

FLIM-FLAM AWARENESS

Catching a Con Artist: Awareness for Seniors

People who perpetrate Flim-Flams are Con artists that often focus on Senior Citizens. They focus on seniors since so many live alone and have plenty of time to talk. Scam artists use flattery and friendliness as well as high-pressure techniques to convince seniors to do unwise things. And when the deal is done, they often say, "Psst, it's a secret. Don't tell anyone about the special deal I gave only to you." These scams can cost seniors their savings, homes, confidence, and health.

Common Cons

Con artists run all kinds of scams, from sweepstakes to drug discounts. They approach victims in a friendly, helpful, trustworthy manner, so what they're offering may not seem like a scam at first. It's important to spot the red flags before you become a victim. The following are common situations cons conjure up to deceive you:

- Lottery ticket scams that ask for "good faith" money up front for a share of the "winnings".
 - Sweepstakes that require the "winner" to pay something first
 - Someone in a foreign country asks the victim to help him or her transfer large sums of money through their own bank account -- these scam artists often ask for banking information in exchange for a future monetary rewards (other variations of this scam exist)
 - Home improvement offers from door-to-door contractors who either run off with the money before working or who do the work but fix things that don't need fixing
 - Telephone marketers who call asking for donations for questionable causes, offering "get-rich-quick schemes," or asking for personal information such as credit card numbers or social security numbers
 - Door-to-door salespeople who use tricks to get in the home or who want payments in cash only
 - Medicare drug discount cards sold directly -- unless a person has contacted the card company and requested information, companies are not allowed to contact people
 - Predatory lenders who target homeowners who own homes outright, often adding high processing fees and interest rates to an unneeded loan
 - Identity theft, either through stolen or shared information

Protect Your Loved Ones

You can help your loved ones avoid con artists by staying involved with their lives. Keep a careful watch to help make sure they don't get scammed. It's also smart to:

- Have them use the scam prevention worksheet on the American Association of Retired Persons Web site to determine whether or not telemarketers are legitimate
- Get them listed on the federal government's Do-Not-Call list
- Contact the Direct Marketing Association to have their names removed from mailing lists
- Advise them not to give out personal information
- Help them shred documents that include key financial or personal information
- Ask them to wait a couple days to make decisions
- Suggest that they involve another person in decision-making
- Report scams to authorities

- Change the phone number, if necessary

Signs of Trouble

You may have done everything you can to protect the seniors in your life, but scam artists are pretty good at what they do. Start to worry if you notice if your loved one:

- Receives repeated calls from people asking for donations or promoting investment offers
- Has new items around the home, including magazines, that he or she may have ordered in an attempt to win contests or come as prizes from sweepstakes
- Has unexpected withdrawals from financial accounts
- Is experiencing sudden money difficulties