

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM SCAMS

Question: *“I have been receiving many phone calls, Facebook messages and emails from people that are trying to scam me. How can I protect myself?”*

Answer: Older Americans pay millions to scammers each year – but that’s just what’s reported to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). When factoring in unreported scams, older Americans lose about **\$3 billion each year**, according to a report by the Senate Special Committee on Aging.

“Scammers who target older adults assume that they are less computer-savvy, more trusting, and more solitary,” says Christine Durst, a scam expert and internet fraud investigator who has consulted for the FTC. “They tailor their approach in ways that align with these vulnerabilities.” As a result, your pocketbook- and your health- may suffer. The good news is you can protect yourself from swindlers by arming yourself with knowledge. Here’s how to spot the top four scams you’re most likely to encounter – plus what to do if you think you’ve been targeted.

SCAM #1: BUSINESS OR GOVERNMENT IMPOSTERS

Some scammers will pose as the representative of a company, like a bank or utility provider, in an effort to convince you to reveal confidential information or perform some act – namely, sending money. Others may pretend to represent a charity or a government agency like the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

They can reach out via email, phone, or text message in an effort to sell you fake services, convince you that you owe fees, or send you a fraudulent check for too much money and request that you return the extra.

HOW TO SPOT IT: Anyone who asks you to pay with a gift card or wire transfer is a fraud. Only fake companies will ask for these types of payments, which cannot be recovered once they’re gone. No legitimate company will ever ask for payment that way, the FTC says. In addition to never demanding a specific type of payment, like a prepaid debit card, the IRS will never call demanding immediate payment. They’ll always send a bill in the mail first and allow you time to question or appeal the amount owed.

SCAM #2: PRIZES, SWEEPSTAKES OR LOTTERIES

You’ve won!! At least, that’s what you’re being told. It’s yours – as long as you cover the minor cost of taxes, shipping and handling, or processing fees first.

HOW TO SPOT IT: If you have to pay anything, it’s not a prize. Legitimate sweepstakes don’t make you pay a fee or buy something to enter or improve your chances of winning, according to the FTC. Another telltale sign: You’re contacted via text message. Any unsolicited business text message spam is illegal.

SCAM #3: ROMANCE SCAMS

The numbers for this type of internet fraud are on the rise, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Scammers use dating or social sites to meet potential victims, creating fake profiles and building online relationships. Their endgame: to convince you to send them money – for a plane ticket, a sick relative, or to help out with financial hardship. If you think a scam involving online dating affects younger folks more, you’re mistaken. Older consumers and younger consumers report it at about the same rate, according to the FTC.

HOW TO SPOT IT: If you meet someone online, take things slowly, says the FBI. That’s the key to avoid becoming a victim. Ask lots of questions and get to know the person. If he or she tries to move quickly – wanting to leave the dating site immediately and use personal email or claiming love early on – that’s a RED FLAG. And of course, if the person asks you for money, walk away!!

SCAM #4: FAMILY EMERGENCY

In this type of scam, the trickster claims to be or have custody of a friend or family member in distress who needs money right away. Often scammers will impersonate grandchildren to con grandparents into sending funds – a scheme that’s been dubbed the “grandparent scam.”

HOW TO SPOT IT: Ask questions that a stranger couldn’t possibly answer. Or come up with a code word that your grandchildren can use to prove they really do need help. Also, be sure to keep contact information updated. You should always have family phone numbers on hand so you can quickly and easily verify a story.

THINK YOU'VE BEEN SCAMMED? YOU HAVE REPORTING OPTIONS

You can report the incident to the FTC online at ftc.gov/complaint or call 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357) or TTY 1-866-653-4261 if you prefer.

You can also call your local law enforcement agency for assistance in filing a report and/or the ADRC at 608-930-9835.

If you provided your credit, debit or bank card number, call your financial institution to place an alert on your account right away. And change any passwords you may have shared.

Whatever you do, don't keep it to yourself. "I've found that many older scam victims are embarrassed and have not informed their families," Durst says. BAD IDEA. Seek support from a family member or friend. After all, if the numbers reveal anything, it's that you are not alone. Plus, by sharing your experience, you'll alert others to specific scams and help them protect themselves.

Information and Assistance Specialist's (I&A's) **services are free and confidential**. Send questions to: News and Views Q & A, 303 W Chapel St, Suite 1300, Dodgeville, WI 53533.

Reprinted from:

Article adapted from www.silversneakers.com

Iowa County News & Views – September 2019

Ask your Information and Assistance Specialists