When the Kids Are Away, the Scammers Come Out to Play

from Shawn Mosch of ScamVictimsUnited

I was asked to share this information about scams related to students away on Spring Break. That time of year is just around the corner, and this is something that all parents need to be aware of. Much like the Grandparent Scams, this scam preys on an adult wanted to help out a child in trouble.

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MoneyGram Offers Advice to Parents of College Spring Breakers
To Avoid Fraud During Popular Travel Period
DALLAS (Feb. 22, 2012) â€“ While most Americans will prepare to lose an hour of sleep when Daylight Saving Time ends in mid-March, many parents are preparing to lose something else: their peace of mind when their college-age children travel on spring break
According to MoneyGram (NYSE: MGI), a leading global money transfer company, spring break can end up â€œbreaking the bankâ€• if parents donâ€™t stay alert to the â€œfamily scamâ€• â€“ when a scammer calls parents to inform them their child is i a distant location, asking for money for medical care or bail, even though the child is perfectly safe.
â€œSpring break can be a letting-go experience for parents of college students,â€• said Kim Garner, Senior Vice President of Global Security for MoneyGram. â€œBut along with letting go, parents should hang on to their common sense, especially when it comes to helping their kids stay safe and avoid certain common scams.
Garner offers the following advice to parents of college students to safeguard their physical and financial health during spring break:
Check in before heading out: American students traveling internationally can register with the U.S. State Departmentâ€™s free Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, which will help with communications in the event of an emergency. Canadian students can register with their countryâ€™s similar program, Registration of Canadians Abroad.
Take a lesson from E.T.: Phone home: Parents should make a deal with their students traveling for spring break â€“ a little freedom for a few phone calls and some extra phone numbers. Parents should establish specific times for phone calls to check in, so they will know where their students are and what theyâ€™re up to, and get cell phone numbers for the friends of their traveling children as a back-up means of communication.
Just say no: With personal belongings left scattered on beach towels, scammers often will use student IDs to find parents and ask for money to be wired in the aid of their child who canâ€™t come to the phone. Garner of MoneyGram advises parents to say no â€“ and never wire money to anyone they donâ€™t know â€“ instead checking in by calling the childâ€™s cell the local authorities where their child is vacationing.
Give them credit: Parents can temporarily add a child as an approved user to a credit card, and place a pre-set spending limit on the card as a way to prompt financial responsibility while the student is traveling.
Put a policy in place: To guard against a financial loss, parents should check with their insurance company to make sure their childâ€™s possessions are insured on their homeownerâ€™s policy while the student is traveling, especially if the child will be traveling outside the United States.

â€œThe best way to ensure a safe spring break and avoid a scam is to talk to your child in advance about these types of precautions, and schedule regular contact so you can hear directly from them that theyâ€™re safe,â€• said Garner of MoneyGram. â€œAnd while the student is traveling, parents should focus on their own protection against scams by never sending money to anyone they donâ€™t know, regardless of what the individual on the other end of a phone might be telling them.â€•
As part of MoneyGramâ€™s ongoing efforts to protect consumers from wire transfer fraud, the company recently launched an enhanced version of its fraud prevention website â€“ www.moneygram-preventfraud.com. MoneyGram recommends that before initiating a money transfer, consumers should:
Â· Know â€“ Always know the person to whom you are sending money. Never send money to strangers.
Â· Show â€“ Never show or share information about your money transfer to anyone but the recipient.
Â· Throw â€“ Discard or throw away any offers that promise easy ways to earn money, especially if the offers require you to send money before earning money.
Consumers who suspect fraud associated with money transfers should contact their local law enforcement. Consumers should call 1-800-MONEYGRAM (800-666-3947) if they believe MoneyGram was used to wire money as a result of a scam.

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Another tip from Scam Victims United

When we were kids they taught us about â€œStranger Dangerâ€• and avoiding becoming a victim of kidnapping. We were told to never go with a stranger, even if they looked â€œniceâ€• or said that they were a friend of your parents and your parents sent them to pick you up. In my family, we had a â€œcode wordâ€• so that if someone we did not know DID have to pick us up, they would have to know the â€œcode wordâ€• before we would go with them. Similar to this, create a code word with your child before they leave for Spring Break. If someone calls saying that they are your childâ€™s friend you just need to ask â€œWhat is the code word?â€• If they donâ€™t know it, you will know right away that they are lying.

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