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## Royal Canadian Mounted Police

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# Just the facts: sextortion

By Alexandra Cotroneo



### Public safety

Trust your instincts and be careful when interacting with people online. You might not be talking to the person you think you are.

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Sextortion is a form of exploitation where a person convinces someone to provide explicit images or videos of themselves. This material is then used to blackmail the victim into sending money, or additional images or videos, in exchange for not having the material released publicly to friends, family, or other people known to the victim. The impact on victims of sextortion can be damaging. In some cases, victims might experience extreme outcomes, such as self-harm and even suicide.

From September 2023 to August 2024, [Cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca) received more than 2,600 tips of incidents of sextortion.

## How it happens

Although there are different ways sextortion can happen, the typical process is as follows:

### Step 1

Sextorters can contact a person through social media, dating apps, or video games. They often pose as a new friend or romantic interest online, and sometimes as a different age and sex than they actually are.

### Step 2

The sextorter builds trust with the victim, appearing to be their friend or someone who cares about them. Because sextorters are very convincing, the trust that has been built can impact the victim's ability to see the person's underlying motives. Using this tactic, the sextorter might have gained access to the victim's online network, which they will use against the victim later.

### Step 3

Once trust has been built, the victim is convinced to send explicit material, such as nude pictures or videos of themselves, to the sextorter. Often, this is done using a messaging app such as Snapchat.

#### **Step 4**

Once they have the material, the sextorter threatens to release it publicly or to friends or family, unless demands are met. For example, money, gift cards, or more photos and videos.

#### **Step 5**

If the victim refuses to do what the sextorter wants, they might try to make the victim feel like they have no way out of the situation, or that their life will be over if they refuse because their images will be released.

## **Common targets**

- Teenagers and young adults between the age of 14 and 24 are the most common targets.
- While anyone can be targeted, girls are generally targeted for sexual images or videos, while boys are more often targeted for money.
- When the social media platform was known and reported, 74% of sextortion incidents happened on Instagram and Snapchat, according to [Cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca).

## **Prevention Tips**

- Review privacy settings on social media.
- Be cautious about interacting with people online. You might not be speaking to the person you think you are.
- Be careful about sharing explicit material online. Once it's shared, you might not be able to control what happens to it.

# What you can do

If you think you or someone you know might be a target of sextortion, remember that regardless of what the sextorter says, you are not alone. While these criminals are organized, law enforcement is working together to respond to these crimes. There is life after images. Below, are some other steps you should take.

- Stop all communication with the sextorter.
- Do not comply with threats; do not send money or more images.
- Deactivate, but not delete, your social media account or images. Deleting your account will also delete proof of the crime.
- Save a copy of any images you sent, and take screenshots of all messages and the sextorter's profile including their username.
- Trust your instincts and practice caution when communicating online. If something seems off, stop the communication.
- Reach out to a trusted adult and report the incident to your local police station. You are not to blame, and will not be in trouble with law enforcement. By reporting the incident you will also find people who can help you.
- Report incidents to [cybertip.ca](https://www.cybertip.ca) – Canada's national tip line for reporting online child sexual exploitation – either by name or anonymously.
- If you need further support:
  - Call or text 9-8-8 for immediate and free [mental health crisis support](#) and suicide prevention intervention.
  - [Kids Help Phone](#): Call 1-800-668-6868 or text 686868.
  - [Need Help Now](#) provides information and answers questions on emotional support, reporting, and how to help a friend.
  - [Indigenous Help Line](#): Call or text 1-855-554-4325.

- Hope for Wellness Helpline – for all Indigenous people across Canada: Call 1-855-242-3310 or chat online.
- Black Youth Helpline: Call 1-833-294-8650.
- LGBT Youth Line: text 647-694-4275 or live chat.

## Canada's response

- The RCMP's National Child Exploitation Crime Centre (NCECC) functions as the central point of contact for all investigations related to the online sexual exploitation of children (OCSE) in Canada and transnational child sexual offences involving a Canadian victim or sextorter. Through the National Strategy for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation on the Internet, the NCECC and its partners work together to identify sextorters, safeguard victims and advance education, awareness, research and intelligence on sextortion.
- Cybertip.ca is Canada's online reporting body for suspected online child sexual exploitation, which is operated by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection (C3P). In addition, they provide age-appropriate information and resources to help educate Canadian youth ages 14-24 about online safety.
- Public Safety Canada provides youth, parents, and caregivers with educational resources on online dangers, including cyberbullying, sexting, and sextortion.
- In its Victim Services Directory, the Department of Justice Canada provides information and community resources for victims of online child sexual exploitation.
- Media Smarts, a digital media literacy platform, provides online safety resources through education, public awareness, research and policy.

## Note

The majority of the information in this article was provided by the RCMP's Sensitive and Specialized Investigative Services, Strategic and Operational Services and National Child Exploitation Crime Centre.

### Related links

- [Caregivers need to be engaged to monitor and help kids online](#)
  - [Just the facts: Cyberbullying](#)
  - [Sextortion: It's a scam. It's trending. You can make it stop!](#)
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### Public safety

#### 1. [\*\*The cost of fraud exceeds financial loss, victims say\*\*](#)

The impact of fraud on victims can be detrimental regardless of demographic or fraud type. In addition to financial loss, many victims also report serious emotional and psychological harm and impacts on their social life.

#### 2. [\*\*Just the Facts - Organized Crime\*\*](#)

RCMP officers and employees deal with organized criminals every day. Read about some of the realities of organized crime in Canada.

#### 3. [\*\*Just the Facts — Missing and abducted children\*\*](#)

Read about the latest facts and ways to protect your children.

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