SEXTORTION

A summary for parents and carers of The Meadows

What is Sextortion?

'Financially motivated Sexual Extortion or 'Sextortion' for short, is when a child or adult is forced into paying money or meeting another financial demand after an offender has threatened to release nudes or semi-nude images or videos of them. The National Crime Agency in 2024 put out an alert to all schools to make them aware of this growing risk.

What might I spot in my child?

- Stealing (from home, school, even their teachers and friends)
- Becoming increasingly withdrawn and appearing pre-occupied
- Demonstrating high levels of shame - children blaming themselves, being extra harsh on themselves for errors and mistakes
- Appearing to be in a rush to get back home, or to retrieve their device at the end of the school day
- Appearing panicked about communications with parents/carers
- Secrecy about their online activities or hiding their devices.
- Significant changes in behaviour such as mood swings, increased anxiety or anger, especially after using electronic devices or being online.
- Excessive use of the internet including throughout the night or at set times of day
- An unusual or sudden decline in academic performance, truanting, or loss of interest in school-related activities and even hobbies

Every child's experience is unique however some common features and patterns of abuse include:

- A child or young person (CYP) might be added by an unknown contact online, or perhaps added by a hacked account of someone they know. The offender often poses as another young person in order to build up trust.

- The offender will then start chatting to them and may after some time try to move the conversation over from a social media or gaming chat, onto an encrypted messaging service such as Whatsapp or similar.

- The offender may send a nude image first or may otherwise persuade the child to send one. The images may also be deepfaked images but the threat of these being shared may still be used to blackmail the child.

- The offender may even pretend to (or actually) hack the child's information, images etc and then threaten to share what they gain access to unless the young person sends them money.

- The child is then blackmailed into sending the offender money or doing things they don't want to do, in order to prevent their images or information being shared.

- This usually takes place online however can happen offline too.

Who might be vulnerable?

ALL CYP can be vulnerable to this form of abuse. However research suggests that boys aged 14-17 are currently the main group victimised by this crime.

Children with SEND such as those at The Meadows, may also be more vulnerable as they may be more likely to trust others, less likely to understand when they are being manipulated and there are increased barriers to disclosure, to seek support.

LGBTQ+ CYP may be targeted particularly if they are not able to be 'out' in supportive families and communities.

What should we do?

- Avoid victim-blaming! This form of abuse feeds off shame.

- Report to the police on 999 and children's services as soon as possible. You can use the CEOP website to report to police. Sandwell MASH is 0121 569 3100

- Use tools such as Childline's 'Report Remove' and NCMEC's 'Take It Down' which enable you to register the image so it cant be reshared

- DO NOT tell children to delete and block. It's important to keep evidence such as images, screenshots, usernames and bank details.

- Report directly to the platform/app that has been used

- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing and this is not their fault.