

Alert: Sextortion Schemes are on the Rise

OFFICE OF LEAVENWORTH COUNTY ATTORNEY
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Leavenworth, Kan. - With the end of the school year nearing, the Leavenworth County Attorney's Office would like to remind parents and children to be vigilant in protecting their online privacy.

Social media bots and fake profiles have been on the rise. These fake accounts are targeting children by coercing them into sending explicit images and then extorting them for money – a crime known as financial sextortion.

Law enforcement officers within Leavenworth County have received multiple reports of sextortion and extortion in recent months.

Leavenworth county Attorney Todd Thompson said, "Talk with your children, monitor your child's online activity and educate them on the dangers of online schemes." Thompson added, "Avoidance of online activities is nearly impossible so education and awareness are key principals to keeping our children safe!"

The FBI, Homeland Security and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children issued a national public safety alert earlier this year reporting that more than 3,000 minor victims were targeted in 2022.

A press release posted on the Department of Justice's website in mid-January stated:

"Over the past year, law enforcement agencies have received over 7,000 reports related to the online sextortion of minors, resulting in at least 3,000 victims, primarily boys. More than a dozen sextortion victims were reported to have died by suicide. The FBI, U.S. Attorney's Office, and our law enforcement partners implore parents and caregivers to engage with their kids about sextortion schemes so we can prevent them in the first place.

Sextortion schemes occur in online environments where young people feel most comfortable—using common social media sites, gaming sites, or video chat applications that feel familiar and safe. On these platforms, predators often use fake accounts and target minors.

Through deception, sextortionists convince the young person to produce an explicit video or photo. Once predators acquire the images, they often threaten to release the compromising material unless the victim sends additional sexually explicit material. Some of these criminals demand money or gift cards to keep them from releasing the compromising material in their possession. Often, these predators demand payment through a variety of peer-to-peer payment applications. In many cases, however, sextortionists release the images even if additional material is sent or payments are made. The shame, fear, and confusion that victims feel when they are caught in this cycle often prevents them from asking for help or reporting the abuse and may drive them towards self-harm."

Thompson added if you or someone you know has been exploited, they are victims of a crime and it should be reported. You can call the FBI at 1-800-CALL-FBI or contact your local police department.