

Grooming and Sextortion: Essential Considerations for Trust & Safety Teams

What are grooming and sextortion?

Grooming and sextortion are all-to-common threats to children in both online and offline interactions perpetrated by individuals or organized groups, often operating in overseas jurisdictions.

Grooming: manipulative behaviors an abuser uses to gain access to a potential victim, coerce them to comply with abuse, and reduce the risk of being caught. Grooming can occur exclusively offline, online, or as a combination of the two.

Sextortion: threatening to expose sexual imagery depicting someone if they don't yield to demands. These threats come from both people (e.g., "strangers") one meets online and people from offline communities (such as once intimate romantic partners) who seek to harass, embarrass, and control victims.

Characteristics of grooming

- Building relationships over shared interests such as music, games, or celebrities.
- Abuser may impersonate influencers or attractive young people to mislead potential victims.
- Moving conversations from public to private online settings to isolate potential victims.
- Relationships can be built over weeks or can escalate into abusive behaviors within hours. **Grooming interactions have no set timeline.**

KEY FACT

54%

of minors thought that online grooming was a somewhat common experience for children their age.

[*Online Grooming: Examining risky encounters amid everyday digital socialization*](#)

Characteristics of sextortion

Sextortion can take many forms and occur in a variety of contexts. No two instances of sextortion are precisely the same and may encompass any of the following characteristics:

- Threats to spread explicit imagery of the victim to extort actions.
- Various forms of deception, like "catfishing," to manipulate minors into sharing intimate images.
- Generative AI technology is also being used to produce explicit images.
- Financial sextortion may involve organized groups demanding payments through cash exchange apps and gift cards.

TREND ALERT

40%

of children reported someone they only knew online tried to "befriend and manipulate" them.

[*Online Grooming: Examining risky encounters amid everyday digital socialization*](#)

Key challenges

- The anonymous nature of online interactions often leads to more vulnerable behaviors. 1 in 7 minors report sharing something they've never shared before with an online friend.¹
- The perception of normality could lower defenses and lead to complacency, creating further vulnerability for potential victims.
- Many victims do not report grooming or sextortion experiences. 1 in 6 (18%) minors who had an online sexual interaction indicated they had not disclosed their experience to anyone.²
- Among minors who have had an online sexual interaction, they were nearly twice as likely to use online reporting tools (79%) than they were to seek offline help (46%).²
- Nearly 2 in 3 victims in a [2017 sextortion survey](#) reported they attempted to comply with demands to make the threats stop. **That often did not stop demands.**

¹ [Online Grooming: Examining risky encounters amid everyday digital socialization](#)

² [Self-Generated Child Sexual Abuse Material: Youth Attitudes and Experiences in 2020](#)

Key recommendations: Layered detection approaches

To mitigate the risk to children using online platforms, we recommend a combination of text classifiers, behavioral analysis, account history, and human-in-the-loop review that can detect sextortion, grooming, and other abusive behaviors.

Platform interventions:

- Safety by Design: Considering child safety at every phase of new technology development
- Adequate policies and enforcement practices to combat grooming and sextortion informed by youth behavior
- Accessible and effective blocking and reporting tools that are easy to navigate and built with youth in mind

Solution

Safer Predict CSE text classifier provides much-needed signals to help trust and safety teams find conversations that violate your child safety policies, such as those containing sextortion or requests for self-generated content from a minor.

[Learn more →](#)

Get the expert child safety guidance your team needs to mitigate grooming and sextortion.

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