LOCAL NEWS

Following online 'sextortion' tragedy, family warns others during Roy High training

Apr 18, 2024, 11:34 AM | Updated: 11:35 am

STAYING SAFE — FAMILY SHARES CAUTIONARY TALE ABOUT ONLINE SEXTORTION DURING ROY HIGH TRAINING — 5 — 46°

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ROY — Online "sextortion" ended in a tragedy for a Utah family and on Wednesday they teamed up with the Weber County Sheriff's Office to warn other families the same could happen to them.

"Your kids need to know this information—that there are people out there doing this," said Brian Glass. "Your kids are being hunted. They're not going out there asking to have this done. They're being hunted by predators for this purpose of just money."

Glass is the stepfather of 15-year-old David Antonio Gonzalez, Jr., who died by suicide in January.

According to Glass, David was a loving, polite, kind teen who had a passion for sports. His online life, however, took a sudden turn when he met the wrong person on the Whiz app.

"A person who was imitating a young girl met him there and then they moved it from Whiz over to texting, right, and then from there as the texts went on, then they were asking for Instagram," Glass explained in an interview with KSL 5. "They got his Instagram information and then from there they started looking at how they could get data out of that Instagram—who his family was, who his friends were. That's when they wanted to have photos shared and he was like, 'I won't do that here' kind-of-thing, but then the went to Snapchat. And then Snapchat he shared a photo."

Glass said the scammer then took that photo, created a collage, went back to Instagram and tried to extort him to the sum of $200. Even though the teen blocked the individual on social media at that point, Glass said the extortionist continued to threaten David through text about what would happen and to whom his picture would be sent.

"They made it feel like to him that they had really already done this," Glass said. "In his mind he had not other options, and so at that point he decided to take his own life to end that situation."

The case was still under investigation as of Wednesday, according to investigators with the Weber County Sheriff's Office.

On Wednesday evening at Roy High School, however, Glass teamed up with a detective from that agency to present the latest in a series of trainings geared toward educating parents on the dangers of online sextortion and what to do in these cases.

"I think the most important thing is for kids to understand that if it does happen to them it's not the end of the world," said Detective Dustin Stewart. "These things will pass. We do have tools to figure out who these people are, we do have tools to prevent their photos from being shared to other people and we do a really good job of investigating these cases."

Stewart said open communication with children was imperative. He said if a teen does encounter one of these extortion plots, the teen should tell a parent or a trusted adult, be honest about what's been shared, stop the communication with the scammer immediately, not delete potential evidence and start documenting conversations and what's been shared and report the situation as soon as possible to police.

He said those reports could be made either through report.cybertip.org, the FBI or local police. For cases in Weber County, parents were urged to contact dispatch at 801-395-8221.

Stewart said known victims of online sextortion have been as young as 6 and the average age is around 15 and can occur on any social media platform or even online gaming forums like Roblox or Fortnite.

He said increasingly extortionists are using artificial intelligence to alter photos and make their scams seem that much more real.

"Technology is very scary and AI is evolving really fast and people are figuring out how to use it for things to make victimizing children much easier, especially online," Stewart said.

Glass urged other families to become educated about the dangers and to have frank discussions with their children.

"We can stop these people from continuing on with this business," Glass said. "It's a bad business."

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