

THE DANGERS OF ONLINE DATING

A black computer keyboard is visible in the background, slightly out of focus. In the foreground, a red heart-shaped computer mouse is connected to the keyboard by a black cord. The mouse is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the image.

NOT EVERYONE IS HONEST ONLINE

**† All sources are provided for information from Online Dating Association:
www.onlinedatingassociation.org.uk
However, we cannot accept responsibility for the advice provided by these sources.**

Whilst the vast majority of individuals who use online dating services are sincere and honest about the information they give and in their reasons for joining the services, as always, exceptions do exist.

The safety of those using online dating is a primary concern across the industry, however you should think about your own personal safety too. When you embark on online dating you will be thinking a lot about what you want from a relationship but you should always be giving thought to how to stay safe. Use care and common sense when communicating with or meeting new people, both online and offline.

Here are a few tips to help you have a safe experience together with links to organisations that can offer professional expert advice and practical assistance if needed.

Creating your online profile

- Protect your identity and personal information. Most sites will encourage you to create a User Name that does not contain your surname and doesn't let everyone know who you are.
- Remember sexually explicit, provocative or controversial user names could attract the wrong kind of attention.
- Stay in control when it comes to how and when you share information and don't share personal details until you are ready. It is also best to avoid including contact information such as your email address, home address, where you work or your phone numbers in your profile.
- When it comes to pictures, as a general rule, only share images that you wouldn't mind others seeing.



Getting To Know New People And Protecting Yourself

- When getting to know people, take your time and trust your instincts.
- When you are having a conversation online think whether you would be saying and sharing the same things if you were meeting the other person face-to-face. Use it to get to know people at a pace you feel comfortable with. It is totally sensible to be cautious about how much information you share at first and even over time. Always take a common sense approach when talking to someone new.
- Dating sites often offer mail and chat services so you can get to know people in a safe and controlled environment. Make the most of their platforms and the added security it gives you. Take care when providing contact details to people who say their subscription is about to end. A common behaviour of scammers is to take the conversation away from the safety of the dating site as quickly as possible.

Meeting In-Person

Be smart and stay safe. Going on a date with someone is new and exciting. Although you've probably got to know the person better during your conversations, it's still worth taking note of the following tips to ensure you stay safe when dating and especially on a first date:

- Let friends or family members know where you're going and when you'll be home and keep them regularly updated
- Meet in a public place with lots of people around, don't be tempted to meet at your date's house
- Use your own transportation to get to and from the date
- Watch your alcohol intake and don't leave your drink unattended
- Keep your purse, wallet, phone, and personal items with you
- Take your mobile phone with you
- Leave at any time if you feel uncomfortable, remember your safety comes first

Be Aware Of The Warning Signs – Scammers

Although the vast majority of individuals who use online dating services are honest about the information they give, as with all social networking sites, there may be some exceptions. Dating sites, the police and others work to keep scammers off sites. Scammers want one thing and one thing only – money.

Here are a few examples of behaviours to watch out for:

- **Moving too quickly** – Be cautious if the relationship progresses more quickly than you are used to. Sudden declarations of love may sound nice but other motives could be there. Use common sense and don't be afraid to speak to a friend to get a second opinion.
- **Irregular behaviour** – If the person seems vague, tries to take the conversation offline, has an unlikely story or acts inappropriately, then proceed with caution and don't hesitate to report them.
- **Requests for money** – Some scammers will look to gain your sympathy with emotional stories of ill relatives or financial difficulties or urgent job opportunities and travel needs. Look out! Any request for money at any point should ring an alarm bell; however sad, urgent, compelling or heart-wrenching the story.
- **Investment opportunities** – Beware of anyone offering you ways to get rich quick putting your money into investment schemes. You are online to meet people and make new relationships: not to act as a charity or in search of investments. Any offer that's "too good to be true" is to be avoided.



We can't guarantee that you'll find romance, but for everything you need to know about protecting yourself and your savings when dating online, please visit www.getsafeonline.org or www.onlinedatingassociation.org.uk



Reporting A Concern Or Problem

If someone you are talking to is making you feel uncomfortable cease your communication with them and report them to the dating service provider or the police immediately.

Other useful contacts:

- **Action Fraud**

Action Fraud is the UK's national fraud and internet crime reporting centre. If you've been scammed, ripped off or conned, there is something you can do about it. Report fraud to us and receive a police crime reference number.

0300 123 2040

www.actionfraud.police.uk

- **Citizens Advice Bureaux**

The Citizens Advice service helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice.

03444 111 444

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

- **Get Safe Online**

Providing practical advice on how to protect yourself, your computers and mobile devices against fraud, identity theft, viruses and many other problems encountered online.

www.getsafeonline.org

- **My decision**

A Metropolitan Police site which has been created as step by step guide for anyone who has, or knows someone who has, been raped or sexually assaulted. Step by step; from who to contact, to the type of care they will receive, how evidence will be collected, making a report, the investigation and their ability to control the process.

www.mydecision.co.uk

- **Rape Crisis**

A national charity helping those who have experienced rape, child sex abuse and/or any other kind of sexual violence.

www.rapecrisis.org.uk

- **Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARC)**

SARC's offer victims of sexual crime an integrated service where victims can receive medical care, psychological counselling, legal advice and other support, all in one place from professionally trained staff. For victims, referral centres help reduce the stress of dealing with what's happening to them.

www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Rape-and-sexual-assault-referral-centres/LocationSearch/364

- **Single Point of Access / Focus**

If you or someone you know is a vulnerable adult and suffering from abuse, harm or neglect, call the team.

01472 256 256

www.focusadultsocialwork.co.uk

- **Suzy Lamplugh**

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust runs the National Stalking Helpline which provides guidance and information to anybody who is currently or has previously been affected by harassment or stalking.

0808 802 0300

www.suzylamplugh.org

- **Victim Support**

Victim Support is the national charity giving free and confidential help to victims of crime, witnesses, their family, friends and anyone else affected across England and Wales.

08 08 16 89 111

www.victimsupport.org.uk