



## After an online 'sextortion' threat, a Utah teen died by suicide. Now his parents are warning others.

Parents Lauren and Brian Glass are working with the Weber County Sheriff's Office to educate families in hopes of preventing another tragedy.



(Francisco Kjolseth | The Salt Lake Tribune) Brian Glass talks about the tragic loss of his son who recently took his own life after being sextorted through social media on Wednesday, April 17, 2024. Roy High School held the meeting to discuss ways to prevent future tragedies.

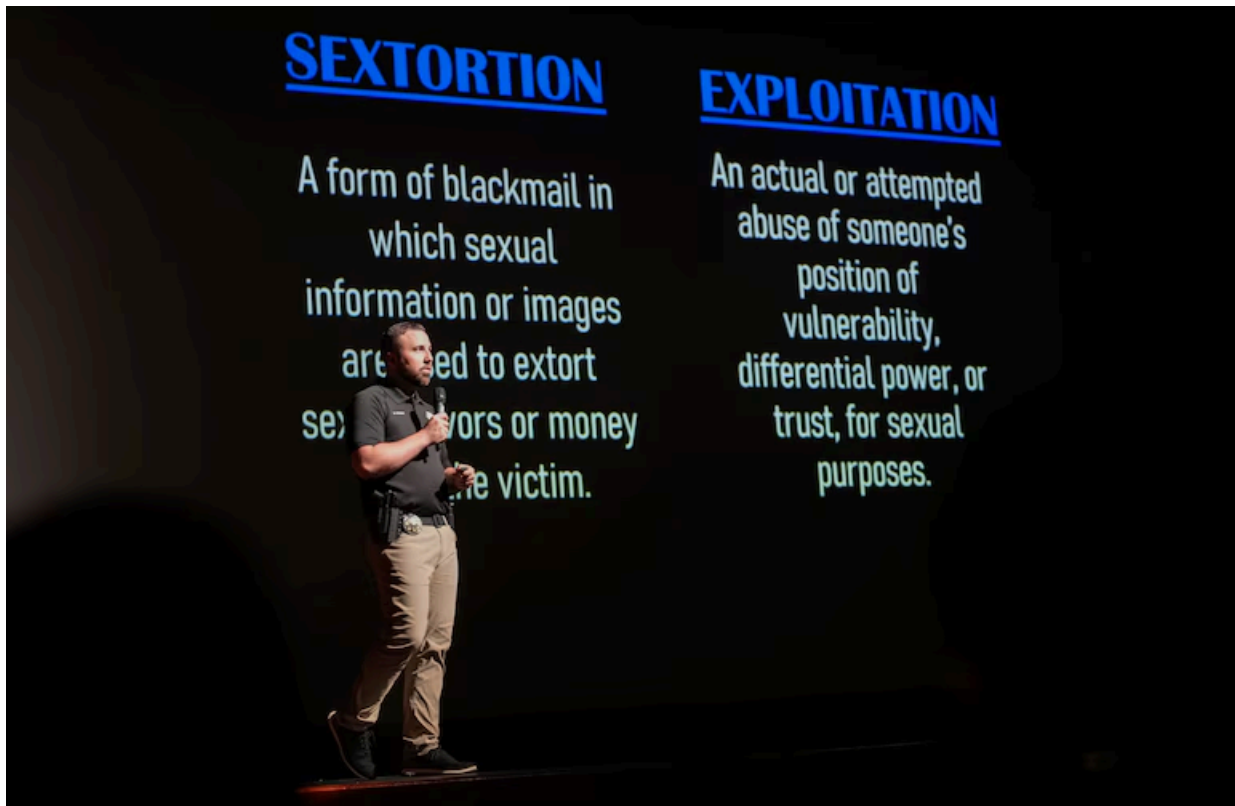
By Carmen Nesbitt | April 20, 2024, 9:24 a.m. | Updated: April 26, 2024, 3:40 p.m.

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**Editor's note** • This article discusses suicide. If you or people you know are at risk of self-harm, call or text 988 to reach [the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) for 24-hour support.



sexual information or images are used to extort money or favors.



(Francisco Kjolseth | The Salt Lake Tribune) Detective Dustin Stewart with the Weber County Sheriff department speaks at Roy High School on Wednesday, April 17, 2024, to discuss the dangers of social media following the tragic death of a Weber School District student who took his own life recently after being sextorted.

Stewart pressed a button on his remote, advancing the presentation to the next slide. A recording of a 911 call played, and a woman's screams pierced the auditorium.

The call was from the moments after Lauren Glass found her 15-year-old son had died by suicide. Officers discovered an extorter had threatened to circulate intimate images that the boy had shared but thought would stay private, Stewart said.

"I think it's important that we hear that portion of that phone call," Stewart said to about one hundred parents and community members. "Because it's real life."

Lauren and Brian Glass returned to the room shortly after the recording had stopped.

"My family's goal in this process of sharing our son's story is to help," Brian Glass told the audience. "If we can get one family never to feel what we felt, never to have to go through this situation, ever, we've accomplished something out of this tragedy."

Although the couple spoke from a distance to the auditorium crowd, the evening felt intimate as they shared their grief and listening parents held hands and cried with them.



(Francisco Kjolseth | The Salt Lake Tribune) Lauren Glass is comforted as she listens to her husband Brian talk about the tragic loss of their son who recently took his own life after being sextorted through social media on Wednesday, April 17, 2024. Roy High School held the meeting to discuss ways to prevent future tragedies.

Recently, there has been a [significant rise in reported financial sextortion cases](#) that involve teenage boys, the [National Center for Missing & Exploited Children](#) reported on its website. In 2023, the center received 186,819 reports of “online enticement,” a category of criminal activity that includes sextortion.

## The Glass's story

On Jan. 7, the Glass's son came in contact with an extorter posing as a teenage girl through a social discovery app called Wizz, according to screenshots of their text exchange shared by Stewart. The Salt Lake Tribune is not naming the boy, in part, because he was a minor.

The extorter immediately asked the boy if they could follow each other on Instagram, a tactic commonly used to gain access to a victim's friends and family for leverage later on, the detective said.

The Glass's son agreed. The extorter then suggested an exchange of photos, asking the boy to provide explicit images of himself, Stewart said. The boy did so during a video call on Snapchat, feeling that it was “safer” than other apps.

“Kids think that Snapchat is safe,” Stewart said. They think “stuff deletes. Stuff can't be saved without you knowing, which is not the case.”

The extorter took screenshots from the video and compiled them into one image, which included the boy's face, and texted it to him, Stewart said. “Listen to me, bro,” the text read, “Are you ready now to cooperate with me



“My son was so devastated, not because of the money,” Brian Glass said. “It destroyed him, I just know it. I beg you, have the conversations with your kids. Let them know that it’s a mistake and it’s going to be OK if they do something like that.”



(Francisco Kjolseth | The Salt Lake Tribune) Lauren Glass joins her husband Brian as they talk to other parents following the tragic loss of their son who recently took his own life after being sextorted through social media on Wednesday, April 17, 2024. Roy High School held the meeting to discuss ways to prevent future tragedies.

## Extorters are often in other countries

The Weber County Sheriff’s Office receives at least one case every week involving the sextortion of a minor, Stewart said.

“There’s no sexual component for the extorter,” Stewart explained. “They’re only after one thing: they’re after money. They make that very clear. They don’t care what they get, as long as they get something of the kids’ that they can use against them for money.”

If they do get the money, the extortion “never ends,” Stewart said. If they don’t, extorters sometimes release photos, he said, but more often than not, they will just “move on.”

“They’re talking to a bunch of kids,” Stewart said. “They are doing this to make money for their family. They’re going to work, doing this, and then going home at the end of the day. It’s a job.”



Sometimes governments comply, sometimes they don't, Stewart said.

Stewart said he can't speak to the specifics of the Glass's case because it is an open investigation, but said officers believe they have located the man responsible for the messages.

## Signs to look out for

Lauren Glass described her son as kind, a basketball player and someone who always stood up for others. "He had struggles with himself where he had Tourette's and ticks and ADHD," she said. "There were plenty of times when he was bullied. But when it happened to other kids, he never stood for it. Ever."

Lauren and Brian Glass said they hope that other parents will use their tragedy to educate themselves and foster open communication with their children. It's important for children to have a trusted adult whom they feel safe confiding in about mistakes, the parents said.

Here are early warning signs that suggest someone is engaging in child sextortion, according to Stewart:

- Approaching a child on social media and immediately asking for "nudes," or explicit images.
- Offering reciprocation ("I'll show you, if you show me").
- Intentionally moving their communications with the child from one online platform to another.
- Sending messages that appear to be written by someone who isn't a native English speaker; grammar and word use is "off."
- Pretending to work for a modeling agency to obtain sexual images of the child/

While the instinct upon learning a child has fallen victim to sextortion is to delete all messages and photos, Stewart said that doing so will impact law enforcement's ability to stop the extorter. He suggested parents instead:

- Stop all communication immediately.
- Block the extorter but do not delete messages or photos.
- Report the extorter's social media accounts on all platforms.
- Contact area law enforcement.
- Get help before deciding whether to pay money or comply with the extorter's demands.

More information and resources about child sextortion can be found at:

<https://www.missingkids.org/theissues/sextortion>





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