

Sextortion: Managing and Supporting Children & Youth Affected by Sexual Exploitation

April 2, 2025 | 1200–1330 PT



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Continuing Professional Development

Faculty of Medicine

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge that UBC CPD work on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), xʷməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), and Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.



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What is your relationship to the territory or the land that you're on?

FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Funding for this webinar has been provided by the Child & Youth Mental Health and Substance Use Community of Practice, an initiative of the Shared Care Committee.



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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize indications of sexual exploitation in children and youth.
2. Utilize effective strategies for managing cases of child sexual exploitation in clinical practice.
3. Identify community and regional resources to support children and youth who have experienced sexual exploitation.



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DISCLOSURES

Speakers

- **Dr. Michelle Clarke:** has received payments from the BC Department of Justice to provide expert testimony in cases on child maltreatment. These payments have **not** influenced the webinar content.
- **Meghan Donevan:** has received salary payments Talita to complete a PhD. These payments have **not** influenced the webinar content.
- **Dr. Shirley Sze:** has received payments from the Child and Youth Community of Practice supported by Shared Care Committee. These payments have **not** influenced the webinar content.
- **Natalie Davis, Megan Lowe, Emily Lindsey, Tracy Scott:** nothing to disclose

Planning Team

- **Dr. Wilma Aruda, Stephanie Din, Dr. Bruce Hobson, Caldon Saunders:** nothing to disclose



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SEXTORTION

April 2, 2025



-
- 15 yo F seen with parent
 - Abdominal pain for 2 weeks
 - Poor appetite and weight loss
 - Missing ++ school
-
- On exam, you note superficial lacerations to forearms and inner thighs



Disclosure

- Disclosed that she sent intimate images to her new boyfriend.
- Images are now posted online
- Her parents are unaware and she does not want them to know what happened.



NATALIE DAVIS

STAFF SERGEANT, RCMP INTEGRATED CHILD EXPLOITATION UNIT (BC ICE)



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Online Child Exploitation: Sextortion



→ What is Online Child Exploitation?

Internet is used to **access, possess, and distribute child sexual exploitation material (CSEM)**

Child Luring over the Internet

Sextortion

Making **Sexually Explicit Material Available** to a Child

Voyeurism

Human Trafficking of children facilitated through the Internet

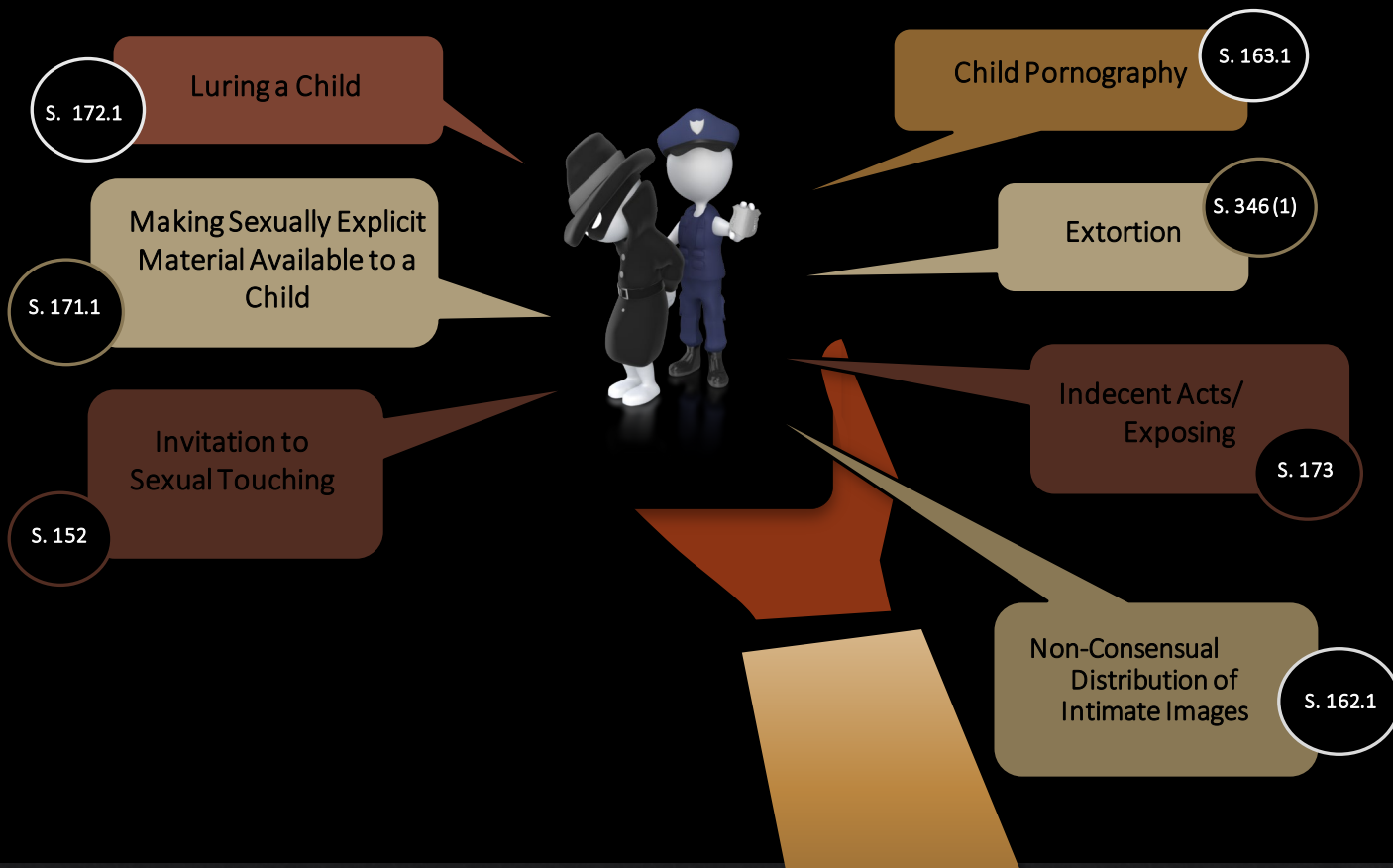




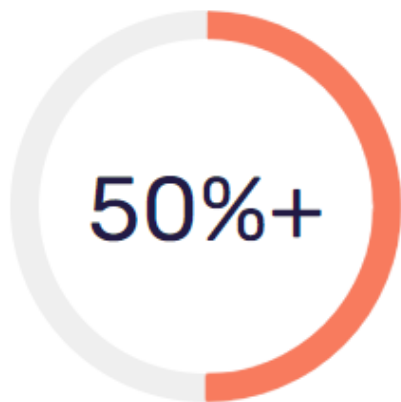
What is “Sextortion”?

- Typically involves a suspect befriending children and teenage victims through social media.
- The offender may pose as an acquaintance from a neighbouring school or community group.
- The offender creates the appearance of a safe online relationship before asking for intimate images from the victim.
- Once pictures and/or videos have been shared with the offender, victims are threatened that this material will be shared with family, friends or online unless some sort of payment is made.

COMMON OFFENCES ASSOCIATED TO SEXTORTION



Shame is the biggest
obstacle to seeking help.



More than half of kids and parents mostly or exclusively blame
the child in the photo when nudes are leaked.

Give Direction

- ✓ **STOP ALL COMMUNICATION – STOP TYPING – STOP**
- ✓ **DO NOT** send money or more photos or videos
- ✓ **DO NOT DELETE** your account or the messages – this is evidence
- ✓ **TELL** the police and bring your device to the police station
- ✓ **WE CAN HELP YOU**



Assess the Threat & Mitigate Risk

- How did this start & how long has it been going on?
- What threats have been made?
- Have they met/made plans to meet offline?
- Does the offender know where the victim lives?
- Does the offender know anyone the victim is friends with?
- Who else has the victim told about the suspect?



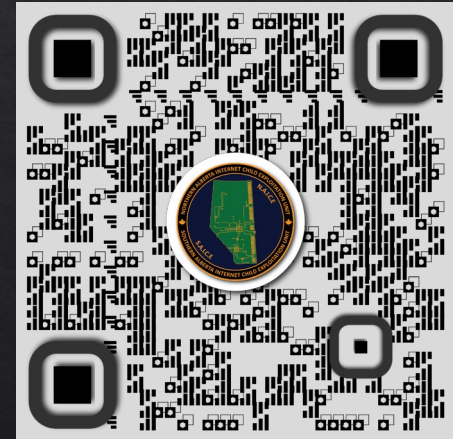
Sextortion in BC



- In 2024, approximately half the files sent out for investigation are believed to have possibly been Sextortion.
- 2024 reports received which may be Sextortion:
 - ✓ 112 Extortion files
 - ✓ 20 Harassing Communication files
 - ✓ 1674 Luring files
- High profile cases in BC highlighting the need for education and training for both the public and police.

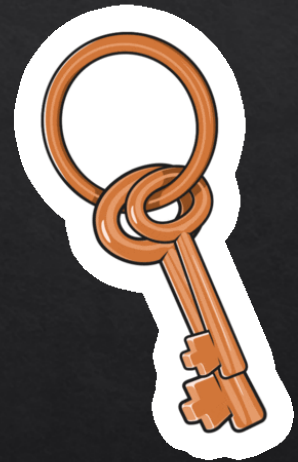
Resources

- ✓ Canadian Center For Child Protection (C3P)/ Cybertip
- ✓ Thorn for Parents
- ✓ Media Smarts
- ✓ Take It Down
- ✓ Project Arachnid
- ✓ National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)



Key Points

- These offences are highly under-reported due to victim shame and/or fear.
- Given the significant risk and harm Sextortion and other Internet Child Exploitation offences pose to children, reports of Sextortion should never be dismissed, as it is critical to ensure these victims are recognized, they're safe, and feel supported and heard. It is critical to ensure these victims feel supported and heard.
- The initial steps of a Sextortion investigation are critical to protecting the victim, minimizing the impact of the sexual violence being perpetrated, and identifying the offender as quickly as possible.
- The potential risk to victim safety is high and it is imperative that support be provided and safety plans be discussed and developed with the victim and family. The consequence of not doing so may result in a fatal outcome for the victim.



Contact



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Sextortion's Impact on Children and Youth: Research Insights and Professional Response Strategies

Meghan Donevan

PhD student Umeå University

Research Director Talita

Understanding sextortion in the cycle of exploitation

- For some, first instance of abuse
- For others, part of long-term pattern of exploitation
- Sextortion used by perpetrators as a tool for control and to maintain power over victims
- Inflicts immediate harm but also creates barriers for victims trying to escape the cycle and seek help





**Taking
technology-facilitated
sexual violence
seriously...**

A young woman with long, straight brown hair is shown from the chest up. She is covering her face with both hands, with her fingers spread. She is wearing a dark, ribbed jacket over a light-colored turtleneck sweater. Blue headphones are visible around her neck. She is also wearing blue jeans. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage. Overlaid on the image is a quote in white text.

“The images are permanent.”

”



Health consequences of sexual exploitation

Research among 120 individuals subjected to online sexual exploitation...

- **84%** fulfilled the criteria for PTSD
- **69%** had attempted suicide at least once
- **77%** had engaged in self-harm behaviors
- **80%** had been diagnosed with at least one mental health problem
- **45%** had been diagnosed with a neuropsychiatric diagnosis (autism, ADHD)

Young people's cries for help

Children communicate using verbal and nonverbal cues...

- Acting out in school or sudden changes in behavior
- Withdrawal from friends and previously enjoyed activities
- Alterations in sleep or eating habits



Barriers to disclosure

- Threats from the perpetrator
- Self-blame, shame and guilt
- Feeling alone
- Afraid of negative reactions
- Previous experiences of negative reactions



”

It was even more painful when I told my mom and she didn't do anything—it was like she didn't even listen. At that point I knew like I couldn't talk to anyone about it...

- Elin



Negative social responses

- Disbelief
- Blame/shame
- Not being taken seriously
- Inaction
- Turning too quickly to solutions rather than active listening
- Focus on symptoms and behaviors rather than root causes



Takeaways for Professionals

Early detection: *Recognize the signs..*

- Change in behaviours
- Emotional distress
- Social withdrawal
- Unexplained health issues
- Self-destructive behaviors
- Eating disorders
- Substance use



Takeaways for Professionals

Early detection: Have the courage to ask...

- *“Has anyone ever made you feel unsafe online?”*
- *“Is there anything happening in your life that makes you feel trapped?”*

Shift the burden – we must take initiative





”

When they ask, you
immediately know:
'Wow, they really care.'
That question alone
means everything.

Takeaways for Professionals

- **Early detection:** implement routine-based questions
- Screening tools + conversation

CTS Child Report (Age 6-17)

1

Child Name/ID: _____ Age: _____ Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other

Administered By: _____ Date Completed: _____

2

EVENTS: Sometimes, scary or very upsetting things happen to people.

These things can sometimes affect what we think, how we feel, and what we do.

	Yes	No
1. Have you ever seen people pushing, hitting, throwing things at each other, or stabbing, shooting, or trying to hurt each other?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Has someone ever really hurt you? Hit, punched, or kicked you really hard with hands, belts, or other objects, or tried to shoot or stab you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Has someone ever touched you on the parts of your body that a bathing suit covers, in a way that made you uncomfortable? Or had you touch them in that way?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Has anything else very upsetting or scary happened to you (loved one died, separated from loved one, been left alone for a long time, not had enough food to eat, serious accident or illness, fire, dog bite, bullying)? <i>What was it?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Takeaways for Professionals

- *"Tell it like it is"*
- Effective referrals
- Child (and parent) participation



Takeaways for Professionals

- Tailored support and care
- Cross-disciplinary collaboration
- Ongoing follow-up
- Trauma-informed support



Key questions to consider...

- Do we know which questions to ask?
- Are we prepared to ask these questions?
- Are we ready for the responses we might receive?
- Can we manage our own reactions?
- Do we know where to refer children and youth for further help?
- Are we committed to going the extra mile in support of those affected?





”

I think sexual exploitation can be stopped if children and teens are **seen and heard in time.**

A hand holding a bouquet of pink peonies and greenery against a wooden background. The bouquet features several large, fully bloomed pink peonies with ruffled petals, interspersed with green eucalyptus leaves and smaller green flowers. The hand holding the bouquet has a tattoo on the forearm. In the background, a person's legs wearing orange sandals are visible on a wooden deck.

Thank you!

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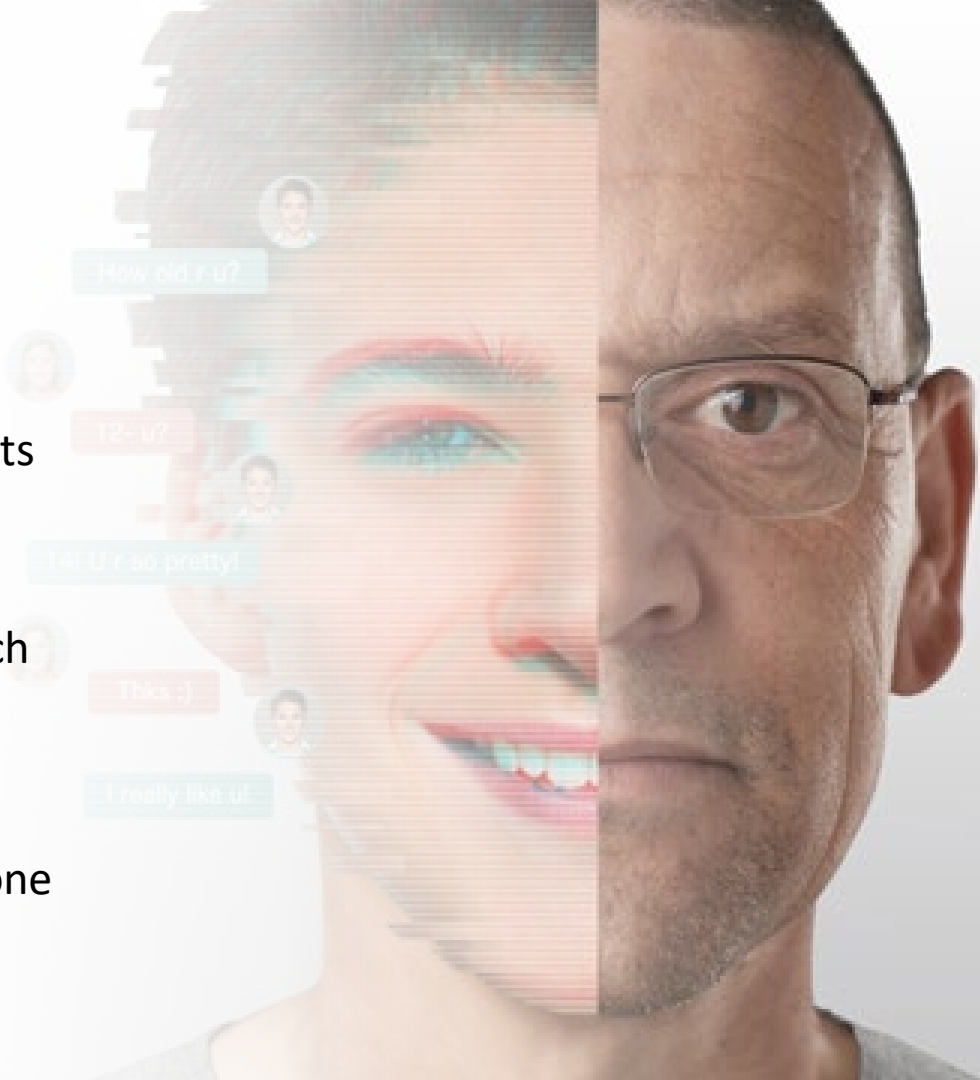
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CLINICAL NURSE SPECIALIST, CHILD MALTREATMENT AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE, INTERIOR HEALTH

Incorporating into Practice...

- Routine sextortion assessments
- Speak privately & set confidentiality limits
- Use non-judgemental approach
- Ask open ended questions
- Assess for suicidal ideation
- Sextortion can happen to anyone





Other Considerations

- Normalize online safety discussions
- Routine screening reduces stigma & identifies risk
- Create a safe, non-judgmental space for open dialogue
- Consider past childhood trauma
- Sextortion can affect anyone

- “Children who were abused in earlier childhood are four times more likely to be sexually exploited, with 95% of teens engaging in commercial sexual activity having been sexually abused during earlier childhood.” (Chang, 2015)

Legislation

- Mandate pertaining to the “protection” from maltreatment of children falls under provincial legislation
- B.C. – Child, Family and Community Services Act (CFCSA)
- Child/Youth in BC is <19 years



Section 13 (1)

When does a child need protection?

As defined in **Section 13 of the CFCSA (12 categories)**, a child requires protection when there is **reason to believe** they are:

- Physically harmed or at risk of harm
- Sexually abused, exploited, or at risk
- Not protected by a parent from abuse
- Deprived of necessary health care
- Emotionally abused
- Neglected, leading to actual or likely physical harm



Screening Questions for Healthcare Providers

1. Have you ever run away?
2. Any history with law enforcement?
3. Have you ever had unexplained or concerning injuries?
4. Do you use substances? Do you have a history of substance misuse?
5. Are you at risk of self-harm or suicide?
6. Who would you talk to if something online made you uncomfortable?
 - Have you felt pressured to share personal images?
 - Has anyone threatened to share a photo or video of you?
7. Use psychosocial or suicide risk assessments (e.g., HEADS, HEARTSMAP, TASR-A)



Advocating for Youth

1. Validate & Support

2. Educate & Empower

3. Offer Resources & Action Plans

4. Educate yourself; feel comfortable having conversations with youth and or their caregivers



Resources For Teens & Families

- Intimate Images Protection Service
- The White Hatter
- Cybertip.ca
- NeedHelpNow.ca
- Kids Help Phone (1-800-668-6868)
- Local law enforcement
- ONYX
- Foundry (app, website or local centre)

Key Take-Away's



Sextortion can happen to anyone

- **Not the victim's fault**
- **Support:**
 - SCAN clinics
 - Counseling
 - Victim services
- **Barriers:**
 - Shame, isolation
 - Limited tools
 - Parental response
- **Action:**
 - Focus on behaviors
 - Digital violence is real
 - Written tools help



In conclusion:

- NO child is immune!
- Knowledge is power
- Early recognition and intervention is key
- Look beyond presenting symptoms/behaviours
- To ask the question or not?
- Future resources
- Final take away



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Foundry BC app

- Free & Confidential mental health & wellness services for young people (12-24) and their caregivers
- Virtual services fill the gaps in communities that do not have a Foundry centre OR support youth who have barriers to accessing in-person services
- Video, audio + (phone options) and chat options available
- Access through the Foundry BC App or Web Portal
- Open **7 days/week**;
10:00am – 9:00pm Monday to Friday,
10:00am - 6:00pm on weekends and holidays.

Services available **same day** or **bookable in advance**

Questions?

Email online@foundrybc.ca

www.foundrybc.ca

www.foundrybc.ca/virtual



·FOUNDRY·

