

# ALERTS

## TRADING STANDARDS

### 18/02/2026

## Romance fraudsters stole £119.6m in 2025

Know the five signs you are dating a romance scammer

### **1. An entirely online relationship**

Meeting someone online is normal. What's not, however, is the relationship existing entirely online and you never meeting up with them in person, not even via a video call.

This should raise a red flag, especially if a significant amount of time has passed. Romance fraudsters typically use stolen images of real people, or increasingly, AI-generated images to pretend to be someone they're not, so this should be treated with suspicion.

### **2. Using stolen images**

Fraudsters carry out romance scams by creating fake personas, and part of that persona involves images of real or fake people.

Previous research found victims whose pictures had been used countless times in romance scams to lure in other unsuspecting victims.

With AI scams on the rise, scammers are also generating entirely fake images of people to use in their schemes.

You can use Google image search to trace images of people to other places on the internet, or a tool like [TinEye](#) – just upload the screenshot and see if the image belongs to someone else.

### **3. Overly dramatic stories**

Anyone that you're speaking to online who always has something devastating happen to them – from losing access to their bank account to experiencing several bereavements to having their home burgled – should raise alarm bells.

During the grooming process, fraudsters will attempt to elicit empathy from you by telling you sob stories to extract money from you at a later date.

This is also done to build an emotional connection with you, making you more likely to provide financial help when they ask.

### **4. Offering investment opportunities**

Once they've earned your trust, the scammer may change the conversation using claims that they can help you make easy money through exclusive trading offers or investment opportunities.

### **5. Asking for money or gifts**

This is typically the end result of the scam. Eventually, when the scammer has you convinced that you're in a real romantic relationship, they'll use one of their stories to persuade you to part with your money.

Sometimes, fraudsters will ask you for several amounts of money over time under the guise of various fake scenarios.

Alternatively, the scammer may ask you to move money for them by using your bank account to transfer money into and then out of again. This is a form of money laundering where a scammer uses 'money mules' to move illicit cash.

## What to do if you've been targeted by a romance scammer

If you think you could be speaking to a romance scammer on a dating app or a social media website, you should report the profile to the platform using its in-app reporting tools.

You may find you need impartial support too, both [Mind](#) and [Victim Support](#) offer support services for those affected by these crimes.

### WHERE TO REPORT

**Protect others by reporting incidents like this.**

**Report suspicious texts** you have received but not acted upon, by forwarding the original message to 7726, which spells SPAM on your keypad.

**Report suspicious emails** you have received but not acted upon, by forwarding the original message to [report@phishing.gov.uk](mailto:report@phishing.gov.uk)

**If you, or anyone you know, have been affected by this fraud or any other scam, report it to Report Fraud by calling 0300 123 2040 or visiting [www.reportfraud.police.uk](http://www.reportfraud.police.uk)**

[tradingstandards@royalgreenwich.gov.uk](mailto:tradingstandards@royalgreenwich.gov.uk)