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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 13, 2022

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FBI Columbia Warns of Sextortion Schemes Targeting Young Boys

The FBI Columbia Field Office issued a warning this week to parents and caregivers about a rise in nationwide incidents involving the sextortion of children over the internet.

Sextortion is a crime. It is illegal for an adult to ask for, pay for, or demand graphic images, also known as Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), from a minor. If convicted, offenders face penalties up to life in prison.

The FBI has received increased reports of adults on social media and online gaming systems, posing as adolescents, who coerce children to produce sexual images and videos, and then extort money from them. The most targeted group are males ranging from 14 to 17 years old. After they have sent the material, the predator informs them that they will post the content online if the victim does not send money.

The FBI believes cases may be underreported because children are afraid of the repercussions threatened by the criminal and/or fear the response from their parents, guardians, or law enforcement.

"The victims of these crimes may be afraid to come forward, so it's important to have open discussions with your children about their activities online," said FBI Columbia Special Agent in Charge, Susan Ferensic. "If you or a family member has been a victim of this crime, reporting may lead to holding a criminal accountable and prevent further victims."

The FBI offers the following tips to better protect you and your children online:

1. Be selective about what you share online. If your social media accounts are open to everyone, a predator may be able to figure out a lot of information about you or your children.
2. Be wary of anyone you encounter for the first time online. Block or ignore messages from strangers.

3. Be aware that people can pretend to be anything or anyone online. Videos and photos are not proof that a person is who they claim to be.
4. Be suspicious if you meet someone on a game or app and they ask you to communicate with them on a different platform.
5. Encourage your children to report suspicious behavior to a trusted adult.

If you or someone you know is a victim of sextortion:

1. Contact the FBI Columbia field office at (803) 551-4200, the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) at www.ic3.gov, or the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at 1-800-THE-LOST or Cybertipline.org
2. Do not delete anything before law enforcement is able to review it.
3. Tell law enforcement everything about the online encounters; it may be embarrassing, but it is necessary in finding the offender.

You can find more information about sextortion by visiting
<https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/stop-sextortion-youth-face-risk-online-090319>.

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