

Police advice on how to avoid being victim of 'Romance Fraud'

Police Scotland have issued advice concerning 'Romance Fraud' which is widespread and estimates suggest that only one in five instances is reported.

All frauds require the offender to establish trust and rapport with the victim. In romance fraud, the victim believes there to be a genuine relationship.



— Anna, 36
Caring young woman, Offering love, friendship and

BANKRUPTCY.

For further advice, visit
scotland.police.uk/romancefraud

Techniques include attempts to build rapport with and gain the trust of the victim by claiming to adhere to the same religious faith or spiritual beliefs and articulating an intense desire for and attraction to the victim

Phases of a romance scam normally tend to follow the pattern below:

The victim being motivated to find an ideal partner. The victim being presented with the ideal profile. The grooming process. The sting (crisis) – where the scammer needs money from the victim. Continuation of the scam. Potential sexual abuse. Re-victimisation.

Types of romance fraud

‘Foot-in-the door’ technique, in which the perpetrator initially asks for a small sum and, then having gained this small sum from the victim, manufactures new or escalating crises requiring larger and larger sums of money.

‘Face-in-the-door’ technique, in which the perpetrator initially asks for a sum of money so extreme that most would refuse, followed by a request for a far more modest sum(s) to persuade the victim to part with their money.

Third is webcam blackmail.

The tactics used by scammers can include: Economic abuse, Creation of fear (by-product of abuse/breach of trust), Isolation (move to messenger app, tell no one), Monopolisation (bombarding victim with messages, calls, monitoring of social media, sleep deprivation – only available at night), Degradation (highly abusive to wear victim down, get money, Jekyll and Hyde, victim seeks to placate), Psychological destabilisation (pretending money has not been sent), Emotional or interpersonal withdrawal (refusing to communicate till demands are met), Guilt tripping.

What can you do?

It is easy to become a victim, therefore, be guarded and aware, be unrevealing and discreet to avoid making yourself vulnerable online. Whilst money loss can cause great distress, the psychological and human cost of romance scams should not be underestimated. There have been instances of mental health issues including breakdowns and suicide.

If you've been the victim of a scam please come forward and report the crime to police, you will be taken seriously and dealt with in confidence.

If someone threatens you to share money with them – don't make any payments, stop all communication with the blackmailer, and keep all evidence of the communications you have had. This is a serious and organised crime and information is needed to help us tackle it.

Never send money or your bank details to someone you've met online, no matter how convincing the reason they give for needing it, nor how long you've been speaking to them.

Banks usually do their best to track and recover your payment but aren't responsible for your losses if the request is fraudulent. If they turn out to be a criminal, it's highly unlikely to you be able to get your money back.

Scammers use long and elaborate reasons for why they need you to send money, and will try and make it a matter of urgency, so you panic and oblige.

It's best practice to use a credit, debit or official payment platform (such as PayPal) to make any online payments as you have some protection if it is a scam. Paying by transfer doesn't offer any protection if things go wrong.

Opt out of your personal details being provided to third parties and use a reputable site registered with the dating industry.

If someone asks you for money, report it immediately to the dating platform you are using, and call the Police on 101.