

## Online Safety: Protecting Teenage Boys from the Rising Threat of Predators



*\*This story reflects the true experiences of participants on their journey of healing at Wellspring Living.*

**Teenage boys are being targeted every day through gaming platforms and other apps that appear harmless and “friendly.”** What begins as an ordinary conversation quickly becomes something far more calculated.

The predator often pretends to be a boy in the same grade. He carefully studies how teenagers talk and presents himself as relatable — sharing similar interests, favorite games, sports teams, music, or school frustrations. He uses humor. He builds easy conversation. *He creates the illusion of common ground.*

The connection feels natural.

Over time, trust is intentionally cultivated. Private messages replace public chats. Conversations become more personal. Once the boy feels safe, the requests begin. At first, it seems innocent. "Send me a picture of you."

A simple headshot.

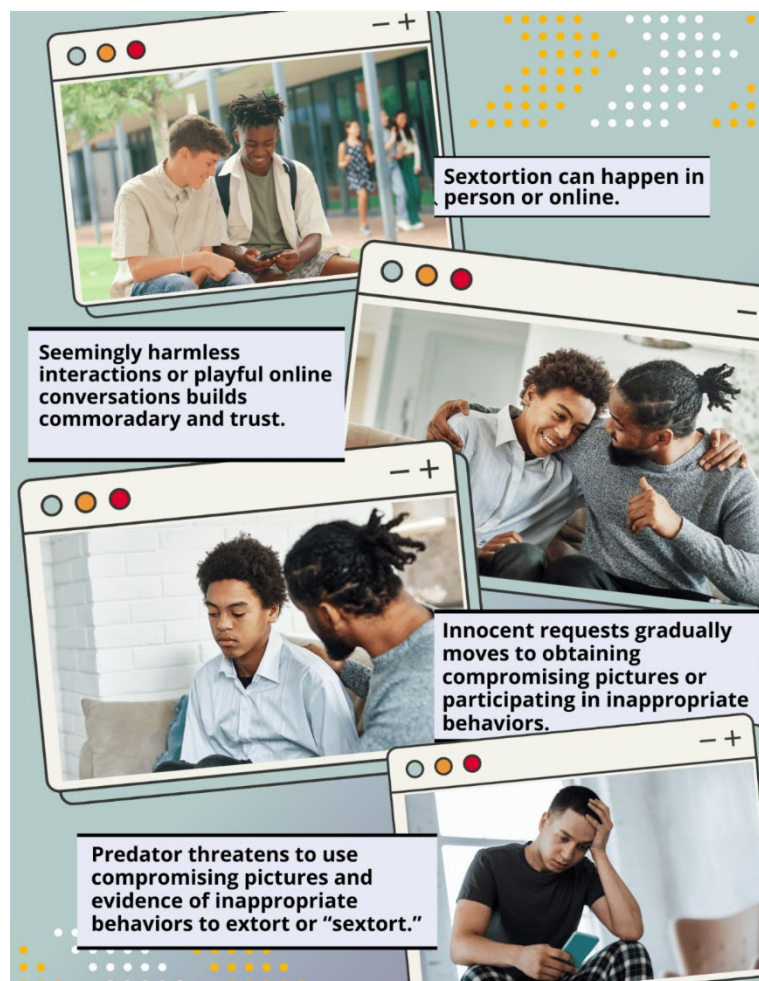
Then a full-body picture.

As the false friendship deepens, the tone subtly shifts. *The predator normalizes increasingly personal exchanges, reassuring the boy that it's harmless and private.* Eventually, he asks for a compromising image. **By the time that request is made, the relationship feels established. The trust feels real.**

And that is exactly how the trap is set.

**Parents and grandparents need to understand what happens next.**

The moment a predator receives a compromising image, everything changes. The friendliness disappears. **The manipulation begins.** This is *sextortion*.



The predator immediately turns the image into a weapon. He threatens to send it to classmates, teammates, teachers, and friends. Often, the most powerful threat is this: "I will send it to your parents."

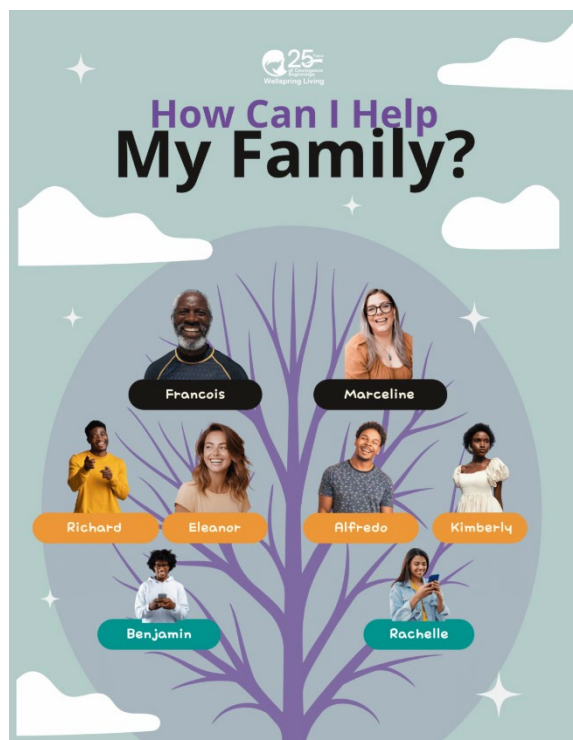
Sometimes money is demanded. Sometimes, more explicit images are required. The message is relentless — comply, or your world will be exposed. Even if a boy gives in to the demands, it does not end. The harassment continues. There is always another threat, another demand, another payment.

The predator's goal is control, and fear is the tool.

Many boys do not tell their parents. They are overwhelmed with shame. They are terrified of disappointment. They believe they have made a mistake so devastating that their reputation — and their family's trust — will never recover. In that isolation, fear grows.

Tragically, some boys in this situation have taken their own lives because they believed the humiliation would be unbearable. In their panic, they could not see a way out. They could not see that the threats are often empty. They could not see that they were victims of a crime.

Parents must know: shame and silence are the predator's greatest weapons. Open conversation, steady reassurance, and immediate action can save a child's life.



**This is why we cannot afford silence.**

**As parents, we must move from awareness to action.** *Predators thrive in secrecy, but protection grows in community.* No family should navigate this alone.

**We are reminding parents and grandparents to safeguard teenagers against online predators by having open conversations, actively supervising online activity, and providing immediate support if a child is targeted. Please read and use the resources provided below.**

When parents and grandparents stand together, shame loses its power. When children know they will be met with protection instead of punishment, they are far more likely to speak up.

**This is not about control. It is about covering our children with courage, vigilance, and unwavering love.**

Let us be the safe place they run to — not the reason they stay silent.

## Safeguarding GIRLS & BOYS from Online Sextortion

1. **Talk Openly:** Have regular conversations about online safety with the young people in your life. Ensure they understand that dangers exist online.
2. **Educate About Online Risks:** Explain that people can pretend to be anyone on the internet. Stress that strangers may not have good intentions.
3. **Emphasize Privacy:** Teach them that anything shared online can become public, even if it seems private.
4. **Set Device Limits:** Consider establishing rules about internet use, such as having no devices in bedrooms at night or turning off WiFi during certain hours.
5. **Check Devices:** Periodically review the apps they use and with whom they communicate to stay informed.
6. **Review Social Media Settings:** Help them set their social media accounts to private to protect their personal information from strangers.
7. **Encourage Trust:** Let them know they can always come to you for help if anything online makes them uncomfortable.
8. **Be Supportive:** If they share any concerns with you, reassure them that you are there to help and will support them.
9. **Report Issues:** If they encounter online threats or become victims, assist them in reporting it to law enforcement.
10. **Stay Informed:** Keep up with the latest online trends and apps to better understand the environments your children or grandchildren are using.

BY FOLLOWING THESE STEPS, YOU CAN CREATE A SAFER ONLINE ENVIRONMENT FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE.

