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# Opinions

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## Consumer alert: NYS DCP offers grandparents tips to avoid ever-evolving grandparent scam

### Grandparent scam hallmarks: involvement of a family member, immediate need for money, and a request for secrecy

Submitted by the New York State Division of Consumer Protection

In recognition of Grandparents Day, the New York State Department of State's Division of Consumer Protection (DCP) calls attention to scams targeting grandparents. This date is dedicated to honor grandparents and to appreciate their unique roles in our lives. To celebrate this special day, DCP wants to empower grandparents to outsmart scammers who prey on family bonds. With the common grandparent scam, criminals impersonate someone trying to help a loved one so they can trick them into sending money.

"The grandparent scam has been around for years, but criminals are getting bolder by even showing up at an individual's home. It's one of the top scams targeting older consumers," Secretary of State Robert Rodriguez said. "Criminals orchestrating this fraud use clever schemes and add new twists to this old trick. They systematically target older consumers and exploit the special relationship grandparents have with their grandchildren. Many of these schemes go unreported, so it's important to raise awareness to

help prevent these scams."

New York State Police Superintendent Kevin P. Bruen said, "We urge all New Yorkers to take caution if they receive a call or text from someone claiming to be a loved one in urgent need of help and asking for money. Even if a scenario seems valid, do not provide any financial or personal information without confirmation. The State Police takes scams of any type seriously, and those that take advantage of the elderly or vulnerable will be held accountable."

New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) Acting Director Greg Olsen said, "So-called grandparent scams have increased substantially during the pandemic, exploiting trusted family relationships to target older adults. In fact, financial exploitation ranks highest as the most common form of elder abuse. Be vigilant and know the signs of a potential scam. If someone calls you claiming that a child or grandchild is in trouble, don't act purely on second-hand information. Confirm any incidents directly with a loved one and contact the police or other trusted authorities to verify."

Multiple grandparent scam scenarios have been reported and the number of reported incidents continues to increase. In 2021, the Federal Trade Commission received over 12,700 complaints from people ages 60 and older about scammers claiming to be family members or friends in trouble to trick people in providing money. These reports added up to \$23.8 million in total losses.

#### Common Elements of a Grandparents Scam

√ **Impersonation of Family** – Scammers exploit grandparents' love by pretending to be a grandchild or relative in need of emergency cash. This scam starts with a call or text from a fraudster posing as a panicked grandchild or family member who is in trouble and requires immediate financial assistance. In some scam scenarios, the scammer impersonates an arresting police officer, a lawyer or a doctor, who is calling on behalf of the relative in trouble.

√ **Urgent and Immediate Need for Money** – To create a sense of urgency, the caller may claim to be hospitalized, in jail or stuck in a foreign country. In all cases, the scammers ask that money be sent immediately. Scammers often try to pressure victims into transferring money through a mobile payment app, by wiring money, or by purchasing gift cards or money orders. A new variation of this con has surfaced recently where the scammer pressures victims to put money in an envelope to be picked up at their house by a courier. Several incidents of courier pickups have been reported throughout New York state over the past year.

√ **Insistence on Secrecy** – The caller insists that parents or other family members not be informed. The scammer may claim

there is no time to speak to others, or that the grandchild will be embarrassed if other family members know about the situation. The scam artists know that, once you contact another family member, you will likely discover the scam.

#### How To Avoid the Ever-Evolving Grandparent Scam

√ Resist the urge to act immediately, no matter how dramatic the story.

√ Don't engage with the caller or reply to the text. Contact the grandchild or family member directly to confirm the story.

√ Don't give your address, personal information, or cash to anyone who contacts you. Scammers will likely ask you to send them a gift card, wire money, or offer to pick up cash at your home. They prefer these methods because they are difficult to trace.

√ Check your social media privacy settings since most social media is public by default, and be careful of what information you put online. Social media is an easy place for scammers to find personal information they can use to prey on the fears of grandparents.

√ To learn more about scams targeting older consumers, please see these tips to learn more about how to protect against fraud targeting seniors.

The New York State Division of Consumer Protection provides resources and education materials to consumers on product safety, as well as voluntary mediation services between consumers and businesses. The consumer assistance helpline 1-800-697-1220 is available from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays, excluding state holidays. Consumer complaints can be filed at any time at [www.dos.ny.gov/consumer-protection](http://www.dos.ny.gov/consumer-protection).

For more consumer protection tips, follow the DCP on social media on Twitter @NYSConsumer or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/nysconsumer](http://www.facebook.com/nysconsumer).

*"I cannot lead you into battle. I do not give you laws or administer justice but I can do something else. I can give you my heart and my devotion to these old islands and to all the peoples of our brotherhood of nations."*

Queen Elizabeth II  
1926-2022



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