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Internet Relationship Scams Bro. Hal Bookbinder



Relationship (or romance) scam victims are not just the young and naïve. Anyone seeking connections, including those who have lost their mate, are at risk. The FTC reports that in 2022, nearly 70,000 people reported losing \$1.3 billion in relationship scams. Since many likely do not report, the actual losses are likely higher. This is a nine-fold increase over the reported losses of just four years ago. Increased isolation due to the pandemic may have contributed to this.

A typical online relationship scam quickly progresses from a contact out of the blue, to strikingly similar interests, to professions of admiration and love, to immediate need of financial help or "can't lose" investment opportunities, to ghosting, with your money and the phantom admirer gone forever.

Relationship scammers' techniques

- Sending friend requests to people in your network, expecting some to accept, making it appear that you have friends in common.
- Amazing coincidences, in which the scammer's passions, politics, and interests seem to closely match yours.
- Seeming to take a genuine interest in you, flattering you, and even expressing their love for you relatively soon after making contact.
- Wanting to move the conversation from the relationship app to email, WhatsApp, Telegraph, or another private messaging site.
- Telling you that they are unable to meet you in person. Common excuses are inability to travel and offshore or international work.
- Trying to convince you to invest, send money to resolve a problem, pay gift fees, or pay for transportation so that they can join you.

How to avoid becoming a victim

- Be careful about accepting new friendship requests. Don't share personal information, including phone numbers and addresses.
- Suspect it's a scam if the new admirer has excuses, no matter how plausible, for not meeting you in person.
- Share that you are in an online relationship with family and friends and listen to their feedback.
- If the online admirer shares suggestive, or even explicit, photos and asks you to do the same, **don't do it!** and **block the admirer!**
- Do a reverse image search on any photo they send. You may find it on the web. Here is a recent [Forbes article](#) on how to do this.
- Never send money, crypto, gift card numbers or wire funds to a person you have met online, or act on their investment tips.

Artificial intelligence (AI) will make relationship scams even more potent. AI will likely be used to identify potential targets, gather personal information, compose convincing messages, and even keep the dialogue going with multiple targets simultaneously. To read more, Google, "[Relationship Scams](#)".

Bro. Hal Bookbinder is a retired Information Technology Director and College Instructor. All articles in this series can be accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/SafeComputingArticles>.