



District Attorney's Office • 18th Judicial District

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Consumer Advisory

Warning, Online Daters - Your Sweetheart Could Be a Fake

When it comes to matters of the heart, the ability to spot deception in a potential mate is critical, especially when searching for a love interest online. Launched in 1995, internet dating sites have become an acceptable means of bringing together like-minded partners, and participation is rapidly growing among older adults. While it's true that 'virtual' encounters have resulted in many successful match-ups, charlatans are known to troll online dating sites in the interest of luring unsuspecting victims into handing over cash. The following are popular "come-ons" and other red herrings to be on the look-out for to help 'flush out' an imposter:

- ◆ A "suitor" who professes to be a soul-mate after only a *very brief* courtship, and enchants the victim with affirmations of love, yet makes excuses as to why he/she can't meet. To disguise their identity, charlatans often insist on conversing online, instead of through video chat or phone;
- ◆ Writing and grammar of the "suitor" is well below the standards of his/her self-proclaimed occupation and education level;
- ◆ After several months of courting, "suitor" may share an emotional hardship story, then unexpectedly ask victim for a large sum of cash. Or, victim may be asked to open an on-line bank account in his/her name so that money for their long-awaited "union" can be safely deposited. In truth, the money may be 'hot' or stolen, and could implicate the victim in a money-laundering scheme.
- ◆ Having successfully gained the victim's love and trust, charlatan may sweet-talk victim into sharing sexually explicit photos, then turn around and extort the victim for money by threatening to post the photos online.

If these very nasty ploys sound like scripts, they most likely are, and are shared by crooks linked to various criminal networks operating outside of the United States.

Prevention:

- ◆ Use only paid, membership-based dating sites. Fraudsters aren't inclined to "pay to play", and unfortunately they don't need to, since many online dating sites provide the service for free.
- ◆ Check the safety policies on the site. Are background checks conducted on all users?
- ◆ Stick to active users within your local area. If the relationship heats up, you have a greater chance of meeting face to face. Also, consider doing your own research by entering the name through a search engine to see what pops up.
- ◆ If you suspect you've been taken in a scam through on an online dating site, report it to the Internet Crime Complaint Center at www.IC3.gov

For more information on the psychology behind dating site scams, visit the Colorado Attorney General at <https://www.stopfraudcolorado.gov/fraud-center/common-scams/sweetheart-scams>