

SEXTORTION: A LOGICAL EXTENSION OF SEXTING
COLORADO SCHOOL SAFETY RESOURCE CENTER
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has reported a surge in a disturbing Internet trend directed at children: sextortion. The predator targets kids with lax security settings or prominent social media presences. As is so often the tale, the offender poses as a child of like age or gender, friends or follows the child, then begins grooming the child until he/she sends intimate pictures. The crime can also occur if the child or teen sends files to a known recipient who disseminates them. In either scenario, once the explicit files are in the hands of the offender, he threatens the child with exposure of the photos to the child's family or friends unless he or she sends more. The extortion continues due to the child's embarrassment, fear of reprisal from the offender, and/or punishment from parents. Cases have been reported in which victims were coerced into providing numerous photos or videos to avoid disclosure, sometimes multiple times per day.

The pressure exerted by sextortion is extreme, and has reportedly resulted in suicide, attempted suicide and other self-harming behaviors. To avoid victimization and empower children, parents and educators should exercise the following restrictions:

- Set personal security and privacy setting to the strictest possible;
- Remind children to seek a trusted adult if they feel coerced or uncomfortable online;
- Monitor computer use – keep them in public areas in the home, oversee app downloads and use, and educate on the permanence of internet “footprints.”

In the event a child reports that he or she has been victimized, do not delete the evidence. It is not a crime to send sexually explicit matters by electronic means if the child was compelled to do so. The photos may provide a vital link to the offender for law enforcement. Report suspicions of sextortion to local law enforcement, the Colorado Bureau of Investigation (<http://www.colorado.gov>), or the Federal Bureau of Investigation (<https://www.fbi.gov/>).

Adapted from an FBI Briefing dated April 4, 2016
U. S. Department of Justice