

SCAMS AWARENESS UPDATE

Older Persons Scams Awareness & Aftercare Project

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Soul mate or scammer?

Revisiting friendship and romance fraud, as scams continue to rise.

Last July, this bulletin focused on romance fraud. Since then, it's likely that a further £56 million has been lost to this cruel scam*.

Over the last year, our Scams Awareness & Aftercare Project has supported romance fraud victims in Cheshire East to come to terms with the emotional and practical impact of being duped by someone they thought they had struck up a friendship or relationship with.

Now, with their help, we go deeper into the issue of friendship and romance fraud, with top tips of how to spot, avoid and report it for yourself and for your loved ones.

As always, we also have information about current scams affecting residents in Cheshire East, and beyond.

If you are over 50 and affected by any of the issues raised in this month's bulletin, you can contact Sally Wilson, our Scams Awareness & Aftercare Project Manager, for help and support at sally.wilson@ageukce.org or on 01625 612958 / 07932 999902.

*Based on Action Fraud report of £68 million lost in 2020.

What is it?

Romance fraud is where people are duped into sending money to criminals who go to great lengths to gain their trust, and convince them that they are in a genuine relationship, whether it be for romance, friendship or companionship.

Who could fall for it?

ANYONE! Many people think they wouldn't fall for the scam, but scammers use language to manipulate, persuade and exploit you, so that requests for money do not raise alarm bells.

Where does it happen?

Most frauds of this type happen online. However, it can also happen on the phone or face-to-face. And it's not just dating sites. Social media, including any sites where people can chat (e.g. online game sites), are open to being exploited by befriending scammers.

When could it happen?

It could happen at any time of life. However, the average age of a victim is 50, and scammers target those who may be vulnerable through loneliness, relationship breakdown and bereavement.

There is a stigma around befriending and romance fraud, especially with older people. We can all help to remove this by:

- ✓ Embracing the fact that older people are still looking for love, friendship and company.
- ✓ Accepting that people are lonely or unhappy, so are vulnerable to these types of scams.
- ✓ Taking on board information on the next page, and sharing it openly with family and friends, to empower them to make safe decisions.

Please don't be embarrassed if you have been a victim of romance fraud. We would recommend you STOP all contact, REPORT it to Action Fraud and CONTACT your bank to get the support you need.

Many, many people find friendship, romance or their life partner by talking to people they've yet to meet face-to-face. However, just like stranger danger when we were children, it always pays to be cautious. If they really care, they'll understand.

Here are a few things to look out for to avoid being scammed:

Scammers:

May have a brilliant profile, with lots of impressive photos.

Sometimes say they are working off-shore or in the armed forces, so they can't phone or video message you.

Often ask lots of personal questions early on. This to see how vulnerable you may be to their scam.

May use generic language e.g. "Babe", "Love", as they are scamming many people at one time, or it's a team of scammers talking to you.

Will quickly ask you to move away from the site you met on, over to less monitored apps such as WhatsApp and Google Hangouts.

Will ask you for money. This could be for anything, but is often for a family emergency, shipping costs or taxes to release goods, tickets to visit you or investment opportunities.

Appear very plausible because the requests are made bit by bit.

May ask you to keep your friendship a secret, isolating you from friends and family.

You can:

Use technology such as [Google Reverse Image Search](#) or [Tineye](#) to see if photos have been stolen from another profile.

Ask the person to send a photo or video of them doing something that they can't use a stolen photo for e.g. putting their finger in their ear.

It's okay to refuse a request for any information.

Ask the person to use your name each time you talk.

Stay on the original site to talk to people until you have met them in person.

NEVER send money to, or share bank details with, someone you've never met in person, regardless of the reason they give or how they make you feel guilty.

Look back at conversations over time to get the real picture of how requests have built over time.

Tell someone about who you're talking to online.



How do they operate?

Here's our monthly round-up of current scams to watch out for:

Doorstep scam in Bollington



We've had reports of a man approaching an older person's home asking to read the gas and electricity meters, despite the resident having a Smart Meter.

It's important to report suspicious activity in your area to the Police by calling 101, as this could save others in your area from being scammed.

You can also contact your utility company to join their priority services register, to set up a password for future visits, and other security benefits.

Another possible Census scam



Although Census activity is winding down, there is still potential for scammers to take advantage.

You should no longer be approached by a Field Officer to encourage you to complete the Census, as this work has finished.

This month, you *may* be contacted to take part in the Census Coverage Survey. For this, people will be contacted by post, followed by a phone call or doorstep visit. The Field Officer will never ask to enter your home or ask for financial details.

Anything else may be a scam.

Fake British Gas refund emails



Action Fraud is warning about fake emails pretending to be from British Gas, offering a refund for overpayment.

The link in the email lead to a genuine looking, but fake, website designed to

steal personal and financial information.

Official organisations won't ask you to share such information over email or text, so it's a scam.

Lifeline alarm service phone scam



Cheshire East Council Trading Standards have been made aware of a local resident who received a call from an 0800 number, stating their Lifeline alarm service needed updating. They were asked to set up a new Direct Debit and they'd get new equipment.

It's best to contact the provider independently before making changes. Just because the caller seems to know you, it doesn't mean you know them. Try to stay in control of the call and don't be pressured into making a decision over the phone.

COMING NEXT TIME...

- Current scams
- Scams awareness fortnight

Though we don't like to see you leave, you can unsubscribe from these bulletins by emailing sally.wilson@ageukce.org

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