

FACT SHEET

STEER CLEAR OF THE SWEETHEART SCAM



“Sweetheart scammers” or “romance scammers” are con artists who prey on people by pretending to fall in love with them in order to win their trust and steal their money.

THE SET-UP

Sweetheart scams often take place online, starting on dating websites or social media platforms where they have set up fake identities. Then as you develop feelings, the fraud moves to emails or texts to your personal phone.

They convince you that they are in love with you and you are in a deep committed relationship. During this time they work on grooming you, in order to manipulate your feelings. The sweetheart scammers may wait months before asking you for money.

The Attorney General's Office regularly hears from older residents or concerned family members when a scam is suspected.

You can avoid being scammed when you keep the following in mind: the warning signs, the tricks they use, the potential emotional and financial effects, plus techniques to protect yourself from these unscrupulous, fake charmers.

WARNING SIGNS OF A SWEETHEART SCAM!

The Sweetheart scammers may wait months before asking you for money. During this time they work on **GROOMING** you, which can last many months. They convince you that they are in love with you and that you are in a deep committed relationship.

 The scammer will persuade you to move the conversation to email, text messaging or call you at home instead of communicating through the dating or social networking site.

 Sweetheart scammers are consistently positive and upbeat, and they present a false sense of unconditional love that can seem very loving and comforting.

 The scammer will often claim to be a U.S. citizen traveling or working overseas, for example with the military or as a teacher or a nurse.

**Illinois Attorney
General:**

**Senior Consumer
Helpline**
1-800-243-5377

**Consumer Fraud
Hotline**
1-800-386-5438

WAYS THE SCAMMER MAY ATTEMPT TO GET YOUR MONEY

I need money for...

-  **Airline tickets or travel documents to come to the U.S. to be with you**
-  **My cell phone bill or Internet access so we can keep communicating**
-  **School tuition, so I can graduate and come to the U.S. and be with you**
-  **Planning our wedding so we can get married**

Other variations of the sweetheart/romance scam:

The scammer may send the victim money orders with directions to deposit, cash and wire the money back. However, in reality, the money orders are counterfeit, leaving the victim responsible to the bank for the lost funds.

Sweetheart scammers sometimes ask their victims to make on-line purchases for them or to forward a package to another country, getting them to serve as mules to carry out illegal schemes.

AFTER-EFFECTS OF A ROMANCE SCAM

- Victims of sweetheart scams feel that they are in a committed relationship and want to believe that the scammer is telling the truth. Once you send money, more excuses and requests for money will follow as to why they are unable to meet you in person.
- Victims may experience profound grief at the loss of the relationship once they accept that it was a scam. The lost money, often thousands of dollars, adds insult to injury. The victim may also feel too embarrassed to tell anyone what has happened.
- Victims may become targets for further scams, such as when the scammer poses as an official offering to return the victim's lost money for a fee!

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM BECOMING A VICTIM OF A SCAM

- Should you meet a sweetheart/romance scammer on social media, block the profile.
- If you receive an email soliciting you, do not open the email. Delete or send to SPAM.
- Should you receive a call, don't engage in any form of conversation.
JUST HANG UP!



If you or a loved one has fallen victim to a sweetheart/romance scam we strongly encourage you to report the scam to the Federal Trade Commission Consumer Helpline **1-877-382-4357** and the Illinois Attorney General's Senior Consumer Helpline **1-800-243-5377** or the Consumer Fraud Hotline **1-800-386-5438**. Individuals with hearing or speech disabilities can reach us by using the 7-1-1 relay service.