

Rising trend of teenage boys exposed to 'Sextortion' threat

In the lead up to Safer Internet Day on Tuesday, 7 February, Kids Helpline is highlighting the concerning trend of overseas criminal syndicates preying on Australian children, particularly teenage boys, by extorting money from them after deceiving them to send sexually explicit images over instant messaging platforms.

Data from Kids Helpline, a service powered by **yourtown**, indicates that the current target for "sextortion" appears to be young males between the ages of 14 – 17.

yourtown CEO Tracy Adams, said the figures demonstrated a key difference in contact trends for Kids Helpline. "

Generally, approximately 70 percent of contacts to Kids Helpline come from females with males making up only about 20 percent, however we have seen a complete reversal of this sextortion trend with 78 percent of contacts over the last 5 years coming from young males, increasing from 2 young males in 2017 to 116 in 2022."

"What we are seeing through contacts to Kids Helpline is increasing cases of teenage boys who are highly distressed after being threatened with the release of intimate images if they don't hand over, in some instances, thousands of dollars."

"In addition to the threats and coercion, victims often feel like they are powerless to do anything to prevent the release of the images they have shared and feel they will be deeply shamed and embarrassed. This has an obvious impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

"If your child is or has been a victim, it is important to stay calm and reassure them that it's not their fault and that there is help available through Kids Helpline who work in partnership with the AFP-led Australian Centre to counter Child Exploitation (ACCE), police and the e Safety Commissioner," continued Ms Adams.

Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, children and young people are able to choose to contact Kids Helpline by telephone, WebChat or email counselling when they need to talk through issues including online safety concerns.

Technology has evolved dramatically in the past two decades and the benefits have been huge. These developments have also exposed children and young people to many risks with real-world impacts, making online safety awareness even more important.

Ms Adams concluded that a whole-of-community response is crucial to protect children. This importantly includes increased awareness and education aimed at preventing online extortion from happening in the first place.

Kids Helpline plays a vital role in supporting young people across Australia who have been subjected to online abuse, had a negative experience online such as online abuse, harassment, sextortion or image-based abuse through our Kids helpline

support channels and website which hosts a range of useful resources for young people, parents and carers. Young people can reach out to Kids Helpline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. On Safer Internet Day Kids Helpline will join with partner organisations across Australia, including the Office of The eSafety Commissioner to promote the message of **Connect. Reflect. Protect.**

Connect safely and with purpose – by keeping apps and devices secure and using social media in positive ways.

Reflect before we act – by taking a moment to consider how what we do and say online may affect others.

Protect ourselves and others by taking action – by telling family, friends or colleagues about eSafety and how we can help.

By doing these simple things, we can work towards making every day a Safer Internet Day.

Kids Helpline is Australia's only free, private and confidential 24/7 counselling service specifically for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years. FREE call 1800 55 1800 or www.kidshelpline.com.au

Facebook: @kidshelpline, Insta @kidshelplineau, Twitter @KidsHelplineAU

media contact

For more information or to arrange a media interview, please contact Maree Reason-Cain, **yourtown** Corporate Affairs & Media Advisor.



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about yourtown

yourtown is a trusted provider of services for young people, with a focus on mental health and wellbeing, long term unemployment, prevention of youth suicide, child protection, as well as support for those experiencing family and domestic violence.

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