

# Community Safety Message

## Internet scams: Relationships

**If you are are looking for love or companionship online, protect your heart and wallet from strangers.** If you are looking for a romantic connection online, beware of scammers seeking to steal your heart and money. Every year, thousands of Australians report to the ACCC that their hearts have been broken and wallets emptied after becoming entangled in a relationship scam with someone that they met online. The internet can be a great way to meet other people interested in a relationship, and there are many online dating and romance services that make it easier than ever to connect with that special someone. Unfortunately scammers also go online to connect – with victims.

### **What are dating and romance scams?**

Dating and romance scams try to lower your defences by appealing to your romantic or compassionate side. They play on emotional triggers to get you to provide money, gifts or personal details.

Scammers target victims by creating fake profiles on legitimate internet dating services. Once you are in contact with a scammer, they will express strong emotions for you in a relatively short period of time and will suggest you move the relationship away from the website, to phone, email and/or instant messaging. Scammers often claim to be from Australia, but travelling or working overseas. They will go to great lengths to gain your interest and trust, such as sharing personal information and even sending you gifts.

Scammers may take months, to build what seems like the romance of a lifetime and may even pretend to book flights to visit you, but never actually come. Once they have gained your trust they will ask you (either subtly or directly) for money, gifts or your banking/credit card details. They will pretend to need these for a variety of reasons. For example, they may claim to be in the depths of despair due to financial hardship or an ill family member. In other cases, the scammer might start off by sending you flowers or other small gifts then will tell you about a large amount of money they need to transfer out of their country or that they want to share with you. They will then ask for your banking details or money to cover administrative fees or taxes to free up the money. **WARNING –** This may be money laundering which is a criminal offence: never agree to transfer money for someone else. Alternatively scammers may claim to have fallen ill or been involved in a serious accident. They will then ask you for money to pay medical bills or travel expenses to visit you. In some instances you may even be contacted by someone claiming to be their doctor.

Regardless of how you are scammed, you could end up losing a lot of money. Online dating and romance scams cheat Australians out of millions every year. The money you send to scammers is almost always impossible to recover and in addition, you may feel long-lasting emotional betrayal at the hands of someone who you thought loved you and was trustworthy.



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## Warning signs:

- You meet someone on an internet dating website and their profile picture or photograph looks different to their description or like it's from a magazine.
- After just a few contacts they profess strong feelings for you and suggest moving the conversation away from the website preferring email, instant messaging and/or phone instead.
- After gaining your trust, they tell you an elaborate story and ask for money, gifts or your bank account/credit card details.
- They continue to ask you for money, but never actually visit you.
- If you don't send money straightaway, their emails and calls will often become more desperate, persistent or direct.
- The email is poorly written, vague or contains specific information taken directly from news articles, repeats itself, you are addressed by the wrong name, or the email is not personally addressed at all.

## Protect yourself from dating and romance scams

- ALWAYS consider the possibility that the approach may be a scam, particularly if the warning signs listed above appear. Try to remove the emotion from your decision making no matter how caring or persistent they seem.
- Talk to an independent friend, relative or fair trading agency before you send any money. THINK TWICE before sending money to someone you have only recently met online or haven't met in person.
- NEVER give credit card or online account details to anyone by email.
- Be very careful about how much personal information you share on social network sites. Scammers can use your information and pictures to create a fake identity or to target you with a scam.
- If you agree to meet in person, tell family and friends where you are going. If this includes overseas travel, consider carefully the advice on [www.smarttraveller.gov.au](http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au) before making any plans.
- Where possible, avoid any arrangement with a stranger that asks for up-front payment via money order, wire transfer or international funds transfer. It is rare to recover money sent this way.
- If you think you have provided your account details to a scammer, contact your bank or financial institution immediately.
- Money laundering is a criminal offence: do not agree to transfer money for someone else.

## Report scams

If you think you've spotted a scam, report a scam to SCAMwatch or contact the ACCC on 1300 795 995. You should also spread the word to your friends and family to protect them.

Information provided by [Scamwatch.gov.au](http://Scamwatch.gov.au)



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