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How to spot them

Most scammers aren't geniuses. Here are some clues that they may not be genuine:

- They claim to have blonde hair and blue eyes when the picture is dark hair and brown eyes or vice versa.
- They immediately want to get off the website and on to instant messaging.
- They consistently use webspeak or abbreviations such as u, r, ur, cos and pls.
- They immediately start using pet names with you.
- They often misspell the cities or towns they claim

they are from and are unfamiliar with any of the local landmarks and attractions.

- If you ask them a question they don't know, they will be offline for a while. They go and look up the answer then claim they had a phone call or had to go to the bathroom.
- They claim it was destiny or fate and you are meant to be together or God brought you to him/her.
- Many of them claim to have lost a spouse/child/parent in a horrific car or aeroplane accident.

From www.romancescams.org



Body Matters

Edited by Lisa Scott bodymatters@ukmetro.co.uk

The cost of

Online dating scams: You could be one click away from being a victim of heartless internet fraud BY LISA SCOTT

After months of chatting online to potential suitors Jessica finally met someone she could see a future with. Tall, dark and intelligent, 44-year-old Mark promised he would fly to London where they would start a new life together – he just had to finish building an orphanage in West Africa first. On top of his very attractive credentials, Mark, originally from Ohio in America, was clearly a good Samaritan. So when he told Jessica about a sick child who needed £1,500 for urgent medical treatment, she wired it over immediately.

'Then he contacted me again and said the child was going to die unless they got another £1,500. I didn't want her death on my conscience so I sent the rest over,' she explains. They continued an intense affair, which involved online conversations – sometimes lasting up to six hours – plus phone calls and regular text messages. But three months after Jessica sent the second instalment, she realised the person she had spoken to candidly about love and sex was actually a gang of Nigerian men who were after her cash. According to the Office of Fair Trading, these scams are rife and on

I can see it now but I just didn't suspect it at the time

the rise, with Britain losing an estimated £3.5 billion per year to them.

According to Barb Sluppick, head of the support group romancescams.org, these gangs typically work on different levels. The most basic involves sending out thousands of winks, hugs and e-mails to men and women on dating and social networking sites. If they get a positive response they pass that person on to another scammer who works from scripts. When they have finished their shift, the next person steps into their role.

Alarm bells started ringing for Jessica when Mark avoided all talk of his life back in the US. 'He said he owned property in Ohio and New York, so I looked for him on a public US website and he didn't come up,' explains the 40-year-old finance expert. On a separate occasion, she even received a text from him which was clearly sent by mistake. It read: 'Tell her we are trying to get online and the connection is slow. Say you just want to talk to her on the phone.' But love is blind, right? 'I can see it now but just didn't suspect it at the time. His voice sounded American but I guess he learned English from an American teacher, hence the accent,' she says.



According to experts, there are standard clues that indicate you are dealing with a scammer. They tend to include the use of 'i' not 'I' and the spelling is generally pretty dreadful. In some cases, if you try to end the affair, they will even blackmail you. 'The victim is often requested to show themselves on webcam,' says Sluppick. 'When a victim performs

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