

Avoid romance scams

Valentine's Day and other opportunities for romance can be exciting, but they can also lead to heartbreak, embarrassment, and financial loss if you're not careful.

Criminals search dating sites, apps, chat rooms, and other social media networking sites attempting to build "relationships" for the sole purpose of getting your money or your personal information.

Romance scams, also called confidence fraud, affected 114 victims in N.M. in 2019 resulting in a loss of more than $1.6 million, according to the FBI's Internet Crimes Complaint Center.

To avoid becoming a victim, the FBI Albuquerque Division recommends the following:

Only use reputable, nationally-recognized dating websites; however, be aware that scammers may be using them. too.

Research photos and profiles in other online search tools and ask questions.

Never provide your financial information, loan money, or allow your bank accounts to be used for transfers of funds.

Do not allow attempts to isolate you from family and friends.

Do not blindly believe the stories of severe life circumstances, tragedies, family deaths, injuries, or other hardships geared at keeping your interest and concern.

If you are planning to meet someone you have met online in person, meet in a public place and let someone know where you will be and what time you should return home.

If you are traveling to a foreign country to meet someone, check the State Department's Travel Advisories beforehand at travel.state.gov, provide your itinerary to family and friends, and do not travel alone, if possible.

Victims may be hesitant to report being taken advantage of due to embarrassment, shame, or humiliation. It's important to remember, romance scams can happen to anyone, at any time.

If you suspect your online relationship is a scam, cease all contact immediately.

If you are a victim who has already sent money, immediately report the incident to your financial institution, file a complaint with the Internet Crimes Complaint Center at ic3.gov, and contact law enforcement.

Staff Reports