



SAFE
COMMUNITIES
—
UNITED TO END
CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

**COMMITTED TO
PREVENTING SEXUAL ABUSE
& SUPPORTING SURVIVORS**

LANCASTER, PA



SAFE
COMMUNITIES

Summer 2023 Newsletter

A Word from the Director...

Sextortion, Suicide and Teens

One victim was a 14-year-old boy from West Virginia. Another victim from Michigan was only 12. Yet another was a 17-year-old girl from Ohio who attempted suicide in a desperate try to escape the situation. In total, the FBI was able to identify 20 young people who were harassed, threatened, and sexually exploited online by an Indiana man who had served as a youth minister in his community.

Our mission to protect kids from sexual harm is becoming more difficult with the steady rise of sextortion. While all teens are vulnerable, the last two years have shown a dramatic increase, prompting the FBI to issue a rare public safety alert pleading for adults to educate teens to prevent victimization. We join that plea.

Sextortion typically begins when an adult pretending to be a teen befriends a minor via social media or gaming platforms. A grooming process is initiated, with the adult plying the teen with flattery and intense social connection.

It soon escalates to a sexual level, often by the adult sending explicit images and asking for the same in return. Since adolescents are just starting to explore their sexuality, it can be exciting for them to receive a nude photo and exchange one, particularly with a real or perceived romantic partner.

Once the victim does that, the extortion begins. The predator threatens to send the teen's explicit photos or videos to friends and family unless their demand for payment is met.

In 2022, law enforcement received 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. Those reported to law enforcement are the tip of the iceberg. A large percentage of schemes originate outside of the United States, and it's very difficult to track perpetrators. Just ask Brandon Guffey, whose son Gavin killed himself in a panic when he fell victim to sextortion.

Gavin sent his younger brother and friends a cryptic message in the predawn hours of July 27, 2022, using a heart shaped symbol of love just before he shot himself.

For weeks, his grieving family searched for signs of something they had missed. Then, they found out that a scammer masquerading as a teenaged girl had convinced Gavin to send nude photos of himself. Once he did, they told him he had to pay, or they would publicize them. Emptying his bank account he sent them \$25 via Venmo – but it was not enough. He pleaded for more time, begging them not to send the images out. In his teenaged brain, it was a catastrophic threat. His father, Brandon, was running for the State House in South Carolina.

In the weeks after Gavin's funeral, his younger brother was bombarded with messages from the scammers, demanding money or they would still release Gavin's photos. They taunted his father with messages telling him Gavin begged for his life.

Nearly one year later, no arrests have been made. The legislature in South Carolina is set to pass "Gavin's Law." Scammers extorting a minor will face up to 5 years in prison. If they can be found, that is.

Given the horrific impact on teens and their families, 5 years in prison does not seem like justice to me. I doubt it will serve as a significant deterrent. And it certainly won't bring back Gavin or the other teens who have taken their own lives rather than have nude images of themselves released.

The best defense: Talk to the teens in your life about sextortion!

Be sure they understand what it is, and how easily it can happen.

Remind them that people online can pretend to be whoever they want, and photos and videos are never proof of identity.

Tell them to be highly selective about sharing any personal information and to never share intimate images online. Once a scammer has the first image; they have all the leverage they need to obtain additional ones.

Emphasize that sextortion isn't a crime that's exclusively perpetrated by strangers, but also at times by partners/ex-partners.

Assure them that if they do get scammed to come to you right away and they will not be in trouble (and mean that.) Help them understand they were a victim of crime, and even if they made a mistake in sending a photo, they are not responsible for the extortion. Make it clear you are open to discussing – without shame or punishment – any question or concern they have about sexuality.

Kenneth Polite, Jr. the Assistant Attorney General of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, commented:

“The protection of children is society’s most sacred duty. It calls on each of us to do everything we can to keep kids from harm.”

Please contribute to our #NeverGiveUp campaign to expand our prevention work and protect more children from harm. We agree that preventing sextortion and other sexual abuse is a sacred duty. We hope you do, too.

Linda Crockett
Executive Director
August 2023

To report suspected sextortion, call the nearest [FBI field office](#) or 1-800-CALL-FBI (225-5324). To make a CyberTipline Report with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), visit report.cybertip.org.

For additional information and resources, access the [FBI's Website](#)
<https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/safety-resources/scams-and-safety/common-scams-and-crimes/sextortion>



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PA Dutch Court Interpreters Project

By Mark Harris, Assistant Director

Lancaster County, Pennsylvania has the highest single concentration of Amish people in the world, at nearly 50,000 individuals. In addition, many Old Order (Horse & Buggy) Mennonite people live in the County. In many of these communities, Pennsylvania Dutch, a distinct language descended from German, is spoken commonly, with young children speaking only this language. Despite this fact, the State has no certified Court Interpreters for Pennsylvania Dutch.

The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) has joined with Safe Communities to begin a pilot program to gather interested PA Dutch Speakers to work towards certification. Because the testing required for this certification is geared towards an individual with an associate degree, and many women in Plain Communities end their formal schooling after the 8th grade, past attempts to get Plain women certified have not been successful.

The AOPC has worked with Safe Communities to come up with reasonable accommodations to help PA Dutch speakers get through the program. These have included excusing Plain folks from the Sunday portion of the mandatory orientation, and hosting the proctored written exam in Lancaster County, at a location easily accessible and comfortable to Plain folks.

Safe Communities is hosting a series of study groups to help those interested prepare for the test, copying and distributing resources, and providing groups to address Vicarious Trauma after PA Dutch speakers get certified and begin to work in the courts.

While it is unfortunate that members of Plain communities need to access the justice system at all, when they do they deserve a system that is prepared and equipped to help



them. This includes trained, qualified interpreters in PA Dutch when they are needed.

By working directly with members of these communities, Safe Communities is working to help Plain communities help themselves. Stay tuned for more news of this groundbreaking project.

Teaching Body Safety & Consent at a Young Age

By Alyssa Swartz, Office Manager

As a new mom with a joyful one-year-old girl, I am learning each day how I can best keep her safe. Most days it looks a lot like baby gates, car seats, and removing little pieces of dog food or other remnants she found off the floor from her hands before they hit her mouth. Because yes, we are in full toddler mode around my house. But what every new parent or caregiver should know is that there is much more to keeping our children safe than just the things we can see. Safe Communities has helped me learn as a parent that reducing the risk of sexual abuse should start as early as possible.



Although my daughter might not be understanding everything I say, the adults around her do. Even at age one, I am setting the tone for her to grow up into a safer place. The heart-wrenching truth is that it's estimated that 85-90% of children who are sexually abused know and/or trust their abuser. So as parents and caregivers, we need to start by openly talking about body safety education to those around us. The Mama Bear Effect notes, "Potential abusers often target families that seem to have less awareness and concern about abuse, not more." So how can we promote body autonomy and consent in casual situations?

When Aunt Jennie tries to hug your child and the child refuses and walks away, step in and reassure the child that you respect their decision and it's okay to say no. Verbalize to the adult that the child's body language and/ or voice tells you that they do not feel comfortable. Remind Aunt Jennie that you are teaching your child to own their body and their voice by saying no, and to please respect their decision.

Another example of teaching body safety and consent could be asking your child, "Would you like to hug Grandma, or would you like to wave from where you are standing, which do you prefer?" Give your child the choice of how they would like to greet company, a choice with and without physical interaction. If Grandma states disappointment or continues to beg for that hug, step in and verbalize you are teaching your child body safety and their right to say no.

Promoting body autonomy and consent is just one useful

way to reduce the risk of sexual abuse. Another way to help protect your children from sexual abuse is by adopting the “No secrets rule” in your household. It’s important for your child to know the difference between a secret, something that will never be told or found out about, versus a surprise, which is something that everyone will eventually know and find out about. By teaching your child the difference between secrets and surprises, they will learn that they can always come and talk with you should anything uncomfortable ever happen in their presence, including if sexual abuse occurs. One example could be teaching your child that we have a surprise gift for Dad’s birthday, although we don’t want to tell him today, Dad will eventually open and find out what his gift is. However, if Grandpa gives us a snack and asks us to never tell anyone and to keep it a secret, that is not safe and is breaking the “no secrets rule.” Your child should learn to talk to a trusted adult when someone asks them to keep a secret. And you can talk with Grandpa, or any other person alike, so that he understands the reason that secrets are not a part of your family life.



There are many ways to help reduce the risk of sexual abuse and these are just the very basic, tip-of-the-iceberg type tips that I have picked up on during my time here at Safe Communities. To learn more about how you can protect your children and/ or the children around you, I highly suggest signing up for our sponsored free online workshops. During these workshops, our team discusses designated topics on how to reduce the risk of sexual abuse to help you learn everything you need to know to keep your child safe. It is never too late to learn something new about how to protect children and the best time to learn is now. Together, we can work together to work towards our vision *where all children and teens are free from sexual abuse, and survivors are empowered to live healthy, joyful, and vibrant lives.*

Free Workshop: Walking with Survivors

Join us via Zoom on Tuesday, September 26 at 6:30PM for our next free bi-monthly Zoom workshop titled, Walking with Survivors. We will learn what it means to accompany survivors through their healing journey. Healing from abuse is difficult and takes time. Survivors need a supportive network of individuals to help them feel safe and navigate their feelings surrounding their abuse. To walk along survivors, we must understand the impact of trauma and how to process healing. We will discuss a four-step guide along with a variety of other useful tips on how to accompany a survivor through their stages of healing. If you can’t make it to the live Zoom workshop, a limited time recording will be sent



WALKING WITH SURVIVORS

A Free Zoom Workshop On How to Support Survivors After Trauma and Abuse



Tues. Sept. 26th @ 6:30PM
Registration Needed

Sponsored By
Lancaster County’s CASE

LANCASTER COUNTY
C.A.S.E.
CAMPAIGN AGAINST SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

to all registered participants afterwards. This bi-monthly free workshop is generously sponsored by [Lancaster County's Coalition Against Sexual Exploitation \(CASE\)](#).

Facilitator: Mark Harris, Assistant Director

Upcoming Event: Save The Date! 10/24/2023

Please save the date for **Tuesday, October 24, 2023**. We will be hosting an event at Loxley's on Centerville Road and would love for you to attend! More details will be coming soon!



Your Donations Are What Make this Work Possible



We are *THANKFUL* for the valuable support of our individual donors, gifts from business such as Clark Associates, and key foundations including Touchstone Foundation, LMC Legacy Foundation, The Alpern Family Foundation, Tecumseh Milestone Foundation, Lancaster County Community Foundation, The Lancaster Bar Association, and the High Foundation.

***Your partnership enables us to continue this work!
Thank you!***

Safe Communities needs everyday items to keep our programs running. We have created a wish list of our most needed items on Amazon.com. Your aid will help us in continuing our work of educating people about Child Sexual Abuse and assisting Survivors. Please click on the link below to view our wish list.

If you have not already done it, please check out our storefront for some cool merchandise. Your purchase will help Survivors of child sexual abuse move forward in their healing journeys and lead more fulfilling lives.

If you would rather support us directly, you can click below to give online, or send a check directly to

- 313 W. Liberty St., Suite 242, Lancaster, PA 17603.

Our core values: **Respect:** Recognizing the worth and dignity of each person of every race, culture, and socioeconomic status. **Integrity:** Adhering to moral and ethical principles, keeping commitments, doing the “right thing”. **Social Impact:** Eliminating root causes of systemic social problems so that individuals and communities can flourish. **Equality:** Embracing non-hierarchical models within our organization, and our work. **Accountability:** Being transparent and accountable to those we serve and the donors who support us.

Please share this newsletter with your friends, family, clients, colleagues, organizations, and faith communities to help spread the word that prevention and healing are possible.

www.safecommunitiespa.org

**We welcome your questions about any of these programs.
Contact info@safecommunitiespa.org or 717.560.9989**

