

## Financially motivated sexual extortion: guidance for higher education professionals

Globally, there has been an increase in reports of children and young adults being forced into paying money or meeting another financial demand (such as purchasing a pre-paid gift card) after an offender has threatened to release nudes or semi-nudes of them. This is financially motivated sexual extortion, a type of online blackmail often referred to in the media as 'sextortion'<sup>1</sup>. It is a form of online abuse.

Financially motivated sexual extortion is usually carried out by individuals who are typically motivated by money and based overseas. While these individuals target all ages and genders, many of the victims include:

- adult males aged 18–34<sup>2</sup>
- international students unfamiliar with UK support systems
- students in isolated living arrangements or experiencing loneliness
- students exploring online dating for the first time
- students with immediate access to money, such as student loans

Here is what you need to know as higher education professionals to recognise the signs of this form of abuse, understand how to respond, and increase awareness and help seeking behaviours amongst students.

<sup>1</sup> Financially motivated sexual extortion is also referred to as sexually coerced extortion

<sup>2</sup> [UK Safer Internet Centre Sextortion Report findings](#)

## What we would like you to do

- Develop your understanding of financially motivated sexual extortion using this guidance and read [additional information](#) published by the Revenge Porn Helpline.
- Avoid using [victim-blaming language](#) and support students in reporting the crime to the police.
- Display the poster attached in prominent areas across your setting, helping students know how to respond and report financially motivated sexual extortion.

## What it looks like

### Victims may appear:

- in high distress or anxiety
- to suddenly withdraw from classes or social activities
- to express shame, embarrassment, or 'having done something stupid'
- concerned about having shared 'something' they regret
- to mention being blackmailed, scammed, or asked for money after sharing content

### Victims may report being:

- quickly engaged in sexually explicit communications, which may include the offender sharing an intimate image first
- moved from a chat on social media, an online dating platform or game to a private messaging app that is [end-to-end encrypted](#)

- 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)
- targeted with extreme language, false accusations, and time-limited demands - all designed to create panic and pressure them into meeting a financial demand
- blackmailed into sending money or other forms of payment (such as pre-paid gift cards), either after sharing an image or video, or in response to threats involving hacked, digitally manipulated, or AI-generated images

Be aware that offenders may target multiple students within an education or wider social setting, as it is more likely that a student will accept a friend request or communicate with someone they don't know if they believe they are a 'mutual friend'.

## Supporting victim survivors

A student who is a victim should be supported in the same way as with any other type of online abuse. **You should:**

- reassure the student that they are not alone or at fault for what has happened and help and support is available
- remain solutions-focused and avoid victim-blaming language.  
Where a student has shared an image, remember that they have been groomed and manipulated into doing so, and they are never responsible for their abuse

- signpost the student towards support and tools to remove or prevent images being shared online:

[The Revenge Porn Helpline](#) can support all adults in the UK who have had intimate images shared online without consent and can help report intimate images for removal.

[StopNCII.org](#), a global tool from SWGfL, can protect the intimate images from being shared on participating platforms.

### **Practical advice you could give:**

- stop communication with the blackmailer
- help preserve evidence, including screenshots of messages or usernames and account profiles
- do not pay any money to the blackmailer; if money has been paid, don't panic, do not send any more
- report the profile or handle of the social media, gaming or dating account, which was used to threaten to share, or share, the intimate images directly to the platform
- report what has happened to the police

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 student is at risk of developing or experiencing poor mental health. Make sure that students are aware of what mental health support services are available to them through the university, locally and nationally.

# Is someone trying to pressure, threaten or blackmail you online?

This could be financially motivated sexual extortion, or 'sextortion'.  
**It's not your fault and there is help and support available.**



## What to do

**Don't pay, stop contact and block.** Sending the offender money does not guarantee that they will stop their threats. It could lead to them asking for more money and the blackmail continuing.

If you have sent them money already, stay calm but don't pay anything more.

Stop all communication with the offender and block them on any accounts they have used to contact you.

**Avoid deleting anything** that could be used as evidence such as messages, images, offender profile details and bank account details.

**Report it** to the police by phoning 101 or calling 999 if you or anyone else is in immediate risk of harm.

## If your image has been shared

If your intimate image has been shared online without consent, help is available:

**1. The Revenge Porn Helpline** can help adults report intimate images for removal.



Scan or go to  
[revengepornhelpline.org.uk](https://revengepornhelpline.org.uk)  
for support.

**2. StopNCII.org**, a global tool from SWGfL, can protect the intimate images from being shared on participating platforms.



Scan or visit  
[stopncii.org](https://stopncii.org)  
for support.

## Need to talk?

Samaritans offer a free, confidential listening service for any issue, with no pressure or judgement, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Phone **116 123**



Scan to find more ways to contact Samaritans or visit  
[www.samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org)