

Payment app scams (Zelle, Venmo, Cash App)

Easy · 10 min · Free

Sending money by app is like handing over cash: once you send it to a scammer, it's hard to get back. Only pay people you know, double-check who you're sending to, never "send money to yourself" because a caller said so, and report fast if it goes wrong.

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ Your payment app
- ☐ Your bank's phone number from the back of your card

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Know why scammers want app payments.** Once you send money to them, it's hard to get it back. Zelle says it's made for paying friends, family, co-workers and others you trust.
- 2 **Lock the app.** Turn on a PIN or multi-factor authentication, and never give your sign-in details to anyone who contacts you.
- 3 **Check the name before you hit send.** Double-check the recipient's information so the money goes to the right person. A typo in a phone number can send money to a stranger.
- 4 **Never pay to collect a prize.** Don't send a payment to claim a prize or sweepstakes winnings.
- 5 **Call before you pay a "friend" in trouble.** Scammers pretend to be a loved one in an emergency. If a request is unexpected, talk to the person directly to make sure it's really them and not someone who hacked their account.
- 6 **Hang up on "your bank" asking you to move money.** If a caller says there's fraud and you must send money to yourself or to a "safe" account to stop it, it's a scam. Hang up and call the number on the back of your card.
- 7 **Move your balance to your bank.** Money people send you lands in your app balance first. FDIC insurance generally doesn't cover money sitting in a payment app, so moving it to an insured bank or credit union account is the simple fix.

Watch out Paying a stranger for something you haven't seen is how most app scams start. For buying from people you don't know, a credit card has legal protections an app payment doesn't.

DAD NOTE *Never send money to someone you've only met online, and never because a caller is rushing you. Real emergencies survive a phone call to check.*

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/tools/spotting-scams/payment-app-scams-zelle-venmo-cash-app/

Checked October 3, 2026. Sources: Federal Trade Commission; Consumer Financial Protection Bureau; Zelle.