

PROTECTING YOUR LOVED ONES:

RECOGNIZING ROMANCE SCAM WARNING SIGNS

To help you protect your loved ones, let's break down the warning signs you should be looking out for:



Emotional Life Changes

If someone close to you experiences significant emotional events like job loss, divorce, or the death of a spouse, they can become increasingly vulnerable to scammers. Heightened emotions lead to quick trust and rapid escalation in online relationships. Loneliness can also make individuals susceptible to romance scams. Scammers exploit any heightened emotional state. It's crucial to remember that everyone experiences trauma differently, so stay open-minded when observing emotional changes. What may not seem traumatic to one person could deeply affect another.



Idealized Love Story that Moves Quickly

If your friend or family member shares a love story that seems too good to be true—filled with perfect scenarios and ideal situations—it could be a sign of a romance scam. Scammers maintain constant contact to create emotional ties and often craft idealized narratives to exert control. They expedite the process of falling in love to exploit emotional vulnerability for financial gain. This “love sickness” serves two purposes—First, to establish a deep bond with the victim quickly, and second, to lay the groundwork for soliciting favors and money. While outsiders may find the rapid progression suspicious, victims feel deeply connected despite minimal physical interaction.



Avoiding In-Person Meetings

Consistently avoiding in-person meetings or making excuses not to meet is a red flag. Genuine relationships transition to real-world interactions. If your friend or loved one hasn't met their online love interest within the first few weeks, they're likely dealing with a scammer. Additionally, advancements in deep fake technology make it easier and cheaper to impersonate someone during video chats. If your friend or loved one has video chatted with their online partner but hasn't met them in person, it's still likely a scammer.



Social Isolation

Be alert if your friend or family member becomes increasingly isolated from their social circle. Romance scammers are master manipulators who want to gain control over their victims in order to prevent friends and loved ones from intervening. If the scammer dominates the victim's life, the victim may believe the relationship is genuine. Scammers often follow scripts designed to manipulate and exploit their victims.



Device Addiction

Scammers maintain constant contact with their targets, calling multiple times a day or texting incessantly. This creates a quick and deep connection while giving the scammer power over the victim. If you observe a significant rise in your loved one's device usage, along with signs of urgency, frustration, or desperation due to the scammer's fabricated story and pleas for financial assistance, it could indicate that they are involved in a romance scam. Also, pay attention to acts of secrecy, defensiveness, or loss of interest in activities that pull them away from their phone for any significant period of time.



Financial Requests

If your loved one's online partner requests money, they're likely involved in a romance scam. Your loved one will feel compelled to help because, as mentioned earlier, scammers have already created a deep bond with their victim prior to asking for money. While creating this deep bond, scammers use well-established personas that enable them to evade in-person meetings and create scenarios where they require financial assistance. Here are some common personas scammers regularly use:

- **The "Hard Luck" Scammer:** If your loved one mentions sending money to their online partner for emergencies, medical expenses, or travel costs, this is likely an indicator that they are involved in a romance scam. Typical scenarios scammers use involve fabricated accidents, a sick child in need of medical attention, or purported financial needs related to their job or employees.
- **The Investment Scammer:** Be wary if their online romantic interest starts discussing cryptocurrency investments. Crypto-romance scams are becoming increasingly common, with scammers promising quick returns and debt relief. They often create realistic yet fake cryptocurrency websites to deceive victims. Some scammers even pretend to invest alongside victims, but ultimately drain their accounts.
- **The Overseas Worker:** Scammers often pretend to be military personnel, oil rig workers, or government contractors who are overseas. These occupations provide plausible reasons why the scammer can't meet the victim in person. Also, the scammer will cite difficulties accessing funds overseas due to being in remote areas.
- **The Celebrity Impersonator:** Advancements in AI technology have made it easier than ever to create fake celebrity profiles and engage with victims as a celebrity using deepfake or voice cloning technology. If your loved one claims they are communicating with a celebrity online, it's highly probable they're interacting with a scammer.

If your loved one is experiencing a romance scam, head over to [FightCybercrime.org/Romance-Scam-Recovery-Group](https://fightcybercrime.org/romance-scam-recovery-group) for support and guidance.