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Many older people are losing shocking amounts of money in this phone scam

Use these tips to protect yourself and your loved ones

[Beth Braverman](https://considerable.com/contributor/beth-braverman/) | 1 week ago

Your beloved niece calls in the middle of the night, saying she's been in a car accident and needs cash to pay for the repair.

Or your boss asks you to send a holiday present to a handful of staffers on his behalf and tells you he'll reimburse you next week.

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People of all ages have fallen victim to the scam, losing a median of about [money-](https://considerable.com/new-medicare-card-fraud/) \$2,000, but, troublingly, those over age 70 were likely to lose higher amounts. [six-](https://considerable.com/new-medicare-card-fraud/)

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These are just a couple of variations of a type of scam, known as imposter [that-help-](https://considerable.com/new-medicare-card-fraud/) scams, that the Federal Trade Commission says cost consumer \$41 million last [you-help-](https://considerable.com/new-medicare-card-fraud/) year—an increase of nearly 60% over the previous year. [them/\)](https://considerable.com/new-medicare-card-fraud/)

Older people who fell for the scam—also known as the Grandparents Scam, because the scammers often call pretending to be a grandchild, usually in some kind of legal trouble—more more likely to send cash, and those who did sent a median of \$9,000.

The following tips can help protect you and your loved ones.

Confirm the story

Hearing that a family member is in a perilous situation can cause emotions to run high, which might prevent you from asking logical questions. But if they ask you not to tell anyone else about it or want to remain on the phone with you while you make arrangements to send money, that's a red flag that you could be dealing with a scammer.

And be on especially high alert if the caller requests cash. One in four victims of the Grandparent Scam over age 70 sent cash in the mail to their scammer, up from one in 14 the year before.

Before agreeing to send funds, hang up and dial their phone number directly or call a mutual friend to get their thoughts. “You can short-circuit a scam by double-checking with your loved ones,” says Michael Hackard, an attorney and

Posting on social media can help criminals create a more believable story.

author of [The Wolf at the Door: Undue Influence and Elder Financial Abuse](https://amzn.to/2E0385k)
(<https://amzn.to/2E0385k>).

Don't overshare on social media

Scammers often mine sites like Facebook and Instagram for material they can use. Posting personal information, travel plans, or even family photos on social media can give criminals material to create a more believable story.

So even if the caller requesting money offers personal details, that's not proof that the call is legit. "They may have information that can make the calls sound very convincing," says John Breyault, vice president, public policy, telecommunications and fraud, at the National Consumers League.

Report any suspect calls

Law officials can only protect you from crimes they know about. If you believe you've been the victim of an imposter scam or any other fraud, report it to your local police, the [Federal Trade Commission](https://www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov/#crnt&panel1-1) (<https://www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov/#crnt&panel1-1>), and [Fraud.org](https://www.fraud.org/) (<https://www.fraud.org/>), which shares complaints with a network of more than 200 law enforcement and consumer protection professionals.

About the Author

[Beth Braverman](https://considerable.com/contributor/beth-braverman/)
(<https://considerable.com/contributor/beth-braverman/>)
[@bethbrav](http://twitter.com/bethbrav) (<http://twitter.com/bethbrav>).

Beth Braverman is an award-winning freelance journalist and content producer, writing mostly about personal finance, p... [Continue Reading](https://considerable.com/contributor/beth-braverman/) (<https://considerable.com/contributor/beth-braverman/>).



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