



NEWS RELEASE

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Sextortion a growing concern among Wyoming teens

FBI agents in Wyoming have noted an increase over the last year in sextortion schemes targeting children, especially boys ages 14-17. The FBI has received numerous reports of predators attempting to coerce young boys into sending sexual videos of themselves and then extorting money from these victims. It's important that parents, guardians and teenagers be aware of this growing online danger.

Here's how this disturbing scheme works:

- 1) A predator (posing as young person) contacts a minor over an online platform used to meet and communicate, such as a game, app or social media account.
- 2) The adult uses deception and manipulation to convince the minor to engage in explicit sexual activity and send videos or images, which are secretly recorded and saved by the predator.
- 3) The predator then reveals he or she has saved the recordings and attempts to extort money, additional sexual material or other things of value from the victim by threatening to post the videos on various social media platforms.
- 4) To receive money, the predator might ask for bank account login information, a person-to-person money transfer app or request gift cards.

Sextortion is a crime. The coercion of a child by an adult to produce child sexual abuse material (CSAM) carries heavy penalties, including potential life sentences for offenders. The embarrassment children feel from the coerced activity is what usually prevents them from coming forward. When victims are emboldened to tell someone, it is typically a parent, teacher, caregiver or other trusted adult.

Sextortion offenders frequently have dozens of victims around the world but evade law enforcement attention due to the stigma many teens attach to reporting their victimization. Coming forward to help law enforcement identify a predator might prevent countless future incidents of sexual exploitation. Earlier this month, Wyoming FBI agents

helped investigate a sextortion case involving the arrest in Malaysia of a Bangladeshi national. That subject exploited hundreds of minor victims before he was apprehended.

“Few crimes are as damaging and traumatic to a young person as sextortion. Victims might feel embarrassed and be reluctant to come forward. They and their parents or guardians need to know it's not their fault,” said FBI Denver Acting Special Agent in Charge Matthew Fodor. “The only way we are going to catch these perpetrators and keep them from harming others is for children to notify a trusted adult and contact us.”

Here are some tips to protect children online:

- Parents should be selective about what they share online. If social media accounts are open to everyone, offenders can easily learn about parents and their children, and then use that information for their predatory purposes.
- Be wary of anyone you encounter online. Block or ignore messages from strangers.
- People can pretend to be anyone online. Videos and photos are not proof that a person is who they claim to be.
- Be highly suspicious if someone you meet on a game or app asks you to start communicating with them on a different platform.
- Encourage children to report suspicious behavior to a trusted adult.

If you know a juvenile who might be a victim of sextortion in Wyoming, here are some steps to take:

- Contact FBI Denver’s Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking Task Force at 303-629-7171
- Do not delete anything before law enforcement is able to review it.
- Tell law enforcement everything about the online encounters. It might be embarrassing, but it is necessary to identify the predator.

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