

The Oasis Centre - Cornwall

Registered Charity Number 1139355, founded to serve the communities in the parishes of St Columb Major, St Mawgan-in-Pydar, St Eval and St Ervan



Looking Out for Texts

Number 42 in a series of notes on important issues.

Modern technology is marvellous. With your mobile phone handy, you can send a text to anyone you want – provided of course you have their number. At any one moment, there are millions of people world-wide sending and receiving text messages, actively encouraged to ‘message your friends and family for free’ by providers such as WhatsApp. You can ‘chat’ in this way using ‘whatever device is most convenient for you’.

As with many aspects of modern life, these texts are the tools of choice for criminals. They can be used by criminals to defraud you, to lead you unwittingly into personal danger and to ruin your life, your peace of mind, your confidence.

It is all too simple. All the criminal has to do is to convince you that the text you have received is from a known source that you trust. It might be your parent, your child, your spouse, any other relative or just a good friend. Alternatively, it might be a business with which you have regular dealings such as your mobile service provider, WhatsApp, your bank or any other business with which you are in the habit of exchanging text messages.

There are various ways in which the criminal can do this. Stealing a loved one’s phone is one obvious example. Because of its brevity, a text message is not difficult to falsify. To achieve the criminal’s desired result, it only has to be sufficiently convincing (an exciting ‘bargain’ perhaps) for the brief time needed to get you to act in the way that the criminal desires.

The criminal may only want you to follow a link, perhaps to a site from which the criminal’s malware can access the sensitive information on your phone. It may be a request for an important password that has been ‘forgotten’. It may be a request for a money transfer due to an emergency. It may even be for a meeting – with the criminal of course – at a location where you could be mugged, or worse.

There is one simple thing that we must all remember. We must treat every text we receive with suspicion. Could it have been sent to us by a criminal? It takes less than a second for that thought to pass through our mind. Hopefully, our answer to that question will always be ‘no’.

Is there is something odd about the text – he or she is on holiday / never sends texts / does not use that language – for instance? That thought alone should prompt us to be cautious. A simple phone call to check may be all that we need to do. Criminals are clever, very clever, so it will always be better to be safe than sorry.

Jeremy Simmonds, Chair, The Oasis Centre - Cornwall