

# Catfishing Romance Scams

Scammers use the internet to exploit the human desire to connect. Don't become a victim.

## Stages of Catfishing

### Setup

Most catfishing begins online where scammers can hide behind fake profiles on dating and social networking sites.

The profiles they create present attractive, successful and interesting people that anyone would want to connect with.

Once a connection is made, the catfisher builds upon it, lavishing praise on the target or lending a sympathetic ear.

### Wooing

The scammer may pretend to like the same music or movies to deepen the bond or seek to help the target through a personal problem.

*In this stage, the target is often swept up in feelings of elation and love.*

*While the target interprets this as genuine, the scammer's sole intent is to use these feelings to his or her advantage.*

Soon, the scammer escalates the dialogue with seemingly innocent requests for personal details, such as where the target works, banks and lives.

### Requests & Avoidance

The more the target provides, the bolder the catfisher gets, and it's only a matter of time before the requests escalate further.

Appeals for money are common at this stage. Often, they're tied to a trip to come visit the target that only the scammer knows will never happen.

The scammer will always have an excuse not to meet or provide personal details about family or friends because they don't exist.

### Extortion

If the relationship has taken a romantic turn, the scammer may ask for intimate photos which can later be used to blackmail the target. This is called 'sextortion.'

Once the scam yields money or other benefits, the catfisher has leverage, often threatening to empty the target's accounts or publish intimate photos unless further demands are met.

Demands can include more money, sexual favors, or information that provides access to the target's family or place of work—all for the purpose of further exploitation.

## Protecting Yourself

The best way to stop a catfisher is to avoid being scammed in the first place. You can do this by asking the following questions:

- Does this person seem too good to be true?
- Is this person far more attractive and successful than the usual prospects?
- Do online or social media searches for this person yield few or conflicting results?
- Is the relationship moving way too fast?

**A yes answer to any of these means you're likely being catfished.**

Here are some things you can do to validate your concerns.

- Upload the person's profile pic to Google Image Search to find its origins.
- Search for the person on social networking sites, such as Facebook. If they have few friends or a generic profile, it's probably fake.
- Ask the person to meet up or video chat. If they decline repeatedly it's likely a scam.

If you suspect catfishing, do not give the scammer money, images or anything you value. **Instead, walk away from the relationship.**