

# Virtual Kidnapping Scam



**IRVINE POLICE DEPARTMENT**

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In Partnership with the Community







# WHAT IS VIRTUAL KIDNAPPING?

Virtual Kidnapping is a scam in which a victim receives a phone call from someone claiming to have kidnapped a loved one. Parents and grandparents are often the targets of these scams.







## SPOTTING A SCAM

These circumstances are indicators the call could be a scam:

-  The call is anonymous, and it comes from an outside area code unrelated to the supposed victim's phone number.
-  The caller says the ransom money will only be accepted via wire transfer or gift card.
-  The caller attempts to keep you on the phone at all costs – including by telling you that the supposed victim will be harmed if they hear you speaking to anyone else.
-  Another type of scam has the caller claiming to be from a government agency. No legitimate government agency will ever call and demand money over the phone, or threaten to arrest you if you refuse to pay.

## SCAM PREVENTION

If you do find yourself in this situation, the Irvine Police Department offers the following tips to ensure the safety of you and your family:

-  Ask to speak to the victim directly. If this is not allowed, ask the caller to describe the victim, or something unique to your loved one.
-  The muffled voice in the background is often an actor in on the scheme – listen very carefully. Does the voice match up to that of the victim?
-  Do not offer information about your loved one, including their name, if the caller has not stated it.
-  Remember, on many smartphones you can keep a caller on speaker while texting your loved one.
-  Before transferring any money, try to get ahold of the supposed victim through social media or text message, or from a different phone.
-  Repeat the caller's demands back to him or her to buy time.

If you have taken the above steps and still believe your loved one is the victim of a kidnapping, call **911** immediately. If you have been the victim of a hoax, call the Irvine Police Department at 949-724-7000.

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