

Sadie Says...

Frequently asked questions about older adult issues

Q: Last week I received a live phone call purporting to be from an adult grandchild saying “Hello, Grandma”. I do not have relatives who fit that description. Then came repeated phone calls from “the Microsoft Refund Department”, not to mention numerous robocalls telling anyone who answered about having won a vacation prize. What can I do about these annoying fraudulent calls?

A: It’s a well known fact that scammers defraud consumers more frequently by telephone than by other means. More than 50% of all phone calls are now automated robocalls, and more than 44% of mobile calls are fraudulent.

So, how can a person avoid this brewing epidemic of phone scams about which the Federal Trade Commission received nearly one million fraud complaints in 2017?

1. Recognize warning signs:
  - unsolicited calls from agents claiming to work for a government agency, utility company, or technology firm are likely to be hoaxes because legitimate institutions will first communicate by other means
  - unsolicited calls from charity fundraisers, especially following disasters
  - calls advertising products or services that sound “too good to be true”
  - automated sales calls from a company that you did not authorize to phone you
  
2. Take positive steps:
  - refuse to answer calls from unknown numbers
  - reject anonymous calls automatically (some phone providers have Anonymous Call Rejection, which you can use by dialing \*77 and hanging up, after which any call hiding its number will be rejected)
  - use a computer to place your phone number(s) on the FTC’s National Do Not Call Registry (<https://www.donotcall.gov/>)
  - consider using Caller ID or a call-blocking mobile app to screen calls, many of which require a small monthly fee; however, T-Mobile has free Scam ID and free Scam Block, and Verizon will also begin free blocking of identified spam and scam numbers beginning in March
  - hang up on illegal robocalls trying to sell you something

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- ask questions of telemarketers because legitimate businesses, charities, and political organizations will provide information and not pressure you to purchase items or make donations; it's your right to take time to consider making any payment.
- hang up and independently research travel deals and charitable or business opportunities you might learn about through unsolicited phone calls
- don't return one-ring calls from unknown area code numbers—many of these are really from out-of-country, and they entail expensive connection charges

Sadie Says is provided by the Lycoming County health Improvement Coalition