



Romance Scams

The simple description of a Romance Scam is, a type of confidence trick where a scammer uses a fake online identity to gain your trust and then steal your money. Scammers use social media, dating apps, and gaming websites. However, several factors play into why we fall victim to these scammers. The reasons for WHY we are so easily influenced varies from age to age.

With the availability of ANYTHING you want to access and look at over the internet has greatly fueled online scams. There are many forms of online scams however, I am going to focus on Romance scams. The FTC (Federal Trade Commission) reported;

- In 2022, victims lost a record \$1.3 billion to romance scams, which was a 138% increase from 2021. In 2023, consumers lost \$1.14 billion to romance scams, with a median loss of \$2,000 per person.

Kids and young adults have had access to the internet since a very young age. They are curious and for a lot of younger kids they have unsupervised access to the internet. Whether searching social media or playing video games, scammers will specifically target children as they are typically vulnerable. ***For the purpose of this example, I am referring to young boys however, young girls are also targeted.*** The scammer will pose as a girl and they begin interacting as if they are interested in the child. The scammer will send photos of a pretty girl. Once the scammer feels they have the trust of the child they will start requesting explicit photos of the child. The scammer typically accomplishes this by sending an explicit photo of a pretty girl. The scammer will then tell the child, if you send me a photo of yourself, I will send more explicit photos. Once the child sends their photos, the scammer will expose themselves and begin extorting the child for money. The scammer will do this by showing the child they have access to their parents, friends and family's social media accounts and if they are not paid they will send the photo(s) to everyone. If your child is asking to use your credit card, disguising it as wanting to buy a game etc., be suspicious and start asking questions. It is possible they have been victimized by an online scammer. This tactic is common from children to the elderly.

Young adults. A lot of what we see happening to the children is happening with young adults as well. However, with young adults they are being introduced to romance scammers via dating applications. Most if not all online dating websites are infiltrated with romance scammers. In addition to scammers using fake accounts (both male and female) there are men and woman using dating websites to extort money out of you, similarly to scammers using fake accounts.

Older adults. Often times they find themselves alone and lonely. Whether their significant other has passed away or they have been single for many years. They typically come into contact with romance scammers via dating website. During my time in Law Enforcement, I have seen victims get extorted for tens and tens of thousands of dollars over an extended period of time. Because most if

not all of the online Romance Scammers are located in foreign countries, recovering the money is very difficult if not impossible.

Below are several links to articles and statistics on Romance Scams.

- New FTC Data Reveals Top Lies Told by Romance Scammers (***FTC dated Feb 9, 2023***)

<https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/news/press-releases/2023/02/new-ftc-data-reveals-top-lies-told-romance-scammers>

- Protect yourself against romance scams (***Homeland Security Investigations 2022***)

<https://www.dhs.gov/hsi/insider/romance-scams-protect-yourself>

- ***FBI***

<https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/scams-and-safety/common-frauds-and-scams/romance-scams>

If you suspect you are interacting with an romance scammer or your child is being extorted, I would be happy to help. Reach out to me for a 30-minute consultation and let's see what we can do to minimize the impact.