

14 May 2024

Dear Parent/Carer,

### **Financially motivated sexual extortion: alert for education settings**

All schools in the UK have recently been sent information from the National Crime Agency, raising awareness of the recent rise in reporting of financially motivated sexual extortion (a type of online blackmail often known in the media as 'sextortion'). Children and young people worldwide are being targeted.

This type of crime involves an adult offender (often from an organised crime group based overseas) threatening to release nude or semi-nude images and/or videos of a child or young person, unless they pay money, or meet another financial demand, such as purchasing a pre-paid gift card. Victims of any age and gender can be targets, however a large proportion of cases have involved male victims aged 14-18.

A child or young person is never to blame if they have been a victim. Offenders will have tricked, groomed and/or manipulated them into sharing an image. Find out more about online blackmail on [CEOP Education's parents and carers website](#).

Child victims may report being:

- contacted by an online account that they do not know but appears to be another child or young person. They may also be contacted by a hacked account of a child or young person they do know and the communication feels unfamiliar
- quickly engaged in sexually explicit communications, which may include the offender sharing an indecent image first
- moved from a chat on social media, an online platform or game to a private messaging app that is an end-to-end encrypted chat platform
- manipulated or pressured into taking nude or semi-nude photos or videos
- told they have been hacked and the offender has access to their images, personal information and contacts (whether this is true or not)
- blackmailed into sending money or meeting another financial demand (such as purchasing a pre-paid gift card) after sharing an image or video, or the offender sharing hacked or digitally manipulated/AI-generated images of the child or young person and making the threat of sharing them wider

Although we deliver online safety through our personal development curriculum as standard, we will be doing work through tutor groups with students over the coming weeks, specifically focusing on how to avoid becoming a victim of financially motivated sexual extortion.

If the academy becomes aware that a young person is in possession of an indecent image on their mobile phone, we have a duty to confiscate the phone and the police will be called to collect it. We will not view images to determine whether they are inappropriate or illegal: this is the role of the police. The phone will be returned at the discretion of the police when they have completed their analysis. This is to keep all children safe.

## **Talking to your child**

It's important to have frequent, open and non-judgemental conversations with your child about relationships, sex and being online to build trust and support them if something goes wrong. Financially motivated sexual extortion should be included in those conversations. We ask that you discuss the content of this letter with your child, and discuss ways that they can stay safe online. We encourage discussions at home regarding healthy and unhealthy behaviours within relationships, including recognising that any pressure put on them to send images is abusive.

Here are some tips about how to approach this:

- Chat regularly about their life online: have ongoing conversations with them about their life and time online. Continue to take an interest as they grow, explore new apps and sites together and talk in a balanced way, considering the benefits and the potential harms.
- Talk about where to find information about relationships and sex: organisations like CEOP Education, Childline and Brook have age-appropriate advice topics such as sexual communication and image sharing. This will help your child to understand what unhealthy relationships look like, such as applying pressure and blackmail; and give them trusted sources of information to explore these topics.
- Review privacy settings: talk to your child about the importance of using privacy settings on their accounts to restrict who can contact them. Read CEOP Education's advice on how to talk your child about their privacy settings.
- Make sure they know where to go for support: let them know that they can come to you with any concerns and won't be judged. It's also important to make them aware of other trusted adults or sources of support, if they feel they can't talk to you, such as Childline.
- Make sure they know where to report an incident (please see below for reporting details).

## **How to respond if this happens to your child**

- Don't pay, do stop contact and block: you may be tempted to pay, but there is no guarantee that this will stop the threats. As the offender's motive is to get money, once you have shown you can pay, they will likely ask for more and blackmail may continue. If you have paid, don't panic but don't pay anything more. Help your child to stop all communication with the offender and block them on any accounts that they have been contacted on.
- Avoid deleting anything: try not to delete anything that could be used as evidence such as messages, images and bank account details.
- Report to the police or CEOP: call 101 or 999 if there is an immediate risk of harm to your child. Or you can use the [CEOP Safety Centre](#) to report any online blackmail attempts.

- Avoid using victim-blaming language. Where a child or young person has shared an image, remember that they have been groomed and manipulated into doing so, and they are never responsible for their abuse. Victim-blaming can be direct and explicit, for example, telling the victim it was their fault. It can also be indirect and unconscious, for example, questioning what a victim could have done differently, or how they may have reacted differently in the victim's shoes.
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing in telling you, and that they are not alone and the adults around them will do all they can to help and support them.
- Help the child to remove or prevent images being shared online by following these three steps:
  - Use [Report Remove](#), the Internet Watch Foundation and Childline's tool, to report images that have been shared or might be shared online.
  - Use [Take It Down](#), a tool provided by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, to help them remove or stop the online sharing of images across participating online platforms.
  - Report directly to the platform or app that the incident has occurred on. See [Internet Matters](#) for advice on where to report online issues on major social media platforms.
- You can also speak to the academy's Safeguarding Team. This includes Learning Managers, and our Safeguarding Leads (Mrs P Smith and Mrs L Fleming).
- In rare cases, financially motivated sexual extortion has been linked to self-harm and suicide. Be aware of changes in behaviour that may suggest a child or young person is at risk of developing or experiencing poor mental health.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me via [c.gibson@normanby.outwood.com](mailto:c.gibson@normanby.outwood.com) if you have any questions or concerns.

Yours faithfully,



Miss Christy Gibson  
Assistant Principal