

# Sextortion & Catfishing: A serious warning for Parents and Carers

## What is Sextortion & Catfishing?

Sextortion is a form of online blackmail where a child or teen is tricked into sharing sexual or private images. Once sent, the perpetrator threatens to share them publicly unless the child sends more, pays money, or complies with further demands.

Catfishing is when someone uses a fake online identity to gain a young person's trust, often pretending to be a peer or romantic interest. It's a common tactic used to begin sextortion.

**Need help? Visit our resource hub  
or support services**



**Need help right now?**

Action Fraud, phone 0300 123 2040,  
report online: <https://www.actionfraud.police.uk>

CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection),  
report online: <https://www.ceop.police.uk/ceop-reporting/>

Local police, emergency 999, non emergency 101

## Who's at risk?

Sextortion affects children from all backgrounds. However, current data shows:

- Teen boys (13–17) are now the most targeted group for financial sextortion scams.
- LGBTQ+ youth are often targeted on platforms that promote anonymity or private messaging.
- Children who feel isolated, seek approval online, or struggle with low self-esteem are more vulnerable.
- Groomers are increasingly using gaming platforms and social media DMs to initiate contact.
- According to the UK National Crime Agency, there has been a 400% increase in sextortion reports between 2022 and 2023.

## Warning signs to look out for

- A sudden reluctance to go online or answer messages
- Emotional distress or anxiety after using their phone
- Hiding screens, deleting apps, or secretive online behaviour
- Requests for money or unusual financial transactions
- Changes in sleeping or eating habits
- Withdrawal from friends or family

## What you can do

If you suspect your child is a victim :

1. **Stay calm and reassure them.** Let them know they're not in trouble, and they're not alone.
2. **Don't blame them.** Perpetrators are often skilled manipulators, your child is the victim.
3. **Preserve the evidence.** Save all messages, usernames, images, and links. Do not delete accounts deactivate them instead.
4. **Block the abuser.** Do this on all platforms.
5. **Report it immediately to the authorities.**
6. **Seek emotional support.** Victims may feel deep shame, fear, or anxiety. Early support is vital.

## Services to support your child emotionally



Childline - 0800 1111 – [childline.org.uk](http://childline.org.uk) - 24/7 free counselling for children and teens

NSPCC Helpline for Parents - 0808 800 5000

Family Lives - 0808 800 2222 - Practical parenting support

The Mix - [www.themix.org.uk](http://www.themix.org.uk) - Mental health support for under-25s

Stop It Now! - [www.stopitnow.org.uk](http://www.stopitnow.org.uk) - Help for anyone concerned about child sexual abuse or grooming online

## Key message for parents

Sextortion is not just an embarrassing situation - it is a criminal offence that can have devastating consequences for young people. The psychological impact can be severe, leading to anxiety, depression, self-harm, or worse. But with the right support, children recover and families can help them reclaim their safety and confidence.