

Parent Information Notice: Online Safety & Sextortion Awareness

Parents and Guardians,

As we work together to support our students, we want to make you aware of a growing issue affecting young people across the country - including in small and rural communities like ours. Online sextortion is becoming more common, and the individuals behind these scams are targeting teenagers through social media, texting apps, and even gaming platforms.

With Thanksgiving Break approaching, many students will have more free time online. This makes it an important moment to gently check in, stay involved, and help guide your child toward safe digital habits. We know that many students do not easily open up about their online experiences. That's why calm, caring conversations - and regular device monitoring - are essential.

What Is Sextortion?

Sextortion occurs when someone online pretends to be a peer, gains a young person's trust, and pressures them into sharing private or inappropriate photos or information.

Once the criminal has these images, they may demand money or additional content while threatening to share the photos with family, friends, or social media. These situations:

- Can escalate in minutes or hours
- Target BOTH boys and girls
- Often involve fake accounts posing as teenagers
- Rely on secrecy, shame, and fear to isolate students

These individuals are highly manipulative, and even confident, tech-savvy teens can be caught off guard.

How Parents Can Help This Week

Thanksgiving Break is a natural opportunity to reconnect and talk with your child about their digital world. Even if teens seem reluctant to share, they still need you as a calm, steady source of support.

Here are some caring, proactive steps you can take:

1. Review your child's phone and social media together

Look for:

- New or unknown contacts
- Hidden apps or secondary accounts
- Messages from people your child hasn't met in person
- Any requests for photos, links, or money

Try to keep the tone supportive rather than punitive. The goal is safety—not punishment.

2. Remind them never to share personal or private images

Many students believe they are talking to another teen. Gently reinforce that:

- Anyone can pretend to be someone else online
- A real friend will never pressure them for pictures
- They can always talk to you if someone asks for something uncomfortable

3. Encourage your child to come to you right away if something feels wrong

Tell them clearly:

- They will **not** be in trouble
- You want to help, not judge
- There is always a solution, even if something already happened

4. Tighten privacy settings together

Ensure accounts are:

- Set to private
- Limited to real-life friends
- Not sharing location

This can be a simple, shared task that opens the door for conversation.

5. Report and block suspicious accounts

If something concerning occurs:

- Take screenshots
- Do NOT delete messages
- Report the account to the platform
- Contact local law enforcement if appropriate

Positive Digital Habits for Students

We also want to promote healthy routines that help students feel safer and more confident online:

- Think before posting or sharing
- Cover cameras when not in use
- Set reasonable screen-time limits
- Ask a trusted adult when something feels uncomfortable
- Use group chats or monitored apps instead of private messages with strangers

These habits empower students to navigate their online world wisely and safely.

We Are Here to Support You

Please know that you are not alone in navigating these challenges. If you have concerns about your child's online activity—or if you believe they may have been contacted by someone suspicious—reach out to us. We will support you, connect you with resources, and help ensure your child's safety.

Thank you for being our partner in keeping students safe, both online and in everyday life.