



## Romance Scams on Facebook

### Scam Overview

“Romance scams occur when a criminal adopts a fake online identity to gain a victim’s affection and trust. The scammer then uses the illusion of a romantic or close relationship to manipulate and/or steal from the victim.”

Source: <https://www.fbi.gov/scams-and-safety/common-scams-and-crimes/romance-scams>

### What Does a Romance Scammer Sound Like?

Here is an actual example of a romance scammer’s first contact with his intended victim on Facebook. He responded to a post she made about animal rescue.

*Hello, I must say your post are interesting and lovely, I guess nobody is going to skip your profile without sending you a message. I was going through a post on a page when I came across your profile, You’re a beautiful woman and I would love to be friends with you. If you don’t mind kindly send me a friend request. Thanks and remain blessed.*

Things to notice in this post:

- ✓ Very complimentary to a person he doesn’t even know (“interesting” “lovely” “beautiful”)
- ✓ Vague as to where he saw the target’s profile
- ✓ Isn’t pushy - invites the target to send him a friend request (to appear non-threatening)
- ✓ Includes a blessing (implying care, morality, and sincerity)
- ✓ In the case of the above post, there was an accompanying military, highly patriotic profile where he also stated he was a widower. (Designed to create credibility, sympathy, connection)

### Common Steps in a Romance Scam

In the Facebook romance scam, the scammer works **slowly and deliberately**. **First, the scammer:**

- Creates a **fake identity** online, which may be incredibly detailed.

They will never use a real picture of themselves. If you click on their Facebook profile, you will often find they state they are high-ranking military and widowed or divorced. Their posts will reflect patriotism, love of country, and all that is “good.” (The image they present to would-be victims is paramount!) Other common false identities include doctors working internationally, as well as contractors working on projects overseas.

## Then—patiently and over time—the scammer:

- Evaluates the target and looks for **vulnerabilities**. Widows and divorcees are common targets.
- Reaches out to the target with a **friendly, complimentary** note. (See example above.)
- **Tailors** comments and questions to create an **emotional connection** with the target.
- Encourages the target to speak with them **privately** through messaging, texting, email.
- Expresses how **close they feel** with the target.
- Requests **photos**, perhaps sending a sexy photo of “themselves” to receive the same in return.
- **Avoids meeting** with the target in person AT ALL COSTS.
- Eventually makes a **declaration of love**.
- Experiences a “**trauma**” and has an “**urgent**” need for money or experiences a **setback** that jeopardizes the scammer’s ability to be in relationship with the target and **asks for financial assistance**.
  - Visa issues, medical or other emergencies for self or family, lost wallets, computer/phone issues, needs money to receive an inheritance or purchase a marriage license, being stranded somewhere, travel costs so they can be with target, etc.
- Once successful in getting money, moves towards **larger asks**.
- Has an ultimate goal of obtaining the target’s **bank account information**.

## What To Do if You Are Affected

- If you receive a message from someone that you suspect is a romance scammer, do not engage.
- If you feel you are already in a “relationship” with a scammer, stop all contact immediately.
- If you have already given money to the scammer, file a complaint with the FBI’s [Internet Crime Complaint Center \(IC3\)](#).

## Steps You Can Take To Prevent Scams on Facebook

- Check your Facebook privacy settings and make sure your account is set for friends only.
- Hide your email, phone number, and any other private contact information you have provided.
- If someone sends you a friend request, check if you have another friend in common. If you do not have any mutual friends, do not accept the request.
- Limit the amount of personal information you share on Facebook and other online forums.
- When participating in groups, keep all your conversations visible to group members and do not be lured into having private conversations.
- **NEVER send your photo to someone you don’t know. It can be used for fraud and extortion.**
- **NEVER send money or gift cards to someone you don’t know. NEVER open a bank account with or for someone you don’t know. NEVER disclose your personal banking information.**

End Elder Fraud: <http://www.endelderfraud.org>

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