

Safe Online Dating Tips

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ANTI-VIOLENCE PROJECT 24-HOUR CRISIS LINE –

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The Internet can be a great place to meet friends or even form lasting and loving relationships. It's also a place where some are online with the intent to take advantage of or to hurt others. It's always best to be educated and alert.

Below is more detailed information on ways you can be safer while searching for a relationship online.

Trust your gut.

If you get a feeling that something isn't right, ***trust your instinct*** and exit the situation. If you are afraid of offending the person, you can do so politely. Our survival instincts sense danger faster than our logical mind. You may not be able to identify what made you nervous until later.

Get a face pic and phone number before meeting them:

If the person knows you have their photo in your email inbox, it could make them wary of doing something to harm you. A phone number allows you to talk beforehand (more on this below) and is another piece of information you can leave around or give to a friend.

If/When you decide to meet in person, *meet in public*:

If you agree to meet up with only one person, but multiple people show up, do not go with them. If you meet up and the person doesn't look like the picture, ask them about it. If they don't have a satisfactory answer, exit.

But why meet in public if we are meeting up for sex only?

To be safe, meet in public close to your destination, and spend a few minutes talking about what you want to do (and what you don't want to do) sexually. This gives you some time to get a sense of this person with others around.

Meeting in public:

- Meeting up in well-lit place is best, a café or restaurant with other people around.
- If you would rather meet at a bar or a club, remember to get your own drinks. If you drink at all, drink only a bit. Intoxication may be seen as vulnerability.
- If someone insists on getting your drink for you, tell them no. If they still don't respect that, please do not to take the drink and consider ending your time with the person.

- Another advantage of meeting in public is that you can bring friends with you. They can watch your back and they can let you know their impressions of your date.
- If you decide to leave with the person, get the address of where you'll be and their phone number. Introduce them to the bartender, friends, or acquaintances before leaving. Let them know you gave info to your friends so they know where you are for safety.

Meeting in private:

I really don't want to meet in public. Is it safer for me to host or for them to host?

There are safety advantages and disadvantages to both.

If you host:

- Leave all valuables out of sight, locked away, or with a trusted friend.
- Keep items that could be weapons out of sight (scissors, knives, bats, etc).
- Stay awake the entire time the person is there - no sleepovers the first time. Items can disappear while you are asleep and your safety could be in jeopardy.
- Generally speaking, it is better not to host if you don't live in a secure building. Remember, after one visit, the person knows where you live.
- Keep your cell phone charged and close to you at all times*. If someone refuses to leave when you ask them, some options include using command type language (i.e. "Get out of my house now"), calling police, calling a friend, or activating your silent alarm (more below). Do what makes the most sense to you.
- ***The police or your friend(s) can't be there immediately after you call.** This is a good safety measure to employ, but don't count on it being your only one.

If they host:

- PLEASE tell at least one person the exact address where you will be and for how long.
- Set up a silent alarm (more on this below).
- Bring your phone and keep it charged.
- Do not accept drinks, even water, at the person's home unless you observe the drink being poured. Date rape drugs have no odor or flavor even in water.
- If somebody else is at the home when you get there, exit. Most people hosting a guest will ask roommates to clear out.
- If at any point you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, leave immediately. **You don't have to give an explanation.** If someone prevents you from leaving, firmly re-state your intention to leave. More under the "Use your Voice" section below.

Isn't it rude to leave? What if we haven't 'finished?' Shouldn't I finish what I started?

NO. You have the right to change your mind and cease sexual activity at any stage. Your emotional and physical safety comes first. **Consenting does not take away your right to stop.** If someone doesn't respect a boundary you set, no matter how small, this is a sign that they may not respect other boundaries as well. You deserve to be respected at all times. Leave if they do something you ask them not to. You will find other sexual partners.

Asserting Your Boundaries:

Use your voice.

Will someone really stop if I tell them to? What if I just make them angry?

One should always take verbal threats seriously, but know that verbal self-defense is a great first line of defense. Resistance breaks the assailant's script and places doubt in their mind about their ability to commit the crime. Note: there is a difference between being aggressive and assertive. Being aggressive is often perceived as confrontational and threatening. To de-escalate a situation, it is important to criticize the behavior, not the person. **We can exercise our rights without denying the rights of others by choosing to be assertive** Below are steps to assertive communication:

- Maintain confident body language- Stand/sit tall, keep your head up, shoulders back.
- Make eye contact.
- Respond firmly and quickly.
- Speak in a steady, calm voice.
- Use clear, command-type language, and use "I-statements" (i.e. "I feel uncomfortable when you talk to me that way and I want you to stop.").
- Be specific as to what behavior it is you want stopped.
- Send a clear and consistent message with your words, voice, eyes, and body language.

More verbal techniques:

Name The Behavior that the person has just done or said that has made you feel uncomfortable (i.e. "Stop touching me after I've asked you to stop.").

Broken Record Technique involves repeating your command. This is especially useful when someone appears intoxicated or is indecisive on what to do next. (i.e. "Leave my apartment now. Leave my apartment now!")

Make A Scene and Enlisting the Help of Others strips the person of the power of secrecy and sends the message that you are not ashamed to call attention to the situation in public.

It also lets others around you know what is happening. To enlist the help of others be directive (i.e. pick a person out of the crowd and address them directly with commands such as "Call 911!")

Reasoning or Negotiation will distract an assailant. They are expecting things to go a certain way, and you responding differently throws them off. Negotiation may include asking the assailant to use a condom, put a weapon down, or to move to a different location. **THIS IS NOT THE SAME AS GIVING CONSENT!** You may decide at any point to resist, escape or comply. All are options for survival.

Making Yourself Human/Distraction violates the assailant's idea you of being fearful and silent. When you are active, you become real and not necessarily what they expect. It is more difficult to hurt someone who is seen as a human being rather than an object.

What is a Silent Alarm?

There are numerous ways to utilize your cell phone as a safety tool. If you do not have a cell phone, and you are not going to be in public place, try to make sure there will be a landline before you agree to go. Tell one friend that, if everything is going well with your date/ hook up, you will call or text at a specific time (usually after the date is over) with a specific code word. It should be something not guessable – i.e. NOT "all is well," "I'm fine," etc. This word (could be a color or a flavor of ice cream or a fruit, for example) tells the friend that all is well and the alarm is disarmed. Beforehand, tell your friend the address of where you will be and you both agree on the code words and what the friend should do if you do not call. Typically, the agreement is that if you call and say 'everything is fine' but do not use the code word, the friend should call police. And if you do not call or text at all at the time agreed upon, the friend should *call you*. If you do not answer, or if you answer and do not say the code word, your friend should call the police.

I really don't want to tell my friends that I am cruising online. I am embarrassed about it. Plus, I don't know if any of them would even do this for me.

TONS of people meet online. It is nothing to be embarrassed about. But even if it's not possible to confide in someone, it is possible set up the alarm without telling them exactly why. If you really do not want anyone to know, or you don't feel like you have time to set one up, leave the picture of the person you are meeting open on the desktop of your computer and leave your computer on, with the person's name, e-mail address or chat name, phone number, and address of where you'll be written down nearby and easily visible.

A few other reminders:

- Set up an anonymous e-mail account if you plan to communicate outside of a dating site.
- Do not publish your address, phone number, or e-mail address in personal ads.
- Ask lots of questions when chatting, but don't necessarily take every answer at face value. Remember online, you cannot read nonverbal, body language cues.
- If someone is abusive to you online, block them right away.

- If you decide to meet in person, do not rely upon your date for transportation and do not provide transportation for them.

These are safety tools that have been useful for some people in some situations. You are never responsible for the actions of someone else, so you are not to blame if following some or none or all of these tips doesn't prevent an attack.

Tips like these can sometimes feel silly or paranoid, but they can often be helpful when meeting strangers. **Use the ones that fit best for you. Follow your instincts, and remember that you do not deserve to be mistreated. For more information, contact AVP's 24-hour Crisis Line at 773-871-2273.**