



Catfishing

Responding to Catfishing

Catfishing occurs when someone pretends to be someone they are not online in order to manipulate, deceive, or control another person, often by forming a personal or emotional relationship.

Catfishing may involve:

- Fake names, photos, or life stories
- Stolen or AI-generated images
- Claims they cannot meet in person or video chat
- Rapid emotional intimacy or “love bombing”
- Requests to move conversations to private platforms
- Gradual pressure for secrecy, favors, or money

Catfishing is frequently used as a precursor to extortion, sextortion, financial fraud, stalking, or abuse.

If you feel unsafe or threatened at any point, call 911.

Catfishing – Do This First

Pause and Stop Escalation

If you suspect catfishing:

- Do not confront the person
- Do not share more personal information
- Do not send photos, money, or favors
- Do not agree to secrecy

Scammers rely on rushed emotions. Pausing gives you room to verify.

Preserve Evidence

Before blocking or disengaging:

- Screenshot or save:
 - Profiles
 - Photos
 - Messages
 - Usernames
 - URLs
- Record:
 - Dates and times
 - Platforms used
 - Claims that don’t add up





- Do not alert the suspected catfisher while gathering evidence.

Assess Risk

Treat the situation as higher risk if the person:

- Pressures you for secrecy
- Avoids video calls or in-person meetings
- Makes excuses about being overseas, military, or “unable to talk”
- Pushes sexual topics quickly
- Asks for money, gifts, or financial help
- Reacts angrily when questioned

If threats or coercion appear, call 911.

Disengage Safely

End Contact Without Debate

Once evidence is preserved:

- Block the account
- Do not explain or argue
- Do not attempt to “get answers”

Silence protects you more than confrontation.

Report the Account

Use platform tools to report:

- Fake profile
- Impersonation
- Scams or abuse
- Save confirmation or report numbers

Reporting helps protect others.

If You’ve Already Shared Personal Content

If you shared:

- Photos or videos
- Personal details
- Emotional disclosures
- Financial information

Take action immediately:

- Preserve evidence





- Secure related accounts
- Seek support early

If explicit images are involved, the risk of sextortion increases, act quickly.

Report the Incident

- National Reporting
 - FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3)
<https://www.ic3.gov>
 - Federal Trade Commission (FTC) - report consumer fraud and scams at [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov).
- Ohio Resources
 - Ohio Attorney General – Identity Theft & Cybercrime Help
<https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov>
Hotline: 800-282-0515
- Geauga County
 - Geauga County Sheriff's Office
<https://www.geaugasheriff.org>
 - Local police non-emergency line if harassment, impersonation, or threats occur
 - Use 911 for active or escalating threats

Emotional & Crisis Support

Catfishing often causes embarrassment, grief, anger, and self-doubt. These feelings are common and valid.

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
- If you may hurt yourself or feel unable to stay safe, call or text 988.

Being deceived does not mean you were naive. It means the person was manipulative.

Recovery – Moving Forward Safely

- Block and document any re-contact attempts
- Watch for fake profiles linked to the same person
- Review privacy settings
- Lean on trusted friends or family
- Give yourself time to recover; being manipulated is not your fault.

How to Reduce Catfishing Risk

- Be cautious of rapid emotional intimacy
- Verify identities before deepening relationships
- Trust your instincts, confusion is a warning sign
- Real relationships do not require secrecy





- Ask for help early, catfishers rely on isolation

