

Online ‘sextortion’ scam targets Yates students

Predator created fake social media accounts

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State Police have launched an investigation into an apparent online “sextortion” scam targeting students in at least two Yates County school systems.

According to the Penn Yan Central School District, an online predator apparently created numerous fake social media accounts, befriended students online and used those relationships to coax the kids into sharing personal information and private photos.

Then, the predator used the information to allegedly “blackmail” the students into sharing additional photographs and details under threat that the pictures and details already shared would be made public.

Penn Yan schools warned parents about the scam in a statement this week on its website.

Officials in the Dundee Central School District sent a similar letter on Wednesday.

“As a district, we will do our part to monitor the activity on our website and available social media during school hours and we will continue to educate our students about safe and appropriate online interactions,” said Dundee superintendent Kelly Houck in the letter. “We ask that you help and support by reinforcing the importance of responsible posting and responding to social media with your children, by monitoring their online interactions at home.”

Both districts are urging parents to talk to their children about their social media presence and activities.

Anyone who believes their child has been a target is asked to call police.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, so-called “sextortion” is the fastest growing online threat against

children.

The Federal Bureau of Investigations says parents should take these steps to help shield their children against “sextortion” activity:

- Make children aware anything done online may be available to others.
- Make sure apps and privacy settings are set to the strictest level possible.
- Keep personal computers in a central location in your home.
- Review and approve apps downloaded to smart phones and monitor activity on those devices.
- Ensure an adult is present and engaged when children communicate via webcam.
- Regularly go through your child’s “friends” and “followers” lists and delete anyone your child has not met in person.
- Discuss internet safety with your children before they engage in any online activity and maintain those discussions as children become teenagers.

The agency says anyone who asks a child to engage in sexually explicit activity online should be reported to a parent, guardian or law enforcement immediately.

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