



# Sextortion

## Phase 1 & 2 Evaluation



We extend our sincere thanks to the young people and expert partners who generously shared their insights and experiences during the development of this campaign. Their contributions were invaluable in ensuring the messaging was informed, relevant and impactful.

A special thank you to the Dowey family for their courage and generosity in supporting this campaign by sharing their own, and their son Murray's, devastating experience of sextortion. Their willingness to speak out has played a vital role in raising awareness and helping to protect others.





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# THE CAMPAIGN

**Phase 1: 18th November – 15th December 2024**

**Phase 2: 7th February – 14th March 2025**

The Fearless sextortion campaign was co-produced with young people and delivered in partnership with the Scottish Government and Police Scotland.

The campaign aimed to raise awareness of sextortion among both young people and the adults who support them – empowering individuals to recognise the risks and know what to do if it happens.

The campaign was formally launched in Glasgow at an event attended by the Minister for Victims and Community Safety, Assistant Chief Constable of Police Scotland, and the Fearless team, alongside 85 partners and young people who helped shape the campaign.

To support learning and engagement, our website offered tailored information for both young people and adults, along with links to expert partner organisations. We also published five themed blogs written by partner experts, which were promoted across our social media channels.

The digital campaign ran across TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram to reach young people, while parents, carers, and professionals were targeted through Facebook, Instagram, and Spotify – complemented by organic content on X and LinkedIn.

We hosted a webinar for 399 professionals working with young people and distributed campaign materials – including posters and A6 postcards – to every Police Scotland division for use in schools and community outreach events.

# What is sextortion?

**Sextortion is a type of online blackmail.**

Adult criminals, often from overseas organised crime groups, will threaten to share nude or semi-nude images and/or videos of a young person, unless they pay them or comply with some other demand.

Sextortion may be from

- sexual / indecent images that have been sent to somebody through contact online, where often the criminal has pretended to be a fellow young person
- images that have been stolen, taken through hacking, or have been faked using AI generators or other image altering technology

The criminal might demand money, gift cards or Bitcoin. They might try to force the person to do something they don't want to do, like give them use of their bank account or provide more sexual images or videos.

**If this happens to you:**

Don't panic.

Don't pay or comply with the demands.

Get help.



# YOUNG PEOPLE



# CO-PRODUCTION

Co-production with young people is central to all Fearless Scotland campaigns, ensuring that our messaging is relevant, authentic and impactful.

For our sextortion campaign, we engaged directly with 52 young people aged 13 to 20 through four group sessions and individual consultations with Fearless volunteers. Each session lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours, with food and drinks provided. All participants received a £10 voucher in recognition of their time and contributions.

At the campaign launch event, two young people spoke on behalf of their peers, sharing their insights with an audience of 85 guests and members of the national press.

**“I enjoyed being part of this campaign because it's good to be asked our views as young people and to be listened to. I've never spoken to this many people before either so it's a good experience!”**

**“I liked being part of this because I believe young people will listen if it's coming from another young person and not some adult trying to scare them.”**



# YOUNG PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDING

The vast majority of young people didn't recognise the word 'sextortion' or 'sexual extortion' and had no accurate understanding of what it was. All recognised and understood the term 'blackmail'.

They wrongly believed that teenage girls were most likely to be the victim.

When asked who they would turn to if they became a victim, most said they would tell their mum, with only one mentioning a dad. Notably, the exception was a group made up predominantly of care-experienced young people, who said they would be more likely to confide in a close friend first.

While most young people said they would tell an adult, they expressed low confidence that the adult would know what sextortion was or how to respond. They viewed these adults primarily as sources of emotional support rather than practical help.

When asked if they would tell a professional like a teacher, youth worker etc they overwhelmingly said that they would only go to a younger member of staff - typically aged under 35 - who they felt would better understand the issue.

Whilst embarrassment and shame was considered as a natural barrier to asking for help, fear of being arrested was a bigger concern. Many of the young people had attended PSE/Campus Officer lessons around sexting and intimate image sharing and the take home message was 'it's illegal to send, receive or share nude images.' therefore many presumed that they would face criminal charges if identifying themselves as a victim of sextortion to Police.

Despite these concerns, all of the young people expressed strong empathy toward victims of sextortion. They said they would want to support a friend in that situation, not judge them - but most admitted they would not know what to do or where to turn for help.



# DESIGNING THE CAMPAIGN

When reviewing sextortion campaign artwork created by other organisations, the young people shared strong opinions.

**“Designed by old people trying to be young.”**

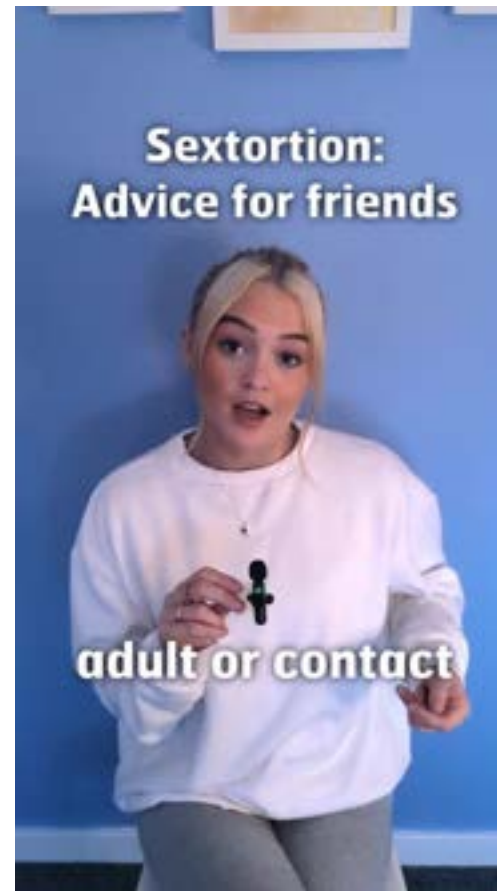
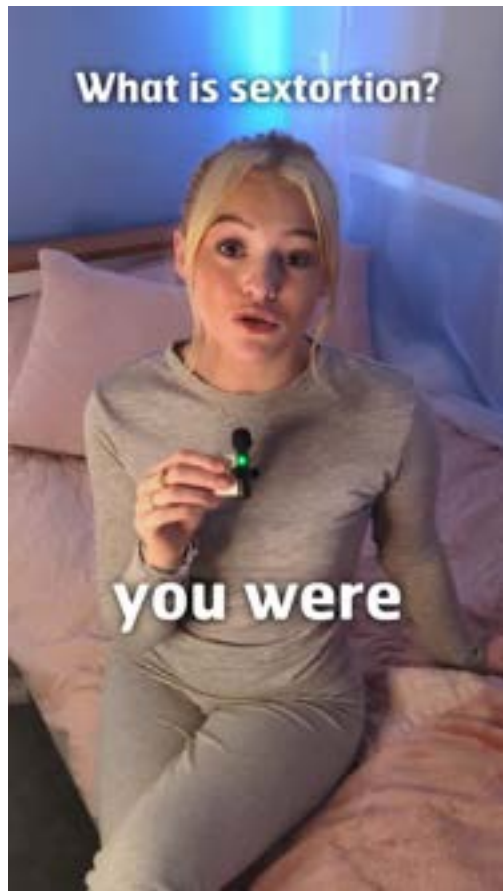
They felt it was clear that young people hadn't been meaningfully involved in the design process, nor consulted for their views.

The young people told us that we should:

- Use language that makes sense to them – not “intimate images” but **“nudes, scuds and dick pics.”**
- Use real people, in a real location – something that they could relate to. A cartoon style animation with animals was met with bemusement **“I’m not going to identify with that if I become a victim, am I?”**
- Get to the point – don’t have slow audio/text.
- Make it look user generated and consider using quiz style videos (example of a specific TikTok account was repeatedly mentioned)
- Not have the same ad running across the different social media platforms at the same time and make sure each ad only runs for a maximum of 7 days or else **“it gets really annoying.”**

# SOCIAL MEDIA ASSETS

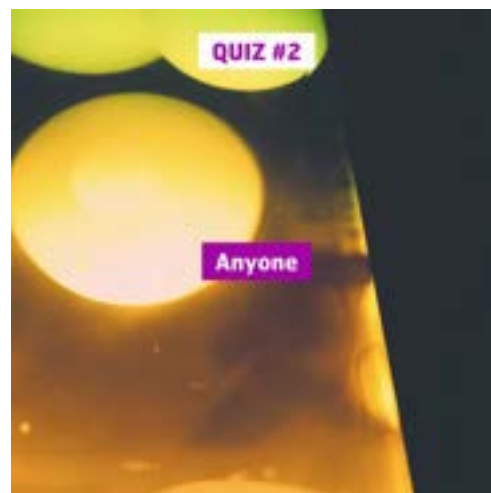
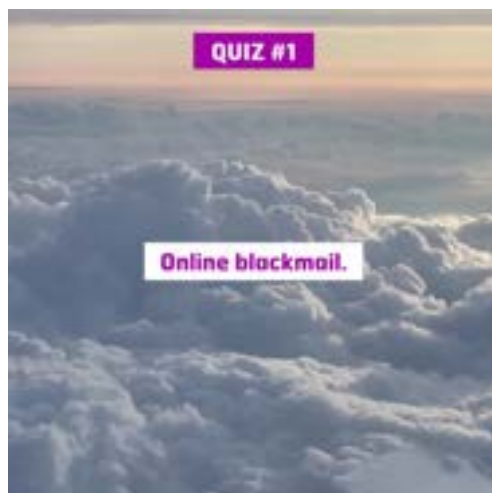
Short, user generated videos produced for TikTok, Snapchat & Instagram Reels.



For access to the campaign toolkit and corresponding social media assets – please contact us via the email address listed on Page 39.

# SOCIAL MEDIA ASSETS

Instagram Square – static images and quiz style videos.





**ADULTS**



# RATIONALE

When creating content to inform adults who work with and look after young people, we wanted to ensure that it was

- **Clear and concise**
- **Reassuring**

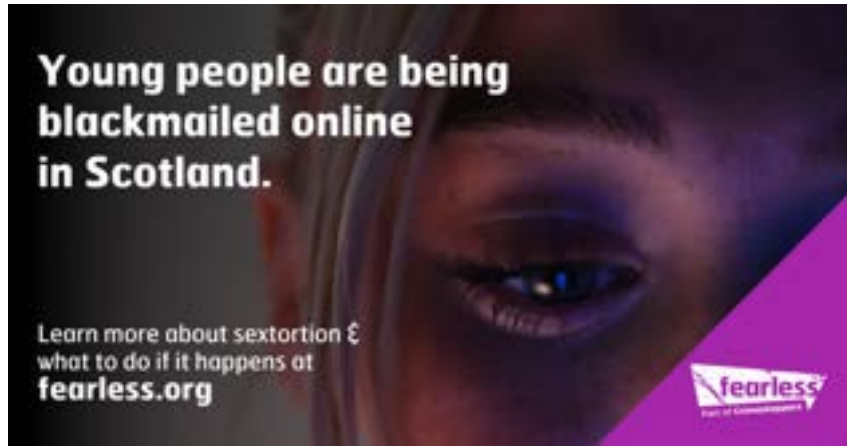
Adults are bombarded with information and asks on social media, so we created short clips of the main adult video produced for our website, with a single piece of key information for them to take on board, each time.

Recognising that this was a topic that many parents and carers in particular feel incredibly overwhelmed by, the artwork and video assets produced didn't sensationalise the topic nor did they instil fear. We reiterated that support is available to them and their young person - if it happens or simply if they would like more help around keeping safe online. We used clear signposting on our adult landing page and social media to expert partners like Children First's Supportline.



# X AND FACEBOOK

## Stills





# INSTAGRAM

## Stills



# VIDEOS



## Video 1

You might have seen the headlines, but what is #sextortion? If you work with or look after young people you can learn more: <https://crimestoppers-uk.org/fearless/professionals/fearless-scotland/sextortion-campaign>



## Video 2

What should you tell your young person to do if they're victim of #sextortion? Watch the full video & learn more: <https://crimestoppers-uk.org/fearless/professionals/fearless-scotland/sextortion-campaign>



## Video 3

Work with or look after young people? The impact of #sextortion can be devastating. Learn more about the crime so you can help keep them safe: <https://crimestoppers-uk.org/fearless/professionals/fearless-scotland/sextortion-campaign>



## Video 4

Young people are being blackmailed online in Scotland. As parents and carers it can be difficult to know how to respond. Learn more: <https://crimestoppers-uk.org/fearless/professionals/fearless-scotland/sextortion-campaign>



## Video 5

It can be difficult to know how to reduce the risks of #sextortion or what to do if it happens but help is available. Learn more: <https://crimestoppers-uk.org/fearless/professionals/fearless-scotland/sextortion-campaign>



## Video 6

Young people are often concerned that they'll get into trouble if they report #sextortion but that is not the case. Watch the full video & learn more: <https://crimestoppers-uk.org/fearless/professionals/fearless-scotland/sextortion-campaign>



The full video can be watched: [https://bit.ly/adult\\_sextortion](https://bit.ly/adult_sextortion)



**A CAMPAIGN  
ACCESSIBLE TO  
EVERYONE**

# ACCESSIBILITY

Working with Lead Scotland, Disability Equality Scotland and Deaf Action, we produced campaign assets in BSL and Easy Read.

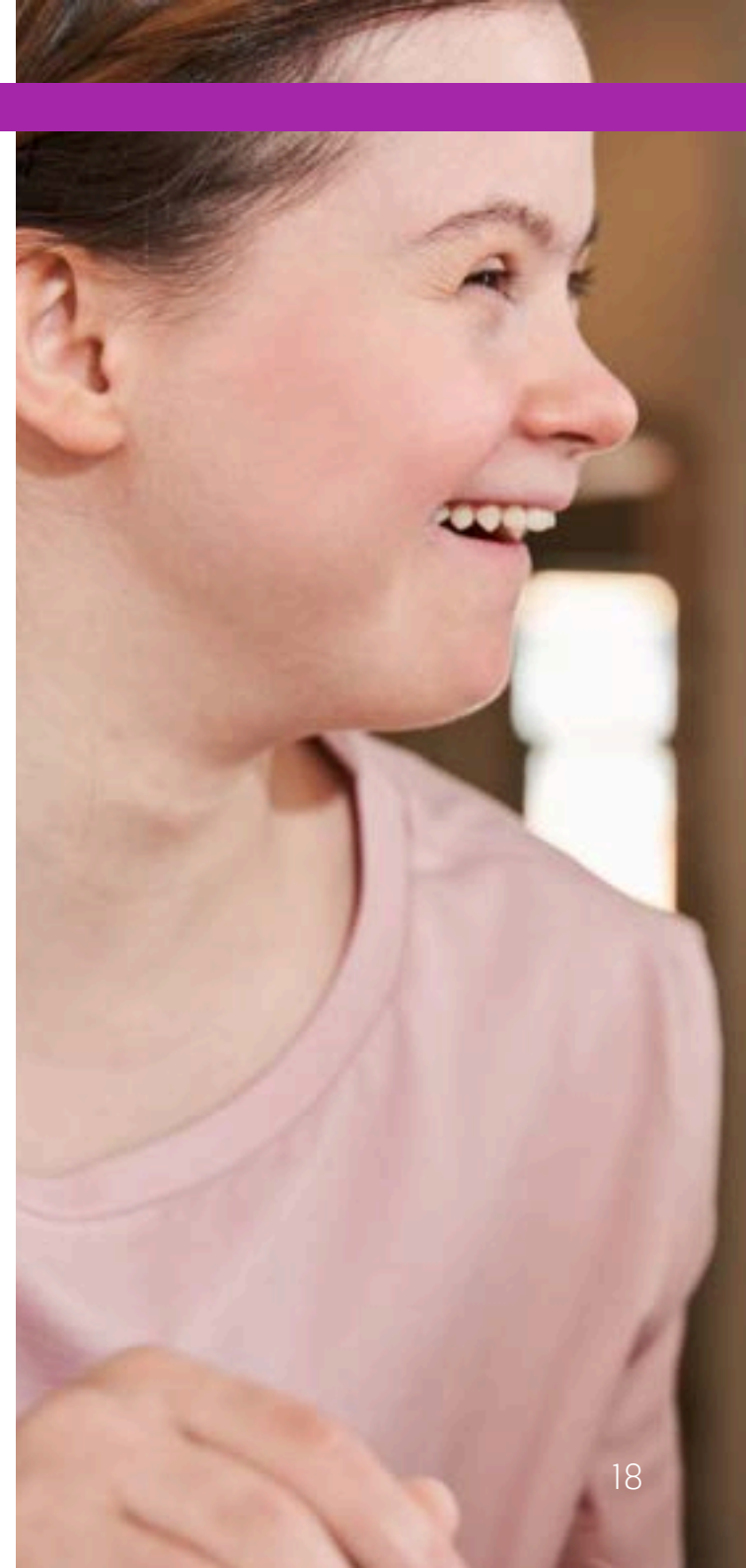
Prior to the campaign, there was no up to date information about sextortion in BSL and limited information in Easy Read.

**The Easy Read pdf has been downloaded 54 times.  
The BSL video has been viewed 168 times.**

All text on our Fearless website can be auto-translated into 100 languages at the touch of a button, this allows provides a more user-friendly experience for those wishing to access the information in another language.

“I am going to be delivering Healthy Relationships sessions in the New Year to our young refugees and I plan to include the sextortion content.”

**Scottish Guardianship Service**





# Key outcomes



# PHASE 1 PRESS

## 236

pieces of coverage

## 1.7 billion

estimated reach

## £262k

advertising value  
equivalent

Journalists were invited to the launch event and a Scotland-wide press release was distributed on 18th November.

In addition to print and online articles, the Minister, Assistant Chief Constable and the Fearless Scotland Manager provided interviews for radio and television.

It resulted in the highest performing press for Fearless ever and was the most successful campaign-based press for Crimestoppers (UK wide) in 2024.



**Sextortion**  
Don't scare us and use our  
language to discuss  
sexortion, say teenagers

Awareness campaign partly designed by  
under-18s will launch on social media to  
educate adults and children



Sextortion is a developing threat and  
relatively new form of online blackmail.



## PHASE 2 PRESS

# 34

pieces of coverage

Minister for Victims & Community Safety, Siobhian Brown attended an outreach event with Fearless and young people from Police Scotland Youth Volunteers to launch Phase 2 on 7th February.

The press was far more low-key in Phase 2 and it was felt that it was a little too soon to gain as much press attention as in Phase 1.

# 423 M

estimated reach

# £68.5k

advertising value  
equivalent



# SOCIAL MEDIA STATS

Audiences	Phase	Impressions	Swipes to the website
Youth social media	Phase 1	8.9 million	61,387
	Phase 2	5.1 million	28,366
Adult social media	Phase 1	1.3 million	6,399
	Phase 2	262K	2,186
<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>15.6 million</b>	<b>98,338</b>

Youth targeted social media ad spend in Phase 2 was 50% lower than in Phase 1, which accounts for the decrease in impressions and website swipes during this phase.

# ADULT FOCUSED SOCIAL MEDIA STATS

In response to feedback from parent and carer groups, we made a strategic decision to significantly reduce both the volume and budget of adult-focused social media advertising in Phase 2 of the campaign.

Parents and carers told us they were more likely to engage with printed materials and face-to-face conversations – particularly with trusted figures such as teachers and youth workers – than with online content.

These discussions also offered a valuable insight: adults who feel least confident talking to young people about online harm are often those who spend the least time on social media themselves. As such, digital advertising alone was unlikely to effectively reach or resonate with this group.

Taking this into account, we reallocated the adult-focused social media budget to create printed resources. We developed posters and A6 postcards, which were distributed across all Police Scotland divisions during Phase 2.

These materials were provided to local schools and youth organisations to support ongoing conversations about online safety and, crucially, were also made available in community locations frequented by parents and carers. In addition, we held eight outreach events across Scotland, including one at Glasgow Central Station, where postcards were handed out and conversations about sextortion were held with commuters.

The strong response to these printed resources reinforced the value of a blended approach. While social media remains a powerful tool for rapid reach – and offers clear metrics to track engagement – traditional print materials and in-person engagement are essential for connecting with audiences who are less active online. Although it's more difficult to measure the impact of these offline activities, their value in building trust and awareness within communities is clear.



Parents and carers from G20 Youth Project, with representatives from Fearless and Police Scotland

# PARTNER FEEDBACK

Our post campaign survey was sent to everyone who attended our webinar and/or launch event in December 2024. We received responses from 59 people.

**95% of people (57) felt that the campaign had increased their professional knowledge of sextortion.**

1 answered 'No' and 1 person selected the 'Already an expert' option

## Since the campaign:

- 85% have shared their learning with colleagues
- 55% have spoken to a young person in their personal life about sextortion
- 37% have spoken to the young people they work with about sextortion
- 22% have shared the social media assets on the personal and/or organisations accounts
- 8% selected 'other' activities incl. including the adult sextortion video in professional training sessions

# WHAT HAVE YOU DONE/DO YOU PLAN TO DO FOLLOWING THE CAMPAIGN?

## Small sample of replies

“I would like to run an evening event in the New Year for parents to learn about sextortion and how to deal with it.”

**Headteacher**

“We plan to get as much information out to as many people as we can.”

**Bo’ness United**

“I plan to introduce this in my PSE. I have also used it in individual/small group chats in my school. I also shared it with my own teens.”

**Teacher, name not shared**

“I will include discussion and resources within all parent and carer groups that I facilitate.”

**Barnardo’s Support Worker**

“Working to support Campus Officers, arrange presentations/talks at the Secondary Schools across 4 counties within J Division (East, West, Midlothian & The Scottish Borders.”

**Police Officer**



# WHAT HAVE YOU DONE/DO YOU PLAN TO DO FOLLOWING THE CAMPAIGN?

## Small sample of replies

“Continued inputs are scheduled for High Schools throughout Inverclyde and Renfrewshire whilst we have been in contact with Education Officers to assist with the development for a new sextortion exercise within the MVP programme. Our local SM channels will continue to support the campaign.”

**Police Officer**

“We are planning a project on the dangers of AI and the use of technology to further harm against young women and girls in 2025.”

**R Mason, The Young Women's Movement**

“We plan to incorporate the resources in our sessions with young people we support to raise awareness of this issue.”

**J Docherty, National Autistic Society Scotland**

“I am working with colleagues at Education Scotland and Police Scotland to create a new scenario for the MVP programme delivered in schools around sextortion.”

**S Scott, Education Scotland**

# WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THE CAMPAIGN?

## Small sample of replies

“Really interesting. I thought I knew about this but actually there was a lot I didn't. I found the discussion around taking phones away really enlightening in terms of it being seen as a punishment and sending the wrong message of blame. I am now considering that more in other situations around problematic phone use.”

**PT Guidance, Secondary School**

“Fantastic information shared by the speakers to widen my knowledge and understanding.”

**Scottish Fire and Rescue Service**

“I thought the campaign was inspirational. The young people being honest about the language that we need to use when discussing this with our children and young people really made me think. Especially around not using the phrase "explicit photos" and actually using their language to talk about sextortion and what that means.

I was blown away by the two young people that spoke about their involvement in the campaign.”

**I Am Me Scotland**

“I think the campaign is so important to raise awareness on this issue and hopefully encourage young people to come forward and speak about this. The fact that this has driven young people to think the only solution is to take their own lives is devastating and this campaign should be congratulated and recognised.”

**NHS Forth Valley**

# WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THE CAMPAIGN?

## Small sample of replies

“It's a great resource to have as someone working with young people. Especially the shorter tiktok videos, it makes it easier for young people to connect with the information.”

**National Autistic Society**

“The webinars were helpful in increasing my understanding, particularly around the barriers to young people coming forward to seek support, i.e. fear of getting into trouble, and considering how that may further impact their mental health and wellbeing, or create further vulnerabilities to exploitation.”

**Inspector, Police Scotland**

“Accessible, powerful, great involvement / participation with young people.”

**Scottish Guardianship Service**

“The campaign is brilliant. A huge well done to you and the young people on such a powerful campaign and generating such a strong launch. You should all be really proud. I've been sharing it far and wide professionally and personally.”

**H Hall, Children First**

“Eye opening and informative.”

**Rangers Charity Foundation**

“

Significant

Effective

Love

Beneficial

**Excellent**

Magic

**Genuine**

Great

Relatable

Eye opener

**Important**

Honest

Understanding

Welcomed

Needed

**Effective**

**Informative**

Insightful

**Included**

**Inspirational**

Collabortive

**Solution**

**Powerful**

”



## Assistant Chief Constable Steve Johnson

“Police Scotland wholeheartedly welcomed the opportunity to support the innovative and powerful national Sextortion campaign delivered by Fearless. Being part of it allowed us to convey what can be difficult messaging, to a large audience of children and young people as well as parents, carers and guardians.

“It also provided a unique opportunity to work in collaboration with local and national partners to successfully raise awareness of the insidious crime of Sextortion and help keep our communities safe.

“We remain committed to supporting all victims of these crimes and targeting those that would seek to inflict harm.

“We look forward to taking forward further collaborative work on the issue.”



# Lessons from Phase 1 & 2



# LESSONS LEARNED

The Fearless sextortion campaign delivered valuable insights into both content creation and engagement strategies when tackling complex and sensitive issues with young audiences and the adults who support them.

Through co-production, stakeholder feedback, and performance analysis, several key lessons emerged:

## **Co-production is essential – not optional.**

Working directly with young people shaped the campaign in authentic and effective ways. Their feedback on tone, language and creative execution challenged assumptions and ensured the content felt relatable, credible and engaging. In particular, their rejection of traditional-style resources and preference for real people, short-form content, and user-generated aesthetics reaffirmed the importance of designing with, not just for, the target audience. Crucially, co-production also gave us deeper insight into young people's existing knowledge of sextortion and the barriers they face in reporting it, helping to ground the campaign in their lived realities.

## **A blended approach is key to reaching adult audiences.**

Relying solely on digital channels can exclude those who are less active online. Combining social media with printed materials and face-to-face outreach ensures more inclusive and effective engagement with parents and carers.

## **Accessibility consideration.**

Partnering with Lead Scotland, Deaf Action and Disability Equality Scotland led to the creation of BSL and Easy Read resources – previously unavailable for this topic. While uptake was modest, this addressed a significant gap and sets a precedent for future campaigns to embed accessibility from the outset.

### **Social media moderation presents ongoing challenges.**

Creating sextortion-related content for social media ads proved complex due to platform moderation policies. Key terms such as "nudes" or "blackmail" were frequently flagged for breaching community guidelines or appearing to promote illegal activity. The lack of consistency across platforms - and even within the same platform over time - made it difficult to predict what content would be accepted. By monitoring ads daily, we were able to respond quickly, edit flagged videos, and ensure the campaign remained visible. Future campaigns should factor in time and capacity for ongoing moderation and creative adjustments when working on sensitive topics.

### **Timing and targeting matter.**

Phase 1 outperformed Phase 2 in terms of media coverage because Phase 2 followed relatively soon after the first. This suggests the need to space phases further apart or ensure each has a distinct hook or fresh angle to maintain media and audience interest. A constant request by the press is for case studies - providing fresh case studies with each release would undoubtedly generate more press pick up.



# **NEXT STEPS 2025/2026**

# NEXT STEPS

Education professionals highlighted a gap in existing sextortion resources, noting the need for more accessible, time-efficient content. While comprehensive lesson plans from CEOP and other organisations were signposted to during the campaign, many schools reported difficulty integrating full sessions into an already packed curriculum. As a result, some resorted to using potentially distressing TV interviews and news clips to address the issue.

To meet this need, a new short-form video co-created with young people has been developed and is set to launch on 9th June 2025. Designed for quick delivery, the video offers a safe, age-appropriate way to raise awareness, especially when time is limited. Schools will be encouraged to show the video to all students before the summer break.

A concise set of facilitator notes will accompany the video, helping educators lead brief but meaningful discussions. Alongside Police Scotland and Education Scotland, there are plans to host a webinar for teachers to attend in order to use the video resource effectively.

Although the resource was originally designed for school settings, care has been taken to make it adaptable. By featuring a variety of settings beyond the classroom in the video and using inclusive language in the facilitator notes, it is hoped the resource will also be suitable for use in further education and youth work environments.

To maintain momentum over the summer – when schools and trusted adults are less accessible – targeted sextortion awareness ads will continue to run across social media. These will direct young people to reliable information and support services, ensuring they know where to turn if they have concerns.





# WIDER RECOMMENDATIONS



# WIDER RECOMMENDATIONS

## **Sustain Campaign Momentum Year-Round**

Build a year-round calendar of digital content to maintain awareness outside high-profile campaign periods.

Incorporate seasonal or topical themes – such as summer holidays or back-to-school periods – to keep content relevant and engaging throughout the year.

Establish regular mechanisms for gathering fresh insights from young people, enabling content and messaging to evolve beyond the immediate campaign lifecycle and respond to emerging trends and needs.

## **Strengthen Collaboration with Social Media Platforms**

Engage with social media companies to explore ways of preventing the unnecessary moderation or removal of safety-focused content produced by trusted charities – particularly on topics related to crime and harm prevention. Advocate for clearer distinction between harmful content and public education messaging, ensuring that vital support and awareness materials are not mistakenly flagged or restricted.

Promote opportunities for platforms to actively support these efforts by offering donated ad credits or promotional boosts for charity-led campaigns addressing critical issues such as sextortion.

## **Promote Early Conversations and Education on Online Risks**

There is a clear need for better signposting and the development of age-appropriate resources to help younger primary-aged children understand the risks of sharing intimate images, alongside broader online harm messaging. Parents and caregivers often struggle with when and how to start these conversations, yet with statistics showing a worrying rise in younger victims of sextortion, it's crucial to begin early. Supporting families to talk openly about online risks from an early age is essential to building resilience and enabling long-term prevention.



Fearless\_Scot



Fearless.org

## **CAMPAIGN CONTACT**

[Lyndsay.mcdade@crimestoppers-uk.org](mailto:Lyndsay.mcdade@crimestoppers-uk.org)