



FRAUD UPDATE FROM WEST MERCIA POLICE - ECONOMIC CRIME UNIT - 11/01/2022



Family members of online daters are being urged to help protect their relatives from becoming a victim of romance fraud, as new figures show almost **£92 million** has been lost through dating scams in 2021 alone. Victims from all age groups can be affected.

Daters who strike up online relationships between Christmas and Valentine's Day tend to be the most susceptible to romance fraud, with a spike of 901 reports recorded by the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB) in March 2021.

Despite a peak of romance fraud reports and losses of **£8.7 million** reported in March, the financial spike came two months later in May 2021 where losses of a staggering **£14.6 million** were reported.

Romance fraudsters will usually spend many weeks initially gaining the potential victim's trust. They will make up stories about themselves, their lives and where they live; they may send fake images of themselves. Money may not be mentioned to start with so the victim thinks this is a genuine relationship.

Then, in time, they will start asking for money using emotional stories and reasons such as funding travel to visit the victim, money to pay for emergency medical expenses, lucrative investment opportunities and pretending to be military personnel or working overseas.

How to help protect people you know are online dating

- Help your friends and family to ensure they have adequate privacy settings on their social media accounts to ensure strangers don't have access to their personal information.

- Stay in regular contact with your friends and family who are online dating to help spot any changes in behaviour or things that don't seem right.
- Make friends and family aware of the signs of romance fraud so that they are conscious of the tactics criminals use to carry out these scams and reiterate that you should never transfer money to someone that you have never met in person.
- Encourage people to report to Action Fraud and the police if they have become a victim of romance fraud and not to be embarrassed about doing so.

Take Five To Stop Fraud

- **Stop:** Taking a moment to stop and think before parting with your money or information could keep you safe.
- **Challenge:** Could it be fake? It's okay to reject, refuse or ignore any requests. Only criminals will try to rush or panic you.
- **Protect:** If you think you've been a victim of fraud, contact your bank immediately and report it to Action Fraud online at [actionfraud.police.uk](https://www.actionfraud.police.uk) or by calling 0300 123 2040.

SOURCE: ACTION FRAUD

For further information visit:

<https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/>

<https://takefive-stopfraud.org.uk/>