



Sweetheart Scams Cost Victims More Than a Broken Heart

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MADISON – In 2017, many eligible bachelors and bachelorettes are swiping, tapping and clicking their way to love. If you intend to look online for your valentine, be mindful that scammers are also on those sites looking for you and your pocketbook. Watch out for the signs of a “sweetheart scam.”

“Many people have found a partner through the internet, but many others have been burned by rip-off artists who use their emotions against them,” said Frank Frassetto, Division Administrator for Trade and Consumer Protection. “If you use an online dating site or app, research any warnings about the service and watch out for requests for cash or sensitive personal or financial information from your new acquaintance.”

According to the FBI, all ages and demographics are at risk of sweetheart scams, but the most common targets are divorced, widowed or disabled women over the age of 40. Scammers may contact potential victims through online dating services, online ad services like Craigslist or social media platforms like Facebook.

After building the trust of the victim over a number of exchanges, they ask the victim to send them money for travel expenses, legal help, medical bills or any number of other issues. Requests for payments don’t end until the victim runs out of money or grows suspicious of the relationship.

Another potential risk from these relationships is extortion. Scammers ask their victims to move the conversation from a trusted dating site to another online location where the talk turns intimate. Photos and personal information shared in these exchanges is then posted to a public “cheaters” website. Victims are told they can pay to have this information taken down, but there is no guarantee that this bargain will be upheld.

It is possible that you are being targeted for a sweetheart scam if your online love interest:

- Claims to be from the United States but is currently “traveling,” “deployed with the military,” or “working overseas”
- Professes love for you almost instantly
- Asks you to leave the dating site and communicate by personal email or instant messages
- Requests that you send personal information including Social Security, bank account or credit card numbers
- Asks you to cash checks for him/her
- Makes excuses for not meeting in person, such as last-minute financial, medical or family emergencies
- Asks you to send money by wire transfer. Never wire money to someone you do not know or have not met in person. Wiring money is like sending cash – once it is gone, you cannot get it back.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at datcp.wisconsin.gov, call the Consumer Protection Hotline at 800-422-7128 or send an e-mail to datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov.

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