

## FBI in New Mexico warns of significant increase in sextortion reports

Written by gallupsun  
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The FBI in New Mexico is warning parents and children about a significant increase in the number of sextortion reports during the past year.

From Jan. 1 to Dec. 19, the FBI's National Threat Operations Center received 168 e-tips or calls about possible sextortion cases in New Mexico.

During the same period in 2021, NTOC received 38 e-tips or calls for New Mexico.

Even though some tips might reference the same incidents, the increase is serious enough that the FBI wants to bring this crime to the public's attention as schools let out for the holidays and children are expected to spend more time online.

This announcement comes on the heels of the FBI, in partnership with Homeland Security Investigations and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, issuing a national public safety alert regarding an explosion in sextortion incidents in which children and teens are coerced into sending explicit images online and extorted for money.

"The FBI and our partners have repeatedly sounded the alarm about the dangers of sextortion and the toll it takes on young victims," Special Agent in Charge Raul Bujanda of the Albuquerque FBI Division said. "We hope this latest announcement gets everyone's attention. We want to help the children who are targeted by these predators, and one of the best ways to do that is for victims as well as parents or guardians to report this crime. Do not be embarrassed. Help us so we can help you."

Over the past year, law enforcement has received more than 7,000 reports related to the online financial sextortion of minors, resulting in at least 3,000 victims, primarily boys, and more than a dozen suicides.

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A large percentage of these sextortion schemes originate outside of the United States, and primarily in West African countries such as Nigeria and Ivory Coast.

As many children enter winter break this holiday season, the FBI implores parents and caregivers to engage with their kids about financial sextortion schemes in order to prevent them in the first place.

“The FBI has seen a horrific increase in reports of financial sextortion schemes targeting minor boys—and the fact is that the many victims who are afraid to come forward are not even included in those numbers,” FBI Director Christopher Wray said. “The FBI is here for victims, but we also need parents and caregivers to work with us to prevent this crime before it happens and help children come forward if it does. Victims may feel like there is no way out—it is up to all of us to reassure them that they are not in trouble, there is hope, and they are not alone.”

Financial sextortion schemes occur in online environments where young people feel most comfortable—using common social media sites, gaming sites, or video chat applications that feel familiar and safe. On these platforms, online predators often use fake female accounts and target minor males, between 14 to 17 years old but the FBI has interviewed victims as young as 10 years old.

Through deception, predators convince the young person to produce an explicit video or photo. Once predators acquire the images, they threaten to release the compromising material unless the victim sends money or gift cards. Often the predators demand payment through a variety of peer-to-peer payment applications. In many cases, however, predators release the images even if payments are made. The shame, fear, and confusion that victims feel when they are caught in this cycle often prevents them from asking for help or reporting the abuse.

What if you or your child is a victim?

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If young people are being exploited, they are victims of a crime and should report it. Contact your local FBI field office, call 1-800-CALL-FBI, or report it online at [tips.fbi.gov](https://tips.fbi.gov).

NCMEC has outlined steps parents and young people can take if they or their child are a victim of sextortion, including:

- Remember, the predator is to blame, not your child or you.
- Get help before deciding whether to pay money or otherwise comply with the predator. Cooperating or paying rarely stops the blackmail and continued harassment.
- REPORT the predator's account via the platform's safety feature.
- BLOCK the predator and DO NOT DELETE the profile or messages because that can be helpful to law enforcement in identifying and stopping them.
- Let NCMEC help get explicit images of you off the internet.
- Visit [MissingKids.org/IsYourExplicitContentOutThere](https://MissingKids.org/IsYourExplicitContentOutThere) to learn how to notify companies yourself or visit [cybertipline.org](https://cybertipline.org) to report to us for help with the process.
- Ask for help. This can be a very complex problem and may require help from adults or law enforcement.
- If you don't feel that you have adults in your corner, you can reach out to NCMEC for support at [gethelp@ncmec.org](mailto:gethelp@ncmec.org) or call NCMEC at 1-800-THE-LOST.

Information, resources, and conversation guides are available at [fbi.gov/StopSextortion](https://fbi.gov/StopSextortion).

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