



## Romance Fraud in Kent

Finding love and friendship online is increasingly popular. It can be highly enjoyable however, meeting new people this way does come with its own set of risks. One of the most concerning is romance fraud, which not only creates great emotional pain but can also lead to significant financial losses.

In 2023 Victim Support had contact with 140 victims of romance fraud in Kent, however we believe the real number of people affected is much higher than statistics suggest, as so few victims tell anyone.

### What is Romance Fraud?

A romance scam is an insidious confidence trick. Fraudsters create fake profiles on dating sites or social media to establish a relationship with someone, with the aim of taking their money.

Being targeted by a romance fraudster does not mean a victim is gullible or naïve. Such scams are prolific and increasingly run by criminal organisations, practiced experts at psychological manipulation. Fraudsters typically spend weeks or months establishing what appears to be a genuine, caring relationship. Eventually, they begin to ask for money or personal information under various pretexts, such as medical emergencies or financial troubles.

By the time the victim realises they have been scammed, they may have lost significant amounts of money. British victims of romance fraud lost over £92 million in 2023, with an average loss of £11,500 each.

### Common Signs of Romance Scams

Here at Victim Support Kent, we have seen first-hand the devastating impact that fraud can have on people's lives. As we acknowledge **World Romance Scam Prevention Day** on October 3rd, we feel it's crucial to stay informed and learn how to protect ourselves when meeting new people online. Here are a few tips:

1. **Be sceptical of online relationships:** If you haven't met the person in real life, be cautious. Watch out for elaborate backstories, early professions of love and excuses for never meeting up in person.
2. **Never send money:** Fraudsters may ask for money for an "emergency" or a supposed opportunity in bitcoin or other investment. No matter how convincing the story, never send money to someone you haven't met in person.
3. **Keep personal information private:** Avoid sharing sensitive personal information like your address or financial details. Romance scammers use this information to commit identity fraud or sell on to other criminals.
4. **Stay connected with friends and family:** Plenty of us date online these days and a trusted friend or family member can offer another perspective on your online relationship. Scammers know this and deliberately isolate their victims from their support networks, so staying connected is crucial.

Romance fraudsters target anybody seeking love and companionship online. However, by staying informed and vigilant, we can protect ourselves and others from falling victim whilst still meeting new people and having fun online.

This **World Romance Scam Prevention Day**, please take the time to educate yourself and your loved ones about the dangers of romance fraud and the steps you can take to protect yourself. Lastly, if something feels too good to be true, it probably is. Trust your instincts, and always seek support if you need it.

## CONTACT

If you or someone you know has been affected by romance fraud, please do not hesitate to reach out for support. You are not alone, and there are resources available to help.

The **Fraud Peer Support Pilot Service** at **Victim Support** offers tailored support to victims of relationship fraud throughout Kent, providing one-to-one casework, a group work programme and peer support sessions. Working closely with Kent Police and other partners, the aim is to disrupt the actions of fraudsters and reduce the risk of re-victimisation.

Victim Support Kent Fraud Peer Support Pilot Service

For more information or support, please contact The Fraud Peer Support Pilot service on 0303 313 2955

[www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)