Sextortion: Stop It Before It Starts

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One of the fastest growing forms of Cyberbullying amongst both male/ female children and teens is coined “Sextortion.” This is the act of blackmailing victims for sexually explicit images. Sextortion occurs when the victim shares these images only after being threatened, which can happen in several different forms. For instance, the suspect begins “phishing” for victims on social media, telling children that he already has images of them and threatens to tell their parents or post the images on social media, if they do not send more sexually explicit images. Children, who may have never have sent images to anyone, become scared and comply with the blackmailer’s demands, hoping that he will go away.

Some children may become involved in an “online relationship” with someone they believed to be a peer. For a while, they may mutually send images. Later, the children find out that the person is not who he says he is and this online predator blackmails them for more images.

Oftentimes kids feel scared and believe that if they comply with the blackmailer’s demands he will stop contacting them. In fact, the request for images usually becomes more intense and sexual in nature. The best way to help our children is to educate them about this issue and to communicate how important it is to never send sexual photos to ANYONE. This includes their boyfriends or girlfriends. Advise children to never comply with the blackmailer’s request. Complying once will not encourage him to stop.

Kids, “The best actions to take, if someone asks you to send photos or says he already has photos of you, are... don’t respond, block the person and talk to a trusted adult.”
We need to let young people know that they will make mistakes and that we are here to help guide them through these bumps in the road. If children feel hopeless or as if they do not have someone to turn to, they may develop depression, anxiety, shame, and/or self-harming behaviors.

Many parents did not grow up with social media or electronic devices. We all are still learning how to navigate through these new challenges. We want to be here for our children, prevent a situation from escalating and keep our children safe.