

Don't Let Grandparent Scam Happen to You



The Grandparent Scam Don't Let It Happen to You

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You're a grandparent, and you get a phone call or an e-mail from someone who identifies himself as your grandson. "I've been arrested in another country," he says, "and need money wired quickly to pay my bail. And oh by the way, don't tell my mom or dad because they'll only get upset!" This is an example of what's come to be known as "the grandparent scam"—[yet another fraud that preys on the elderly](#), this time by taking advantage of their love and concern for their grandchildren. **The grandparent scam has been around for a few years**—our Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) has been receiving reports about it since 2008. But the scam and scam artists have become more sophisticated. Thanks to the Internet and social networking sites, a criminal can sometimes uncover personal information about their targets, which makes the impersonations more believable. For example, the actual grandson may mention on his social networking site that he's a photographer who often travels to Mexico. When contacting the grandparents, the phony grandson will say he's calling from Mexico, where someone stole his camera equipment and passport. Common scenarios include:

- A grandparent receives a phone call (or sometimes an e-mail) from a "grandchild." If it is a phone call, it's often late at night or early in the morning when most people aren't thinking that clearly. Usually, the person claims to be traveling in a foreign country and has gotten into a bad situation, like being arrested for drugs, getting in a car accident, or being mugged...and needs money wired ASAP. And the caller doesn't want his or her parents told.
- Sometimes, instead of the "grandchild" making the phone call, the criminal pretends to be an arresting police officer, a lawyer, a doctor at a hospital, or some other person. And we've also received complaints about the phony grandchild talking first and then handing the phone over to an accomplice...to further spin the fake tale.

- We've also seen military families victimized: after perusing a soldier's social networking site, a con artist will contact the soldier's grandparents, sometimes claiming that a problem came up during military leave that requires money to address.
- While it's commonly called the grandparent scam, criminals may also claim to be a family friend, a niece or nephew, or another family member.

What to do if you have been scammed. The financial losses in these cases—while they can be substantial for an individual, usually several thousand dollars per victim—typically don't meet the FBI's financial thresholds for opening an investigation. We recommend contacting your local authorities or state consumer protection agency if you think you've been victimized. We also suggest you file a complaint with IC3, which not only forwards complaints to the appropriate agencies, but also collates and analyzes the data—looking for common threads that link complaints and help identify the culprits. And, our advice to avoid being victimized in the first place:

- Resist the pressure to act quickly.
- Try to contact your grandchild or another family member to determine whether or not the call is legitimate.
- Never wire money based on a request made over the phone or in an e-mail...especially overseas. Wiring money is like giving cash—once you send it, you can't get it back.