

Elder Fraud—Ways to Protect Our Elderly Loved Ones

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Elder fraud--duping older adults out of their money is a profitable practice. Perpetrators are rarely caught much less prosecuted. Elderly parents, friends and neighbors may need assistance in recognizing the problem and taking steps to prevent falling victim to the crime of fraud.

Telemarketers invite themselves into the home of the elderly person, one who is often lonely and alone. Members of the older generation are more likely to have a home phone and to be listed in the phone directory than younger Americans who have embraced the cell phone movement.

The elderly are also more likely to be at home to receive calls than their younger counterparts and less likely to hang up on callers believing that it is impolite to do so. Consequently, telemarketers 'nurture the soul' or show empathy toward the older adult coaxing important and valuable personal information from them which is later used to commit fraud. Callers may identify themselves as the IRS or Medicare, or a law enforcement agency. Elderly persons can be easily confused; perhaps they are unsure what the caller is asking for. Telemarketers are skilled at convincing the listener they are legitimate. Some have been known to yell at, make threats, or intimidate their 'prey'.

Mail campaigns, often in the format of a 'congratulatory notification' for winning the sweepstakes, or 'official-looking' documents requesting payment or threatening action for non-payment, are another way criminals gain entry into the home. Fake check scams [can be included with a sweepstakes notification] take advantage of an older person's vulnerability. The 'target' is asked to send a check or asked to provide personal, bank, or credit card account information. Being victimized by mail fraud often triggers an avalanche of unwanted solicitations.

Embarrassment about being 'duped' can prevent the older person from telling anyone about the situation, including adult children. If you suspect a problem, ask questions. The Consumer Protection Division of your state's Department of Justice investigates suspected fraud cases; the toll free number for Nebraska is: 1-800-727-6432. The web address is: www.ago.state.ne.us/ Contact the National Do Not Call Registry to have phone numbers placed on the national 'Do Not Call' list; the toll-free number is 1-888-382-1222, or access the website: www.donotcall.gov to register. Ask to be removed from the direct mail list by accessing the Direct Marketing Association's website: www.the-dma.org

Adult children may want to initiate a conversation with parents or other older loved ones indicating they are aware others have been taken advantage of and suggest ways to put protective measures in place to prevent those they care about from becoming victimized.

Other forms of elder fraud include: fraudulent investments—specifically annuities with unreasonable future payout dates, charitable donations, home or auto repair scams, mortgage fraud, and 'avoiding foreclosure' scams.

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