported that it is older teenage boys, aged 14-17, that are most at risk of sextortion. The report suggests that online blackmailers are commonly adults pretending to be teenage girls, using fake images and grooming techniques to trap teenage boys.

These teenage boys believe they are having an online conversation or relationship with a real teenager and are manipulated into sharing sexual imagery. Once the blackmailer has received the sexual image, they threaten to share it unless given their demands.

Often teenage boys caught up in sextortion report being fearful that their lives will be ruined if nude imagery is shared with their friends and family.

## How can we tell if someone is going to exploit us?

Sextortion is a type of grooming. It isn't always easy to recognise the early signs of grooming as it might appear that the young person has just made a new friend or started a new relationship. However, the nature of the relationship will soon start to change as the groomer exerts more control and manipulation over the target.

Learn the signs of grooming to help spot when someone is out to exploit you – [download this factsheet here.](#)

### **What to do if I or someone I know is facing sextortion?**

If someone threatens you or someone you know with the release of explicit content, do not give in to the demands of the blackmail. Instead, report the incident. You have done nothing wrong. It is not your fault. The IWF and the Police can help.

When reporting, consider contacting:

[Report Remove](#) – this is a brilliant service from NSPCC and IWF. Report Remove helps young people whose nude selfies have been shared online and will work quickly to help get them taken down.

[The Internet Watch Foundation](#) – the IWF is an organisation protecting children online by hunting down sexual abuse imagery and removing it. Reporting to the IWF is quick, easy and anonymous.

[The Police](#) – do not forget that sextortion is a crime and should be reported to the Police.