



Thousands of internet users fall victim to online romance scams each year. Unfortunately, scammers are out to steal your money, not your heart. In a recent survey, romance scams ranked first in total reported financial losses. These scams can be incredibly convincing and they are increasingly being uncovered by users on dating websites and social media platforms.

By appealing to a victim's emotions and feigning personal connections, scammers try to steal large sums of money and personal information. Once these fraudsters have people by the heartstrings, they will say they need money for a medical emergency or some other misfortune. They may claim to be in the military and stationed abroad, to explain why they can't meet in person. Pretending to need help with travel costs for a long-awaited visit is another common ruse.

What can you do to play it safe while visiting online dating sites? Here are some tips to help you spot a bogus suitor:

- Look out for someone who professes love quickly.
- Never send money or gifts to a potential suitor you haven't met in person.
- Talk to someone you trust about this new love interest. The excitement about what feels like a new relationship can blind you to things that don't add up. Pay attention if your friends or family are concerned.
- Take it slowly. Ask questions and look for inconsistent answers. Try a reverse-image search of the profile pictures. If they're associated with another name or with details that don't match up, it's a scam.
- Help stop these scammers by reporting suspicious profiles or messages to the dating or social media site.
- Report the scam to the FTC at [reportfraud.ftc.gov](https://reportfraud.ftc.gov)

Contact the Howard County Office of Consumer Protection at 410-313-6420 or [consumer@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:consumer@howardcountymd.gov) for more information on how to protect yourself from scams and how to stay safe in the marketplace.