

# It's Called Sextortion

## Discussion Guide



**NetSmartz®**

A program of the  
  
NATIONAL CENTER FOR  
**MISSING &  
EXPLOITED**  
CHILDREN®

# It's Called Sextortion

This video, 'It's Called Sextortion,' highlights some red flags to look for. Its purpose is to describe what sextortion is, how it can happen, and to promote bystander behaviors among peers. The video also provides guidance on what to do if you receive inappropriate requests or if you experience sextortion. After watching the video, you can use these questions to engage in a mindful conversation with kids about sextortion. Encourage them to think critically about this issue, help them develop safer choices, reassure them that you are there to support them, and offer additional resources.

## How did Niko initially feel about the girl who messaged him online?

Encourage students to share their ideas. Likely answers: excited, happy, flattered.

**Facilitators' Notes:** Emphasize that feeling excited, curious, and wanted are normal and healthy ways to feel about someone, but we also have to be careful as we know people online may not be who they say they are.

## Why was Luis suspicious of the girl who reached out to Mateo and Niko, and is it important to trust your gut, intuition, or feelings?

Luis was suspicious when the "girl" reached out to Luis and identified some red flags. For example, she was very forthcoming, saying things like, "If you show me yours, I'll show you mine." Luis also doubted his feelings about the girl. He mentioned he thought he was being crazy when she reached out to Mateo. Maybe he doubted his initial feelings, but later, he witnessed what happened to his friend. It is important to trust what we feel and if something does not feel right, we should talk to a **trusted adult**.

**Facilitators' Notes:** Developing relationships online is a normal aspect of social development for children. It is challenging to discern people's intentions, whether we know them online or offline. When combined with the normal curiosity, excitement, and the need to explore relationships, it becomes more difficult to identify people's intentions. Just like in the video, the red flags were subtle and hard to recognize as such. Helping our children trust their feelings and encouraging them to come and talk to us is an important prevention tool.

**Why isn't checking mutual friends a good way to verify whether someone you connect with online is who they say they are?**

It is often easy for offenders to determine mutual friends online. Offenders can send friend requests to people you are friends with to make it look like you have mutual friends. Unfortunately, law enforcement officers have seen this tactic used many times to gain the trust of teenagers in order to victimize them.

**What can you do to verify someone is who they say they are online?**

This can be difficult to do, but one way to be more confident that someone you met online is who they say they are would be to look for mutual friends you know offline and ask them about the new connection. If you aren't able to talk to anyone who knows the new person in real life, it is best to proceed with **extreme caution**. If you decide to communicate with them, do not share any sensitive information or pictures and consider blocking their ability to send you direct or private messages. Do not rely on profile pictures or other pictures posted on someone's social media account, as these are not reliable. Anyone can use fake pictures!

**What would you say to a friend that received a request like the one in the video?**

- **Be supportive** and avoid making them feel bad.
- **Talk about the risks** associated with sending a nude image.
- **Explain that engaging in sexting can lead to sextortion**, another form of child exploitation.
- **Encourage them to take time and think** carefully before making any decision.
- **Advise them to say "no."** If the requester gets upset and reacts negatively toward them, that should be a red flag about the person's intentions.
- **Assist in reporting** the incident both on the app and to the [CyberTipline.org](https://www.cybertipline.org).
- **Help your friend identify a trusted adult** who can offer support.

Emphasize that it is always risky to send a nude or explicit image because it is impossible to control where the pictures go after you send it and because anyone who has your image can use it to threaten or intimidate you.

### Consider these tips when interacting with other people online:

#### **Mutual friendship is not a reliable way to verify identity:**

Having mutual friends is not a reliable way to verify a person's identity. If you share friends, call some of them to ask about the person making the request. How do they know them? How long have they known them? Have they ever interacted with this person offline?

#### **Caution with profile pictures:**

Asking for pictures or relying on profile pictures is not foolproof. People can use fake images and with advancing artificial intelligence technology, and creating convincing fake pictures is becoming easier. It's essential to take time to get to know someone and let a genuine relationship develop over time.

Progressing to sensitive or intimate topics quickly is a potential 'red flag' or warning sign about the other person's intentions, especially if the other person is pressuring you to engage in sexual conversation or send sexual images.

#### **Beware of falsified personas:**

People who seek to harm children and teenagers online often create fake profiles, follow or friend multiple people who are connected to each other online, and learn about the interests of the person they intend to victimize in order to create a sense of safety and trust. It's crucial to understand that even though these personas make the person seem like a friend or an interesting person to flirt with or date, everything they are telling and showing you online could be fake.

#### **Responsibility for sextortion:**

Even when a child sends explicit images and this leads to sextortion, it is **not their fault**. The blame lies with the offender's actions. Furthermore, NCMEC has also seen cases where the victims never shared nudes but instead, offenders created fake pictures or hacked their computers to obtain compromising images. Therefore, it is important for everyone to remember not to place blame or shame on a victim of sextortion, but instead focus on supporting and helping them.

## Some notes about Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI):

**GAI is becoming increasingly popular with offenders:** They can create explicit content and use it to victimize children.

**What is important to know about children facing victimization:**

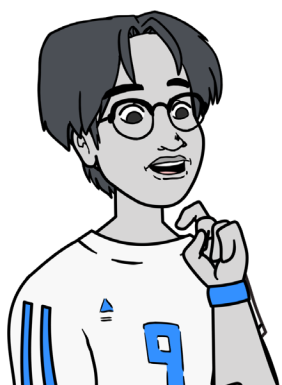
It doesn't matter if the image is "real" or created by artificial intelligence. Images that are nude, sexually explicit, and/or depict the sexual abuse of a child are harmful to the child no matter how they were created.

**Upstanders play a major role:** If you receive an image or video of someone, delete the content. If it is safe, reach out to the person who sent it to you and let them know that they are victimizing someone. Additionally, tell a trusted adult, report the content, and reach out to the victim to let them know you are there for them.

**Trusted adults:** Whether the child created the content or not, it is the responsibility of adults to protect them. Believe them and provide support.

## What are the four things you could do to protect yourself in a situation like Mateo's?

1. **Talk to a trusted adult.** Although there is value in talking to friends as they can provide support, in these situations you should talk to a trusted adult who can help you navigate the situation, as sextortion is a crime.
2. **Report on the app and on the CyberTipline.** Report the issue both within the app and through the CyberTipline.
3. **Do not delete your account.** Avoid deleting your account as you will be deleting evidence.
4. **Do you think your content is already online, but you don't know where?** If you suspect your content is already online, you can take control back by visiting **Take It Down**.



Luis  
15 Years Old



Niko  
16 Years Old



Mateo  
12 Years Old