Be Smart When Looking For Love Online

Scammers are creating fake online dating profiles to target people looking to start relationships and eventually try to convince victims to send money.

How does this scam work?
Scammers use online dating sites, which are used by millions of Americans, to scout potential victims. The criminals create fake profiles and build fake relationships with victims with the intent to eventually ask for money.

The scammers typically ask for money to be sent in ways that are not easily traced, such as wire transfers, gift cards, cash-reload cards and cash.

There are some signs to look for when getting to know someone online. Scammers typically profess their love quickly, claim to be from the U.S. but overseas for business or military service, ask for money, try to lure victims off the dating site, claim the money is for emergencies — commonly medical bills or travel expenses — and say they plan to visit the victim but can't because of an emergency.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, reports of this type of scam to the FBI tripled between 2012 and 2016. People reportedly lost $220 million in 2016 to online dating scammers.

What if I'm a victim?
Contact your bank right away if you think you've sent money to a scammer. Report the incident to the online dating site on which the interaction took place, and always report all scams and fraud to your local law enforcement agency's non-emergency number. If you believe someone is in danger, call 911. Report all scams and financial abuse to the state attorney general, and file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission at ftc.gov/complaint.

Visit the National Association of Attorneys General website for the contact information of your state attorney general. Also, contact the FBI at ic3.gov.

What can I do to protect myself?
An online love interest who asks for money is almost always a scammer, according to the FTC. First of all, take any potential online relationship slowly. Scammers will try to rush you. Most importantly, never wire money, put money on a gift or cash-reload card or send cash to an online love interest. You will not get it back.