



FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION OFFICE OF PRIVATE SECTOR

VIRTUAL KIDNAPPING

Virtual Kidnappings for ransom are telephonic or digital coercion schemes, aimed at extorting quick ransom payments from victims through threats of harm or violence by manipulating victims to believe they themselves, their close associate, or family member have been kidnapped and are in imminent danger. Scammers demand victims pay ransoms for safe release, though no physical kidnapping has actually taken place.

THE SCAMMERS

Scammers often work in organized groups using a variety of resources (including the Internet, hotel employees, phone books) to find and troll victims. Scammers exploit technology such as caller ID spoofing, artificial intelligence (AI) voice spoofing, and social media to convince unwitting victims to pay money. Scammers are known to exploit families who made missing person social media posts, claiming they had kidnapped the missing loved one.

*Schemes often have common tactics of **Isolation** of victims believed to be kidnapped & **Coercion** of victim families to pay a ransom*



If you suspect a real kidnapping is taking place, or if you believe the ransom demand is a scheme, **contact your**

nearest Police Department or FBI office:

1-800-CALL-FBI (1-800-225-5324)

You can email FBI at:

www.fbi.gov/contact-us

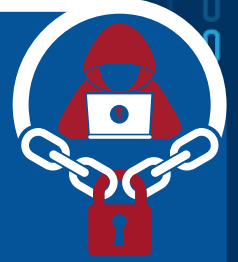
For more information visit:

<https://www.gob.mx/sspc/es/articulos/ques-el-secuestro-virtual?idiom=es>

ISOLATION (PHYSICAL & DIGITAL)

To isolate a victim preventing them from contacting family members or law enforcement, or convince them they have been kidnapped, scammers may:

- Call from an unknown phone number; most cases, victims never physically see the scammer.
- Instruct call recipient to communicate with an encrypted messaging app, such as WhatsApp.
- Threaten extreme violence to gain compliance.
- Tell victims they are “being watched” or investigated, that an incident is occurring nearby, or self-identify with a cartel.
- Instruct victims to obtain a new cell phone or SIM card.
- Instruct victims to turn off their own phones, remove batteries, and not make or answer calls or texts.
- Lure victims to a hotel, instructing them not to leave or answer the door, and to close all blinds.
- Demand personal information and phone numbers of family members.
- Coerce victims to take compromising photographs of themselves (such as nude, hand tied, or blindfolded).
- Require victims to check in at specific times, or to remain on a continuous phone or video call.



COERCION & RANSOM PAYMENT

To elicit ransom payments, scammers may:

- Call from an unknown phone number and instruct call recipient to communicate with an encrypted messaging app, such as WhatsApp.
- Claim they have kidnapped a loved one.
- Use a screaming voice asking for help.
- Threaten violence or harm if ransom is not paid.
- Call numerous times or maintain a continuous call to prevent outside contact.
- Use technology (3-way calling or WhatsApp remote account access) to pretend they are with the victim.
- Exploit personal information coerced from the victims themselves, complicit hotel employees, taxi drivers, or others.
- Request ransom be quickly wired to multiple individuals using money transfer services, or via bank deposits.
- Quickly decrease the ransom amount to avoid prolonging negotiations and the scheme being discovered.
- Demand additional payments even after receiving the initial ransom payment.



RECEIVE A CALL? WHAT TO DO

- ALWAYS attempt to contact your loved one before paying any ransom.
- Stop. Think. Do the kidnapper’s claims make sense?
- Listen closely without providing details or identifying information.
- Control your emotions.
- Demand to speak with your loved one.
- Ask for answers or a code word only your loved one would know.
- Buy time; scammers want to expedite a ransom payment.

SAFETY TIPS



- Avoid providing personal information to strangers while travelling.
- Establish a code word only you and your loved ones know.
- Educate travelers and other loved ones on these scams.
- Check Department of State travel advisories prior to travel.
- When posting missing persons be aware of scammers.



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