



Better Business Bureau® Senior Awareness Initiative Grandparents Still Targeted for Scams

Better Business Bureau® Serving Greater Cleveland (BBB®) is reminding families to be on alert for scams specifically targeting senior adults. In the past, scammers would claim a grandchild is in trouble with the law or in jail. However, in the post-pandemic era, the scam has taken a new twist. The [FTC released a warning](#) advising consumers to be cautious of scammers posing as grandchildren who are sick in the hospital or stranded overseas due to the coronavirus. These communications come with a sense of urgency which panics victims into wiring money under the pretext of paying a hospital bill or making travel arrangements.

“Scammers know how to pull at the heartstrings of grandparents,” says Sue McConnell, BBB Serving Greater Cleveland. “When a grandchild is in distress, it’s natural for well-meaning grandparents to panic and rush to wire beloved family members the necessary funds. However, it’s best to approach these situations with a more level-headed perspective. Simply asking questions, such as asking for a child’s middle name or the name of a best friend, may prevent a consumer from falling victim to this scam. The lies may be particularly compelling, but it’s better to save money for real family emergencies.”

In 2021, Better Business Bureau received over 200 reports of scams taking the form of a family or friend emergency. In these scams, over 35% of consumers reported losing money. Most commonly, this was in the form of an online money transfer or prepaid credit or gift card. Victims were usually solicited through phone calls. BBB wants to remind the public that older adults are susceptible to many types of scams, not just ones specifically targeting grandparents.

BBB also recommends seniors should:

- **Verify the Caller’s Identity.** Ask specific and targeted questions that a stranger couldn’t possibly answer, such as a middle name or the name of an elementary school. Confirm the emergency itself by contacting another family member or friend through a trusted method.
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- **Resist the Urge to Act Immediately** – It’s easy to panic when a family member may be in danger, but staying calm can mean the difference between becoming a victim or remaining a cautious consumer
- **Don’t Send Money** – Scammers may ask for cash in the form of cash, money transfers, or gift cards. Don’t send funds until you can validate contacts.



Better Business Bureau® Senior Awareness Initiative

Keep a Handle on Holiday Debt

The 2023 holiday shopping season was like no other. Family gatherings increased as pandemic fears wane and consumers contributed to “[healthy holiday sales](#).” However, many area consumers are coming to their senses as post-holiday bills arrive and are starting to realize that they may have overspent on their loved ones. Better Business Bureau Serving Greater Cleveland is providing the following debt tips for local consumers:

Address Current Debt - Before taking on additional expenses, address current debt. Pay [smaller balances before larger ones](#) and consolidate higher-interest balances to a lower-interest loan or credit card. While the concept of payday loans may sound enticing to some cash-strapped consumers, it is a high-risk option. Consumers should be aware of [predatory lending and payday loan scams](#).

Create and Stick to a Budget - Create a budget for your daily and monthly expenses. Remember to include expenditures such as gas, food, rent, and other housing-related costs.

Take Advantage of Sales, Rewards, Memberships, and Cash-Back Offers - Although [Thanksgiving weekend traditionally sees the best holiday sales](#), consumers can still find a bargain on other, non-holiday days. Remember to check sales flyers, use reward points on credit cards, and check other retailers for any additional specials they may offer, such as future store credit on select purchases. Stack discounts when possible.

Use Vetted Shopping Apps to Find the Best Price and Get Rewards - Before a consumer installs any mobile app on their device, they should first do research on the company behind the app. Check [BBB.org](#) to see the company’s business rating and reviews. Some purchasing apps, such as [Rakuten](#) and [Ibotta](#) are already BBB Accredited Businesses. [Consumers should read the fine details](#), such as payout and privacy policies, before installing any apps on their mobile devices.

Be Cautious with “Buy Now, Pay Later” and Layaway Programs - While the concept of paying for goods with a “buy now, pay later” program may sound enticing to a consumer, be aware of the fees associated with this. Interest rates can range between 0% to over 30% on a single purchase. Treat all “buy now, pay later” arrangements as a loan and be aware that [credit scores can be adversely affected](#). As for store layaway plans, they are a similar arrangement. Layaway differs in that the store retains the goods until payment is made in full by the consumer. These plans have fallen out of favor in recent years as “buy now, pay later” plans have gained popularity.

Consider Low-Cost Alternatives - Consider making small changes to your daily routine, such as making coffee at home, dining out less, or purchasing used goods instead of new ones. Doing little alterations can make a big financial impact over the course of a year.

For more information about [payday loan scams](#), visit [BBB.org](#). BBB’s website also has more articles with details about [cashback apps](#) and [installment payment plans](#). Remember to report scams to [BBB.org/ScamTracker](#). Your report can help prevent other local consumers from becoming a victim.



Better Business Bureau® Senior Awareness Initiative Winter Snow Brings Scammers

While Clevelanders are very familiar with snow and ice, a strong storm bringing heavy snow combined with a thick layer of ice can easily damage homes and property. Falling tree limbs and power outages are also concerns with seasonal arctic blasts. With each winter bringing the upcoming possibility of widespread property damage, Better Business Bureau® Serving Greater Cleveland (BBB®) is warning area homeowners to beware of “storm chasers” and out-of-town contractors soliciting business. Although not all storm chasers are scammers, they may lack proper licensing and insurance, offer quick but inappropriate fixes, or make promises they can’t deliver on.

BBB is providing the following tips to avoid winter storm scams:

Remember the Basics - BBB recommends homeowners obtain three estimates for repairs, get everything in writing, and pay with a credit card when possible. Also, remember to look up a contractor’s reviews at BBB.org.

Be Careful of Door-to-Door Contractors and Utility Workers - Ask for identification from any individual going door-to-door. Check the worker’s company vehicle for a business name and contact information. Write down their license plate number. If you are contacted by a contractor going door-to-door, verify with your city that they have a solicitor’s permit.

Contact Your Insurance Company - If your home or car suffered severe weather damage, ask your insurance company about policy coverage and specific filing requirements. Save all receipts for food, temporary lodging, or other expenses that may be covered under your policy. Your insurance company may also have recommended contractors.

Resist high-pressure sales - Some storm chasers use tactics such as the “good deal” you’ll only get if you hire the contractor on the spot. Sometimes unscrupulous contractors will also offer a deal on repairs citing they have “leftover material” from another job site. Disaster victims should never feel forced to make a hasty decision.

Don’t sign over insurance checks to contractors - Obtain an invoice from the contractor and pay them directly. Don’t sign any documents that give the contractor any rights to your insurance claims. If you have questions, contact your insurance company or agent.

Don’t Panic about a Utility Call - Your [utility company may make courtesy calls](#) to remind you about an outstanding balance, but they will never call or email you to demand immediate payment under threats of a same-day shutoff or direct you to buy gift cards to pay your bill. If you suspect a scam or receive one of these phone calls, hang up and call your energy company directly.

If individuals have spotted a scam (whether or not they’ve lost money), they can report it to BBB.org/ScamTracker. These reports can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Consumers can also visit the Scam Tracker website to view the latest reported scams in their neighborhood or across North America.