

# Supporting Students Coerced into Sending Inappropriate Photos

A Companion Guide for Therapists, School Counselors, and Educators

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## Purpose of This Guide

This guide is intended for mental health professionals, school counselors, and educators working with adolescents who have experienced online coercion to send inappropriate images. It complements the parent guide and helps support students through emotional healing, legal awareness, and reintegration in school settings.

## Understanding the Adolescent Brain and Online Vulnerability

- The **prefrontal cortex**—responsible for decision-making and impulse control—is still developing in adolescents. This impacts judgment, foresight, and resistance to manipulation.
- Adolescents are **neurologically and emotionally more susceptible** to:
  - Flattery and validation
  - Peer pressure and fear of exclusion
  - Risk-taking in pursuit of social approval or connection
- Online predators **exploit** this vulnerability using emotional manipulation, fake profiles, and gradual boundary pushing.
- **Societal normalization** of sexting, hypersexualized content, and the illusion of privacy in digital spaces make teens believe this behavior is typical or expected.

## Legal and Safety Considerations

- Explicit images of minors—even if self-created—are considered **child pornography** under U.S. law.
- After appropriate reporting, **images must be deleted** from all devices and storage to avoid illegal possession.

- Never ask a child to resend or show explicit content as part of processing or reporting—this can be retraumatizing and may create legal risk.
- Schools must comply with mandatory reporting laws and report suspected exploitation to law enforcement or CPS if applicable.

## **Supportive Steps for Therapists and School Counselors**

### **1. Establish Psychological Safety**

- Validate the student’s emotions: fear, shame, confusion, sadness, guilt.
- Normalize trauma responses (avoidance, numbing, hypervigilance, anger).
- Use language like:
  - *“You were manipulated, not reckless.”*
  - *“This doesn’t define who you are.”*

### **2. Create a Safe Therapeutic Environment**

- Use a trauma-informed approach:
  - Empower the adolescent through choice and collaboration.
  - Help them rebuild a sense of **control** over their life and body.
  - Avoid re-exposing them to trauma details unless necessary for healing.
- Consider **narrative therapy** or **EMDR** when appropriate.
- Include family therapy to repair trust and open communication.

### **3. Address Shame and Isolation**

- Remind the student they are not alone—many youth are victimized in this way.
- Reinforce that their value is not diminished by what happened.
- If appropriate, help them identify **supportive peers or safe adults** in their network.

### **4. School Reentry and Academic Considerations**

- Consider temporary academic accommodations or excused absences.

- Prepare for potential peer gossip, bullying, or isolation.
  - Work with administration to **monitor for bullying** and respond swiftly.
  - Discuss digital harassment policies with the student and their parents.
- Involve the student in creating a **safe reentry plan**:
  - Trusted staff contacts
  - Private space if overwhelmed
  - Flexibility with attendance or deadlines

### Key Phrases That Help

- *“You’re allowed to feel upset—this was never your fault.”*
- *“You’re brave for coming forward.”*
- *“You still get to define your future.”*
- *“Let’s make a plan for how you can feel safe at school again.”*

### Checklist for Professionals

- Ensure the situation has been **legally reported** (if applicable).
- Offer or refer to trauma-informed therapy.
- Coordinate with caregivers about emotional support and school needs.
- Work with school leadership on a **confidential safety/reentry plan**.
- Educate the student (and family) about ongoing digital safety habits.
- Monitor for emotional signs of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, or PTSD.

### Long-Term Goals

- Help the student reclaim their voice and identity.
- Teach coping skills, boundary-setting, and digital discernment.
- Restore trust in safe relationships—with peers, family, and adults.
- Prevent future exploitation through **ongoing digital literacy education**.

## Recommended Resources

- **Stop Sextortion Toolkit (NCMEC):** <https://www.missingkids.org/sexortion>
- **Trauma-Informed Schools Training:** [traumasensitiveschools.org](http://traumasensitiveschools.org)
- **Crisis Text Line:** Text **HOME** to 741741
- **Common Sense Media – Sexting Guide:** <https://www.common sense media.org>
- **Parent Guidance: Screens:** [www.tessastuckey.com](http://www.tessastuckey.com)