Protect Yourself From These 5 Common Google
Play Gift Card Scams

According to the FTC, $74.3M has been reported lost due to gift card and reload card scams in the first 9 months of this year (source). To help protect consumers against scams involving the Google Play gift card, Google is working to raise awareness and educate consumers on protecting themselves from gift card scams. Google Play is the official app store for Android smartphones and tablets. Google Play gift cards are easy-to-give gifts, but can only be used to purchase apps, movies, books, and other video game or app-related purchases through the Google Play store. But because Google Play gift cards are so easy to use, some bad actors request them as an alternative payment method in sophisticated scam scenarios. Don’t be misled. If anyone ever asks you to pay them with a Google Play gift card, it’s a scam. Period.

5 Common Google Play Gift Card Scam Scenarios:

1. IRS & Government

You may get a phone call from someone claiming to be the IRS, police, or another official government entity. If this caller tries to scare you into buying gift cards as payment for back taxes or for other legal situations hang up the phone--this caller is a scammer. Even if the caller knows and recites the last four digits of your social security number, this is still a scam. The caller may become hostile or insulting and they may threaten you with arrest, deportation, or suspension of a business or driver’s license, etc. These are empty threats. Under no circumstances does the IRS, police, or any government entities require payment with gift cards to resolve tax or other legal situations. In fact, the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration states on their website that any call requesting that taxpayers place funds on a Google Play Gift Card or any other gift cards to pay taxes and fees is an indicator of fraudulent activity. Do not buy gift cards and provide this caller with the codes under any circumstances.
2. Tech Support

You may get a phone call from someone claiming to be tech support or a computer software company asking for Google Play gift cards as payment to fix your computer. Alternatively, you may get an email from a computer software company asking you to call them so they can protect your computer from harmful viruses or fix a program you use. **The email may contain a virus that causes computer problems.** When you call, they will ask for payment and may say that because your computer has been compromised, your credit cards have also been compromised. Then they will ask for payment by Google Play gift card. **Hang up the phone because this is a scam.** Do not buy gift cards and provide this caller with the codes under any circumstances.

3. Family Emergency

A caller may claim to be a family member in trouble or an attorney/representative of a family member who is in trouble and needs to be paid in gift cards to remedy their emergency situation. The caller may try to deter you from contacting the family member in question to validate the claims -- don’t believe them. This caller is actually a scammer preying on the love and concern you have for your family. Do not buy gift cards and provide this caller with the codes under any circumstances.

4. Discounted Goods or Services

Someone may tempt you with a great deal and offer a large discount if you pay with a Google Play gift card instead of paying with a credit/debit card. They may also claim there are issues with a credit/debit card payment you recently made so you must pay with a Google Play gift card instead. This is a scam. Do not buy gift cards and provide this caller with the codes under any circumstances.

5. Email Requests

You might get an email from someone you know asking you to perform a “task” or a “favor” to purchase
Google Play gift cards and email them the redemption codes. While the sender’s name and email address may look like a family member, friend, or colleague **this is actually a sophisticated phishing scam disguised as a trustworthy request from someone you know.** Do not buy gift cards and respond with the redemption codes. If you want to confirm whether or not the request is legitimate, do not respond directly to the email sender or click on any links in their email. Instead, contact the person requesting the gift codes face to face or via an alternative communication method (e.g., the phone number you regularly use to call/text them).

**How to Protect Yourself & Loved Ones**

**It is important to know that all of the scenarios outlined above are scams.** Scammers may dictate which store you should purchase Google Play gift cards from (e.g., Target, Walmart, CVS, etc.). Scammers may discourage you from speaking to or answering questions from store associates, colleagues, friends, or family members.

If you find yourself in any of the situations above, or something like them, you’re at risk of being scammed. Don’t purchase gift cards and share the redemption codes with the requester over the phone or in writing; if you do, your money is likely gone. If you or a family member has experienced a scam, please immediately report the scam to your local police department. Victims of scams may be embarrassed to report the scam to anyone, but it can help prevent others from being scammed. You can also report the scam to the Federal Trade Commission on their [website](https://www.consumer.ftc.gov) or directly with Google by phone at the toll free US phone number (1-855-836-3987) or by email (visit [g.co/Play/Contact](https://g.co/Play/Contact) and click on “Contact Us”).

The bottomline is that any time you are asked to pay someone with a Google Play gift card in exchange for goods or services, it’s a scam. In fact, it’s a violation of Google Play’s Terms of Service to use Google Play gift cards to pay for anything outside of the Google Play Android app store.

While Google has been working to educate consumers about scam situations with signage in retail stores where gift cards are sold and anti-fraud warnings on the backs of Google Play gift cards, we’re asking for your help in sharing this information with your family and friends to help them avoid becoming the victim of a gift card scam.