

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.