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Contact Kylie Mason

Phone 850-245-0150



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STATE OF FLORIDA

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VIDEO CONSUMER ALERT: Romance Scams Skyrocket as Dating Site Usage Increases through Pandemic



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody is warning Floridians looking online for companionship to watch out for potential romance scams that are targeting the surge in dating app users since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although some safety measures are taken by the most popular dating apps, scammers still lurk behind imposter or so-called catfish profiles, hoping to make money off unsuspecting users. Attorney General Moody recommends Floridians stay informed about how to recognize a potential catfish account and stick to dating apps with safety measures in place.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "It is pitiful that scammers prey on people searching for companionship—exploiting their emotions all in an effort to steal their money. Be wary this Valentine's Day, or anytime you are interacting with someone online, to make sure that the person you are talking to is actually who they say they are and not a scammer."

Reports by Statista show that in 2020, there were an estimated [44.2 million users](#) of online dating services in the United States—[26.6 million](#) of whom were on smartphone dating apps. The [Federal Trade Commission reports](#) that the 2021 losses to romance scams were more than half a billion dollars and the prevalence of romance scammers increased nearly 80% compared to 2020.

Once a scammer successfully gains a victim's trust, they begin laying traps to access personal or financial information. Victims will be pressured to send anything from cash transfers to gift cards, reloadable debit cards and cryptocurrency, or to invest in fraudulent investments or ship

valuable items like laptops and cellphones to the scammer.

Dating sites boast a variety of safety features taken to prevent scammers and traffickers from abusing their services. Below is a chart that shows which of the most popular dating apps hold specific safety features:

	PHOTO VERIFICATION	PANIC BUTTON	SAFETY RESOURCE CENTER	VIDEO CHAT	BACKGROUND CHECK
BUMBLE	✓		✓	✓	
CHRISTIAN CAFE			✓	✓	
EARMONY	✓		✓	✓	✓
GRINDR	✓		✓	✓	
HINGE	✓		✓	✓	
MATCH	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
PLENTY OF FISH	✓	✓	✓	✓	
TINDER	✓	✓	✓	✓	
ZOOK	✓		✓	✓	

**Information aggregated from dating websites and reviews.*

Photo Verification: Photos are verified as legitimate through the dating site company, often providing users with a logo of verification viewable by other users.

Panic Button: A button that allows a user to immediately send a message to an emergency contact or directly to the police if a situation seems to be suspicious or dangerous.

Safety Resource Center: A resource page containing information on how to stay safe while engaging in online relationships.

Video Chat/Voice Call: In-app video chat features that allow a user to verify someone's identity without being lured into talking on another site with fewer security measures.

Background Check: Full background checks conducted by the dating-site company.

Common red flags of potential catfish profiles used by romance scammers include:

- Attempting to establish a bond very quickly, even proposing marriage not long into a relationship;
- Trying to quickly move the conversation to a direct-messaging app;

- Forming stories about financial needs for desperate situations, guilt-tripping new matches for assistance;
- Asking a match personal questions, but avoiding answering similar questions about themselves;
- Encouraging the victim to keep the relationship a secret;
- Forgetting important details—since scammers sometimes target multiple victims, important relationship details are often forgotten; and
- Refusing to meet in person, talk on the phone or engage in video chat conversations.

Avoid falling victim to romance scams by following these tips:

- Consider making social media accounts private and be wary of direct-message requests from unknown users;
- Only talk with verified users on dating apps;
- Never send money to unknown people online;
- Research matches by checking social media profiles, googling the portrayed name and using a reverse image search on the photo;
- Ask detailed questions and pay attention to see if answers seem suspicious or refute previous information provided;
- Offer to video chat or meet in person, preferably somewhere in public surrounded by people to be safe;
- Ask a friend or family member for advice about a potential relationship, often another pair of eyes can see through deceit;
- Avoid sending private photos or videos to others as they may be used for extortion purposes; and
- Report suspicious or fraudulent activity to dating site administrators to help prevent others from being victimized.

For more information about romance scams, view Attorney General Moody's *Scams at a Glance: Swindling Sweethearts* brochure by clicking [here](#).

To view Attorney General Moody's *Scams at a Glance: Swindling Sweethearts* brochure in Spanish, click [here](#).

To report romance scams, contact the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Internet Crime Complaint Center [here](#) or visit the Federal Trade Commission's Report Fraud website [here](#).