

LIZ AND DAVID TELL YOU ABOUT ROMANCE SCAMS



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Keeping You Safe In Cyberspace

BY:
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INTRODUCTION

In this digital playground where connections are just a click away, it's all too easy to tumble down the rabbit hole of online romances. But amidst the emojis, DMs, and heart reacts, there lurks a shadowy side we need to talk about: romance scams.

You've probably heard stories or seen memes about people getting catfished. It's no joke. With a mix of fake profiles and sweet talk, some folks out there are tricking teenagers into scams that can lead to heartache and empty wallets.

As savvy as you are, it's important to stay a step ahead and recognize when Cupid's arrow might just be a scammer in disguise. I am here to shed light on the nitty-gritty of romance scams - *how they happen, what to look out for, and how to protect that beautiful, beating heart of yours* (and your bank account, TBH).

So, whether you're swiping right, sliding into DMs, or striking up a convo in your favorite game's chat - let's get

armed with knowledge. Stay tuned, stay smart, and let's keep that online love story legit.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Table of Contents	4
Phantoms of the Heart	6
What is a Romance Scam?	8
How They Do It	11
Staying Safe in the Quest for Love	13
Advice from Liz and David	15

PHANTOMS OF THE HEART

In today's world, where lots of us find friends and sometimes love online, two teens named Liz and David got caught up in a messy deal: they fell for scam artists pretending to be sweethearts on the internet. Imagine this: you're just chilling, swiping through profiles on a gaming site, and someone cool catches your eye. That's what happened to Liz with 'StrikerDave,' and at the same time, David hit it off with someone named 'PerfectHeart.'

Before they knew it, Liz and David were chatting with these mystery gamers every day and night, getting super close—or at least, that's what it felt like. They shared all their secret hopes and fears, thinking they were safe behind their computer screens. They waited for those happy little "ping" sounds, thinking each new message was from someone who really got them.

But soon, things got sketchy. 'StrikerDave' kept avoiding meet-ups with Liz and always had a sad story about needing money. And David's online crush, 'PerfectHeart,' suddenly needed cash to get back from a trip. Both Liz and David wanted to help because they thought they were in love, so they sent money without really thinking it through.

Alarm bells went off, though. Liz and David told their real-life buddies what was going on and—whoa—turns out they might not be chatting with who they thought they were. Their friends helped them see the truth, and man, it was rough. These so-called online lovers were fakes—catfishers using fake stories to get money.

Here's the twist: when Liz and David went to get help from the police, they bumped into each other at a group for teens who'd been tricked the same way. They clicked straight away because they knew exactly what the other one was going through. They started hanging out more, helping each other heal and, bam! A true friendship bloomed right then and there.

They decided to team up and help other teens spot these fake romances before they go too far. They're like, "Keep it real and slow things down online. Watch out if someone you've never met face-to-face asks for money or seems too good to be true."

Liz and David learned the hard way that real connections happen face-to-face, not just by liking photos or sending emojis. Sure, they got hurt, but they also made a lifelong friend—and learned to keep their hearts safe by sharing them with real people, not just faces on a screen.

WHAT IS A ROMANCE SCAM?

At its heart, a romance scam is when someone pretends to be in love by creating a fake profile on places like dating apps, social media, or online chats. They're really trying to trick someone into thinking they're in a real relationship.

As this fake relationship goes on, the scammer starts telling all these stories about how much they care and trust the person, making it all seem super real. But it's all just a trick to get someone to let their guard down. If that happens, the person could end up losing a lot of money or getting really hurt emotionally.

The Anatomy of a Scam

All those tales about people getting tricked by fake romances have their own twist, but they usually roll out in pretty much the same way. To start with, the con artist spends a bunch of time making the other person feel like there's something real going on. They're super good at paying attention, and they use what they learn about the other person's soft spots to reel them in.

Creating a Convincing Profile:

Fraudsters can get really creative when they make fake profiles on social media or dating sites. They often use cool looking photos they've nabbed from someone else online and come up with really convincing life stories. It's like they've got a bunch of hobbies and beliefs that look just right for you, making you think you've hit the jackpot of friendships or romance. They've probably been checking you out on your social media, picking up what you're interested in and what you're all about, so they can say just the right things and be "Your Perfect Match".

Fast-Paced Relationships:

The con artist often professes strong feelings in a surprisingly short time, accelerating the pace of the 'relationship' to build a phony bond of closeness and reliability. This can be especially enticing to teens, who are on the lookout for friendship and love.

Isolation Tactics:

A scammer might tell you to keep your friendship just between the two of you, making you think it's our little secret. They do this so that no one gets suspicious, and to stop your family or friends from realizing they're actually tricking you. It's like they're trying to keep you all to

themselves, so there's no one to warn you that something's off.

HOW THEY DO IT

- 1. Emergencies and Hard-luck Stories:** Beware: A scammer might try to trick you into keeping your chats under wraps, away from the eyes of your family and buddies. Why? To keep you all to themselves so nobody can warn you that something's fishy. It's like their sneaky move to play the game without getting caught. Stay alert and always share if something feels off!
- 2. Requests for Money:** A person trying to scam you might try to convince you to not tell anyone about your conversations or interactions, especially your family and pals. They do this shady move so no one gets suspicious and stops them from tricking you. Always remember, keeping secrets from the people who care about you might not be such a good idea if someone is pressuring you to do it.
- 3. Inability to Meet in Person:** Scammers come up with stories about why they can't meet up with you. They might tell you they're on a job far away, like overseas military duty or even tackling some big emergency that means they can't be around. They often pretend to have jobs or situations that mean they have to stay far away - think soldiers on duty in other countries or someone working on a giant oil

rig in the middle of the ocean. They use these excuses to sound legit and make it seem okay that they can't hang out, even though they talk about wanting to get together someday. Be careful, because that someday might never come with these kinds of excuses.

4. The Money (Your Money) :

As online friendships grow stronger, so does the chance of getting tricked into losing your money. Here's how it usually goes down: the person you've been chatting with online suddenly tells you about a big money problem they have - it could be their cash got stuck in a bank, a deal they had going fell apart, or they've got a serious health issue and no way to pay for it. Then, they hit you up for money, playing on all those good vibes and connections you've built chatting and sharing with them.

Typically, as soon as someone tricking you gets their hands on your cash or bank details, they take off. They'll go silent, ditch their account, and you're left wondering what happened, out of pocket and bummed out.

STAYING SAFE IN THE QUEST FOR LOVE

When diving into the sea of online dating or just making buddies on the web, it's super important to be on your guard to keep your heart and your piggy bank safe from sneaky romance scammers. Here's the 411 on how to stay secure:

- Keep your personal information private. Never share sensitive details like your home address, bank details, or Social Security number with someone you haven't met in person. Be careful of what you put out there on your social media accounts. Remember the scammer is looking for information about how to create your perfect match.
- Take things slow. If someone seems to be moving too quickly or pushing for a serious relationship without meeting, it could be cause for concern.
- Verify identities. Execute reverse image searches on profile pictures to see if they appear elsewhere on the internet or belong to another person.

- Seek advice from friends or family. Sometimes, external perspectives can spot inconsistencies and potential red flags that you might miss.
- Never send money to someone you haven't met in person, no matter how compelling the story.
- Stay informed about the latest tactics used by scammers. Knowledge is one of the best defenses against fraud.

Understanding and recognizing the stages and tactics involved in romance scams is critical in protecting yourself from becoming a victim. As a teenager active on social media and dating platforms, always approach interactions with caution, keep communication transparent, and never hesitate to question anything that feels suspicious.

Remember, if something seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Stay safe and think critically about who you trust online.

ADVICE FROM LIZ AND DAVID

To all of you out there who've been duped by an online crush scam—first off, it totally stinks to feel tricked and let down. But get this: you're tougher than you think, and bouncing back is totally in your wheelhouse. If you find yourself in this mess, it's super important to talk to the cops and give your bank a heads up. Plus, don't try to deal with this solo. Chat with a counselor, find a support crew, or just vent to your friends.

Healing vibes don't come overnight, but knowing the score about these romance-fraudsters is step number one to looking out for yourself and your friends. Getting smart about their sneaky moves? That's like strapping on armor for your heart.

Let's wrap this up with a shout-out to keep our heads sharp and our eyes peeled when we're swiping right or DM-ing someone cute. Being on alert means we don't have to let the shady side of the net ruin the real deal: seriously epic connections.

Stay wise to stay safe.



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