



## **Tip Offs to Rip Offs**

*Helping your family and friends avoid schemes and scams*

### **Is your loved one the victim of a scam?**

*Consumer fraud is big business. Con artists bilk American consumers out of more than \$40 billion dollars every year and, according to AARP research, people over 50 are especially vulnerable and account for over half of all victims. Unfortunately, many cases of consumer fraud go unreported. Some victims are unaware that they are being defrauded, while others may be too embarrassed to talk about it. Here are a few warning signs that someone may have fallen victim to a scam.*

- **The phone rings off the hook** with calls seeking charitable donations or offering money-making opportunities.
- **You see lots of cheap new stuff around the house.** Items like watches, pens, and small appliances are often part of "order to win" scams.
- **Payments to unfamiliar companies or frequent withdrawals.** These can show up as checks or money transfers.
- **Secretive behavior regarding mail and phone calls.**
- **Financial troubles.** Watch for a sudden inability to pay for basic necessities or bills.

### **Warning signs that it might be a scam**

*It can be hard to detect a scam. Con artists by definition are masters in the art of persuasion. They have an arsenal of skills to lead you into making the wrong decision. However, there are clear warning signs. Paying attention to these cues can help you identify a potential scam before it's too late.*

- **You're told that you've won a prize—but must pay to receive it.** The scammer may say that there are administrative fees or taxes. It is illegal for sweepstakes to ask for payment.
- **If you don't pay right away, you'll lose the deal.** Often scam artists will try to make a payment "convenient" by offering courier services or wire transfers.
- **There's no written information available.** Scammers want to keep you from making an informed decision, so will often claim that there's no time to send written material.
- **Requests for donations fail to tell you where the money will go.** Legitimate charities disclose how much of your donation goes to administrative costs and overhead.
- **The offer is secret.** Legitimate organizations and charities want as much word-of-mouth business as they can drum up, while scam artists want to keep you from discussing their scheme with your family and friends.

## Prepare for the pitch

*Having a plan for terminating a potentially fraudulent transaction can be one of the most important steps an individual can take to avoid fraud. Too often, people will get caught up in a sales situation on the phone or in person and they won't know how to walk away.*

Prepare and practice responses to unwanted phone solicitations. Develop a "refusal script" for politely getting a salesman off the phone. Some examples might include:

- **"I'm sorry, this is not a good time. Thank you for calling. Good bye."**
- **"I don't do business with people I don't know. Please put me on your Do-Not-Call List."**
- Perhaps the easiest response is: **"I'm not interested. Thank you and good-bye."**

## Resist high-pressure sales tactics

*Legitimate businesses will respect the fact that a person is not interested. Keep these tips in mind when dealing with sales pitches.*

- **Say so if you do not want the seller to call back.** If they do call back, they are breaking the law. That is a signal to hang up.
- **Take your time,** and ask for written information about the product, service, investment opportunity or charity that is the subject of the call.
- **Talk to a friend,** relative or financial advisor before responding to a solicitation. Don't let a con rush you into making a bad decision.
- **Hang up** if a telemarketer calls before 8 a.m. or after 9 p.m. It's against the law.
- **Free is free.** Hang up if you are asked to pay for a prize. By law, you do not have to pay or buy anything to enter a prize promotion.
- **Check out** any company with the state and local consumer protection office before you buy a product or service or donate any money because of an unsolicited phone call.
- **Do not send money** — cash, check or money order by courier, overnight delivery or wire transfer to anyone who insists on immediate payment.

## Stop the Calls

To stop legitimate telemarketers, sign up for the **Do Not Call Registry**. The National Do Not Call Registry gives you a choice about whether to receive telemarketing calls at home. Most telemarketers should not call your number once it has been on the registry for 31 days. If they do, you can file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission. You can register your home or mobile phone for free. Your registration will be effective for five years. Call **1-888-382-1222** from the phone number you are registering. You can also register online at [www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov).

## Report Fraud

If you suspect fraud, contact the Washington State Attorney General's Office at 1-800-551-4636. You may also contact the Federal Trade Commission at 1-877-FTC-HELP.

***For more information on the latest in consumer fraud and scams, and to order free consumer fraud materials and publications, visit [www.aarp.org/wa](http://www.aarp.org/wa) or call the AARP Fraud Fighter Call Center at 1-800-646-2283.***