

SAFETY · 10 min read · September 15, 2026 · By Kelly Stratton

How to Tell If Your Dating Match Is an AI Bot: 5 Tells, 10 Questions, and What to Do If You Sent Money

Find out in five minutes whether the person you're messaging is real: the five tells that give a bot away, ten questions it can't answer well, the exact words for the video-call test, and the steps that get your money back if any already went out.

If someone you're messaging feels a little too smooth, you're not being paranoid, you're paying attention. In September 2026 Anthropic reported that one company had run more than 20 dating apps where most of the matches were AI, built to keep people typing and paying. The good news is that a bot is easy to catch once you know what to look for. Five minutes with this guide and you'll know how to check any match, what to ask, what to say to get a real answer, and exactly what to do if money already went out. Keep dating. Just date with your eyes open.

IN A NUTSHELL

Bots have five tells: they answer everything except your question, they reply instantly with perfect grammar at any hour, they push you off the app fast, every reply has the same warmth, and their life has no boring parts. Ten specific, boring questions expose them. The final test is a two-minute video call. If you've already sent money, there are five steps below, in order, and the first one is a phone call to your bank.

WHAT AN AI DATING BOT IS

An AI dating bot is a fake profile on a dating or social app where the messages are written by an AI model, not a person. It's built to keep you chatting, often because every message you send costs the app's coins, and sometimes to move you toward sending money. It's told to sound warm and never admit what it is.

WHAT YOU NEED

Nothing to install and nothing to pay for. Everything here works inside whatever app you're already using, on your phone, tonight.

PART 1 How Did 25,000 People End Up Talking to AI on a Dating App?

Here's the case behind the video, from Anthropic's own threat report, published September 10, 2026. A China-based app studio used Claude to run a network of more than 20 dating apps. Inside those apps, the match feed was about three AI personas for every one real person, and the real people were gig workers paid per message. Over a two-week window in April 2026, more than 4,700 AI personas held conversations with at least 25,000 people and sent roughly 2.36 million messages.

The part that matters for you is how the personas were told to behave. They were instructed never to disclose they were automated, to deflect requests for video calls and photos, and to move each conversation through a set sequence of stages. The apps made money because messaging and matching used up a metered quota, and more chatting meant buying in-app coins. So the bot's whole job was to keep you warm, keep you typing, and keep you from ever seeing a face.

Anthropic found it by watching how its own system was being used, read the instructions the operators had written for the personas, and cut off their access. That's one operator. The tells below are the same for any bot built the same way, on any app.

WHY THE TELLS WORK

Every tell in Part 2 comes straight from those instructions. A bot told to deflect video calls will find a reason it can't. A bot told to keep the mood warm will answer a boring question with a compliment. A bot running thousands of chats at once replies in seconds at 3 AM. You're not guessing at behavior. You're checking for the script.

PART 2 The 5 Tells

One tell on its own can be a real person having a good day. Two or three together, and you should run the test in Part 4 before you get any more invested.

Bot or person: what each one does

1. It answers everything except your question

You ask what street they grew up on. You get a paragraph about how much they value connection. A person says "Maple, behind the middle school." A bot is built to keep the mood, not to produce a fact it doesn't have.

2. Perfect grammar, any hour, instantly

A full, polished reply two seconds after you send, at 3:11 AM, with no typos, ever. Real people typo, and real people sleep. A bot running thousands of chats at once has no bedtime and no thumbs.

3. It wants you off the app, fast

A few messages in, it's asking for your number, WhatsApp, Telegram, or sending you a link. Scams happen off the app, where nobody's watching and nothing gets reported. A person who likes you is in no rush to leave.

4. Always warm, and always the same warmth

"That's so wonderful, I really love that about you." Then "That's amazing, I truly admire that about you." Every reply is the same shape and the same temperature. People run hot and cold. They tease, they get distracted, they change the subject.

5. The story has no boring parts

Sunrise run, great meeting, dinner with old friends, and now you. No bad days, no annoying coworker, no traffic, no cold. A real life has filler. A script doesn't.

PART 3 What Questions Catch an AI Bot on a Dating App?

Specific, checkable, and boring. That's the recipe. A bot is tuned to keep the feeling going, so it stumbles on anything that needs a real fact, a real memory, or a real place. Ask two or three of these in a normal conversation. You're not interrogating anyone. You're asking the kind of thing you'd ask anyway.

The 10 questions, and what a bot does with them

1. What street did you grow up on?

A person names it, often with a detail. A bot says something about home meaning a lot to them, or gives a street and then can't say what town it's in.

2. What's the weather like where you are right now?

Check it on your phone. A person is right, or close. A bot is vague, wrong, or says "beautiful, like this conversation."

3. What did I say my dog's name was?

Say your dog's name (or your sister's, or your car's) three messages back, then ask. A person remembers or admits they forgot. A bot moving through stages often lost it.

4. What's a restaurant near you I should try?

Then look it up. A person names a real place in the town they claim. A bot names a chain, a place in the wrong city, or one that doesn't exist.

5. What did you have for breakfast?

The most boring question there is, which is the point. A person answers in three words. A bot makes it meaningful.

6. What's something that annoyed you this week?

Real lives have friction. A person has a coworker, a bill, a flat tire. A bot's week was wonderful and then it asks about yours.

7. What time is it there right now?

Compare it to the time zone their profile implies. Then remember the answer for when a "3 AM" reply shows up.

8. Can you send me a photo of you holding up three fingers?

A specific pose a scraped photo can't fake. In the Anthropic case the personas were told to deflect photo requests. A person sends it or laughs and says later.

9. Can you send a quick voice note saying my name?

Ten seconds for a person. A bot has a reason it can't, or sends nothing and changes the subject.

10. Can we do a two-minute video call?

The one that settles it. Part 4 has the exact words.

HOW TO READ THE ANSWERS

One vague answer means nothing. People get distracted. Two dodges in a row on questions 1 through 7, or any excuse on 8 through 10, and you have your answer. Don't argue with it and don't announce what you've figured out. Just stop replying and report the profile (Part 6 shows where).

PART 4 The Video-Call Test, in the Exact Words

This is the test from the video. A real person can do a two-minute video call. A bot finds a reason it can't. So do most human scammers, because the face won't match the photos. Send this, as is:

PROMPT

I'd love to do a quick two-minute video call, just to say hi and put a face to the messages. No pressure at all. Are you free in the next ten minutes, or is there a time today that works?

What a real person does. Says yes, or names a time, or says "I look like a mess right now, give me twenty minutes." Any of those is a person.

What a bot does. "My camera's been acting up all week." "I'm somewhere with bad signal." "I'm shy about video, can we keep texting a little longer?" "I'd rather wait until it feels right." Any excuse, followed by a warm message that changes the subject, is your answer. Offer one more time, with a different day. A second excuse ends it.

If they say yes. Great. Two minutes, camera on, and ask one of the questions from Part 3 out loud. A real person answers. Keep going with your day and your date.

PART 5 The Five-Minute Check Before You Get Invested

Do this once for anyone you're starting to like. It's the same check the Federal Trade Commission tells people to do, and it takes less time than writing a good reply.

- **Reverse image search the profile photos.** On your phone, save the photo, then search it with Google Lens (the camera icon in the Google app). If the same face shows up under a different name, or on a stock site, or on a modeling page, you're done.
- **Search their job plus the word "scammer."** The FTC's own advice. "Oil rig engineer scammer," "deployed army doctor scammer," "crypto trader scammer." If the story you're being told has its own search results, that's a script, not a life.
- **Check the reasons they can't meet.** Working overseas, on a rig, deployed, at an international organization. The FTC lists those as the classic setups, because each one comes with a built-in reason there's no video call and, later, a built-in emergency.

- **Watch for the ask.** Money for a ticket, a visa, a medical bill, customs fees, or an investment “opportunity” they can walk you through. Any ask for money from someone you’ve never met in person is the end of the conversation, no matter how good the story.
- **Tell one friend.** Say the name and the story out loud to someone who isn’t in it. Scams work in private. They fall apart when a friend says “wait, what?”

PART 6 What to Do If You Already Sent Money

First, this happens to smart people every day, and the money is sometimes recoverable if you move fast. In 2025 alone, people reported \$298 million lost to romance scams that started on social media, and nearly 60 percent of romance scams that year began there. You are not the only one, and there is a clear set of steps. Do them in this order, today.

1. **Stop contact and don’t send another dollar.** Not for a “final fee,” not to “release” money they say is yours, not for anything. Block, but don’t delete the conversation yet.
2. **Call the place the money went, right now.** Your bank or credit card company, the payment app (Zelle, Venmo, Cash App, PayPal), the gift card company, or the crypto exchange. The FTC’s exact instruction: tell them you paid a scammer and ask them to refund your money. Cards and bank transfers can sometimes be reversed if you call the same day. Gift cards and crypto are harder, but the companies have fraud lines, and a report on file matters.
3. **Report the profile inside the app.** Every dating and social app has a report button on the profile. Use it. It gets the profile pulled and protects the next person.
4. **File a report with the FTC at [ReportFraud.ftc.gov](https://www.ftc.gov/report-fraud).** Ten minutes. If the loss was large, also file with the FBI at [ic3.gov](https://www.ic3.gov). These reports are what let investigators connect your case to the thousands of others from the same operator.

5. **Save everything.** Screenshots of the profile, the messages, the payment confirmations, the account names the money went to. Your bank and the investigators will ask for them.

THE SECOND SCAM

After a loss, some people get a message from a "recovery service," an "investigator," or a "lawyer" who can get the money back for a fee. That's the same scammer, or their friend, coming back for round two. Nobody legitimate charges you up front to recover scam losses. Your bank, the FTC, and the FBI are free.

PART 7 What This Doesn't Mean

Not every good writer is a bot. Some people are articulate, warm, and awake at odd hours. One tell is a person. The tells matter when they stack, and the video call settles it every time.

Not every reluctance is a script. Plenty of real people are shy about video on day two. That's why the test offers a time and offers twice. A shy person picks a day. A bot never does.

A real person can still be a scammer. The Anthropic case mixed real gig workers into the same feed, paid per message, and human romance scammers have been at this for decades. The five-minute check in Part 5 and the money rule in Part 6 cover both.

You didn't do anything wrong. These operations are built by professionals to work on people who are kind and trusting. Being either of those is not a flaw. Just add the check.

DO THIS FIRST

Pick the match you're most curious about and ask question 1 tonight: what street did you grow up on? Watch what comes back. Then, if you like the answer, send the video-call message from Part 4 word for word. Two minutes with a camera on tells you more than two weeks of texting. And if this guide got here after money went out, start with step 2 in Part 6 right now. The phone call is the whole first step.

FAQ Questions People Ask About AI Dating Bots

Straight answers

How can you tell if a dating profile is AI?

Watch for the five tells together: it answers everything except your question, it replies instantly with perfect grammar at any hour, it pushes you off the app fast, every reply has the same warmth, and its life has no boring parts. Then ask for a two-minute video call. A real person can do that.

Is my dating match a bot?

Ask something specific and boring, like what street they grew up on or what the weather is where they are right now, then ask about something you said three messages ago. A person answers in a sentence. A bot dodges, gets vague, or turns it back into a compliment. Two dodges in a row is your answer.

How do romance scams use AI?

In the case Anthropic reported in September 2026, one app studio ran more than 20 dating apps where about three of every four matches were AI personas told never to admit it, to deflect video calls and photos, and to keep you chatting because messaging cost in-app coins. AI lets one operator run thousands of conversations at once.

What questions catch an AI bot on a dating app?

Specific, checkable, boring ones. What street did you grow up on. What's the weather there this morning. What did I say my dog's name was. What's a restaurant near you I should try. Bots are built to keep the mood warm, not to remember details or name real places, so those questions expose them.

Will a scammer do a video call?

Almost never. In the Anthropic case the AI personas were instructed to deflect video calls and photo requests. Human scammers avoid them too, because the face won't match the photos. Ask for a two-minute call, no pressure, in the next ten minutes. A real person says yes or names a time.

What do you do if you sent money to a dating scammer?

Stop contact, then call your bank, card company, payment app, gift card company, or crypto exchange right away, tell them you paid a scammer, and ask for a refund. Report the profile inside the app and file a report at ReportFraud.ftc.gov. Save the messages. Ignore anyone who offers to recover your money for a fee.

Did Anthropic really find AI bots on dating apps?

Yes. Anthropic's threat report of September 10, 2026 describes a China-based app studio that used Claude to run more than 4,700 AI personas across more than 20 dating apps, talking with at least 25,000 people and sending about 2.36 million messages in two weeks in April 2026. Anthropic caught it through its own monitoring and shut the access down.

SOURCES Where This Comes From

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- Federal Trade Commission, Data Spotlight, April 27, 2026: \$298 million reported lost to romance scams that started on social media in 2025, and the 60 percent figure. ftc.gov
- Report a scam: ReportFraud.ftc.gov and the FBI's ic3.gov

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