

A person is shown in profile, covering their face with their hand, suggesting distress or shame. They are holding a smartphone in their other hand. The background is dark with some blue light. A large, bright blue pixelated graphic is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

While You Sleep

RESOURCES TO HELP PREVENT AND RESPOND
TO FINANCIALLY MOTIVATED SEXTORTION

We created these resources because a conversation can save a life, and too many families never have that chance.

Financially motivated sextortion (FMS) is not a failure of parental love. It happens because good parents believe their family is immune. Families have gone to sleep with a healthy, happy child and awakened to find them gone.

The time from the first message to a life-threatening crisis can be **less than 24 hours**. Since 2021, **at least 36 boys in the United States have died by suicide** after being victimized by financially motivated sextortion. And the true number is almost certainly higher today.¹

Many families have never heard of FMS. And even those who have often think the same thing: *not my kid*.

But that sense of security is exactly what this crime exploits.

On average, a case of FMS is reported every **11 minutes** in the United States.² **This is not a slow-moving crime.**

These resources give you what you need today, before a predator can reach your child first.

The Tim Tebow Foundation has spent years on the front lines of child exploitation. This is not a new fight. It is the next front, and it is one we believe we can win, with one kitchen-table conversation at a time.

Every family can be equipped.

We hope these resources help you start the conversation and save a life.

—The Tim Tebow Foundation Team

Conversation Starters for Parents

You don't need a perfect script – you just need a conversation.

BEFORE YOU TALK:

Digital safety isn't a single talk, it's an ongoing conversation that starts the moment your child has access to any technology: a TV with apps, a tablet, a smartphone. Keep the conversation age-appropriate as he or she grows. What you say to a seven-year-old with a tablet looks different from what you say to a fifteen-year-old with Instagram, but the same open door should always be there.

Most digital safety conversations can unfold naturally, over time. But **financially motivated sextortion (FMS)** is the one topic that you shouldn't wait for the next car ride. This is urgent because this scam can move from the first message to a crisis in under a day.

HERE'S AN EXACT SENTENCE YOU CAN SAY NOW:

If this ever happens — you come to me, or a trusted adult. No matter what. There is nothing you could send, nothing you could do, that would change how much I love you. The second you tell me, we win.

That sentence works because it removes the two things the predator is counting on: shame and fear of consequences.

Say it before anything happens — not after.

OPENERS BY SCENARIO:

MOMENT

WHAT TO SAY

COLD OPEN
(NOTHING HAS
HAPPENED)

"I heard about something called sextortion — where someone online tricks a young person into sending a picture, then blackmails them for more pictures or money. It's happening to kids your age. Have you heard of it?"

NEW FOLLOWER
/DM

"Hey, who's this new person messaging you? A lot of scammers pose as the opposite sex your age to get teens talking. Doesn't mean this message is bad— just want you to be thinking about it."

APP SWITCH
REQUEST

"If someone you just met online ever asks to move the conversation to another platform like WhatsApp, Telegram, or Signal, — that's a big red flag. Scammers do that on purpose. Can you tell me if it happens to you?"

AFTER A TOUGH
NEWS STORY

"Did you see that story about the student who committed suicide after getting blackmailed online? Unfortunately, that's not rare — it's happening every day. I never want you to feel like you're in that alone if it ever happened to you."

IF YOU SUSPECT
SOMETHING NOW

"You've seemed off lately. What is going on? I'm not here to take your phone or punish you — I'm here to help. Whatever it is, we can fix it together. You will not be in trouble."

WHAT NOT TO SAY:

"Why would you send a picture like that?" — Shame is the predator's weapon. Don't hand him another one.

"We're taking your phone away." — as a first response. Confiscation without support teaches kids to hide the next crisis instead of reporting it.

"This would never happen to you." — It removes the warning before it can do any good. Confidence is not immunity.

Revisit this conversation every few months, especially around new apps, new followers, or a change in your child's mood. Remember the goal is not one perfect conversation — it's a line that stays open.

Conversation Starters for Coaches & Teachers

You may be the adult a student trusts most. Use your platform — a team meeting, a classroom moment, a one-on-one check-in — to spread the word before a crisis hits.

OPENERS BY SCENARIO:

MOMENT

WHAT TO SAY

PRESEASON MEETING/START OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

"Before we get going, I want to take a few minutes to talk about something important that's affecting students. There's a scam, called sextortion, where someone online pretends to like you, gets you talking, then blackmails you over a picture. They specifically target athletes like you. If you're ever targeted, I want you to know you can come to me — you won't be in trouble, and we'll handle it together."

INTEGRATE THE TOPIC INTO A HEALTH OR DIGITAL SAFETY LESSON

"Here's one specific scam to know about. It's called sextortion. Someone poses as a peer online, gets you talking, then asks for a picture. The second you send it, they threaten to send it to everyone you know unless you pay. Recognizing this pattern is how you beat it."

CHECK IN

"You've been somewhere else the last few practices — distracted, quiet. I'm not asking you to tell me right now. I just want you to know: whatever's going on, especially if it's something online, you can come to me and we'll figure it out together."

AFTER A TOUGH NEWS STORY

"Some of you may have seen that story about a student who committed suicide after being blackmailed online. I want to say this as a team: that's not rare, and it could be any one of you. If you're ever blackmailed, you can come to me. We will figure out the next step."

RED FLAG REMINDERS

"Before we get on the bus — a reminder. Hotel downtime, being bored on your phone at night, that's exactly when these scams happen. If anyone messages you tonight to send a picture, that's a red flag. Come find me, any time, even if it's late."

IF A STUDENT CONFIDES IN YOU

Stay calm and reassure them first: “I’m glad you told me. This is not your fault, and we’re going to get you help.”

Don’t investigate it yourself. Don’t ask to see the image or the messages — that’s not your role, and it can retraumatize the student.

Encourage them to stop communicating with their blackmailer and to preserve the chats and images on their digital devices.³

Loop in your school counselor or organization administrator immediately and follow your school’s/organization’s reporting protocol.

Point them to help: the NCMEC CyberTipline ([CyberTipline.org](https://www.cybertipline.org)), Take It Down (takeitdown.ncmec.org), and 911 or 988 if they are in danger.

Don’t promise total secrecy — promise to handle it carefully and keep them safe.

Red Flags for Financially Motivated Sextortion

Teaching the script is the prevention. Financially motivated sextortion runs a similar playbook almost every time. Once you and your child both recognize it, it stops working.

A COMMON PLAYBOOK:

- 1 CONTACT** A new follower or DM from an attractive “girl” your child doesn't know in person, often posing as a peer.⁴
- 2 FLIRT** Fast-moving, flattering conversation. Compliments escalate quickly. The “girl” seems unusually interested very quickly.⁴
- 3 IMAGE REQUEST** The conversation turns sexual, often framed as reciprocal image requests (“I'll show you if you show me”).⁵
- 4 THE SWITCH** A request to move the conversation to a different app, such as WhatsApp, Telegram, or Signal.⁴
- 5 THE THREAT** Within minutes of receiving an image from your child, the tone changes completely. Flattery turns to threats. This is often instant and disorienting.⁴
- 6 DEMAND** A specific dollar amount is demanded, usually payable through Cash App, Venmo, gift cards, or crypto. May include screenshots of the victim's contact list as proof of intent to expose.⁵
- 7 ESCALATE** The demand can get more aggressive and can escalate. The threat doesn't go away with payment as offenders frequently release the images anyway.⁶

HOW AI CAN BE USED IN SEXTORTION:

A child no longer has to send an image to be targeted. Offenders can generate convincing explicit images using a child's real face pulled from a team photo or social media post.

This means any child with an online presence is a potential target, whether or not they ever shared anything.⁷

If You're Being Sextorted Right Now

This is not your fault. You are not the first person this has happened to, and you will not be the only one it happens to.

The person messaging you is a criminal running a scam — not someone who knows you, and not someone whose threats define what happens next.

There is a way out, and it starts with telling a trusted adult.

TELL A TRUSTED ADULT

A parent, a family member, a coach, a teacher, a counselor, a pastor. It will feel like the hardest sentence you've ever said. It is also the one that ends this. Something as simple as, "I need help with something, and I'm scared to say it," is enough to start.³

TAKE THESE STEPS TOGETHER

- 1 **Stop responding to the person threatening you.** Every reply gives them more to work with. Silence takes away their leverage.³
- 2 **Preserve communication:** Do not delete any messages. Take screenshots of communication with the offender to provide evidence for law enforcement.³
- 3 **Block the Account:** On every platform where they've contacted you, and report it through that platform's abuse or safety reporting tool.³
- 4 **Report it to authorities:** You can report this to the NCMEC CyberTipline ([CyberTipline.org](https://www.cybertipline.org)), the FBI ([FBI.gov/tips](https://www.fbi.gov/tips)), and [IC3.gov](https://www.ic3.gov).³

- 5 **Request removal of harmful images:**
 - a. If you were under 18 when the image was taken: Use the Take It Down tool at takeitdown.ncmec.org.⁸
 - b. If you were 18 or older when the image was taken: Use the Stop Non-Consensual Intimate Image Abuse tool at stopncii.org.⁹
- 6 **Reverse financial transactions:** If you already sent money, contact your bank or payment platform right away. Reversals are often possible, and the person who threatened you will likely never know you initiated one.¹⁰
- 7 **Respond to phone harassment:** If the harassment continues by phone, filter or block unknown senders, and know that changing your number is a fast, effective option if it doesn't stop.¹⁰

FOR THE PARENT OR TRUSTED ADULT ON THE OTHER END OF THAT CONVERSATION

- **Do not panic, and do not blame.** The fact that they came to you means the predator already lost.
- **Reassure them immediately:** this is not a life sentence, and this is survivable. Families have walked through this and out the other side.
- **Calmly move through the steps above together**
- **If there is any risk of self-harm, do not wait** – contact the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (call or text 988) or go to the nearest emergency room.
- **To speak confidentially with a trained counselor,** Text “THORN” to 741741

SOURCES

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- ¹⁰GASA, “When a Teen Victim Reached Out, GASA Acted: Expert Advice on Handling Sextortion Cases,” May 2025 – gasa.org/knowledge-base/blog/when-a-teen-victim-reached-out-gasa-acted-expert-advice-on-handling-sextortion-cases

Disclosure: Claude, an AI tool, supported the development of this piece by drafting text. An anti-human trafficking and child exploitation subject matter expert reviewed and approved every piece of AI-assisted content in this campaign before publication. The Tim Tebow Foundation is committed to using AI thoughtfully and transparently in service of our mission.