

Online Dating Safety Tips (18+)

As society changes with the times, so do the intricacies of everyday life. One of the biggest aspects of change we have seen in recent days is the inclusion of the internet in everything we do. We're turning to the internet to go to work, take our kids to school, go grocery shopping, and even find a date. Unfortunately, not everyone moving their day-to-day tasks online has good intentions.

Although online dating can be convenient and exciting for adults¹ who have few alternative options for meeting eligible singles, it doesn't come without serious risks. More and more, we see predators and sex traffickers moving their operations to online avenues (including dating apps), using the internet to identify, groom, and exploit their victims. Traffickers see vulnerability in the desire to find love and will use that longing to lure victims into dangerous, abusive relationships, with the intention of sexually exploiting them for profit.

While Shared Hope does not necessarily endorse online dating, we do want to make sure those who are engaging in it are doing so in the safest way possible. Here are a few tips to help you stay safe while dating online:



- **Screenshot any red flags and report them.** While online dating, you may come across someone exhibiting some serious red flags. When you see red flags, screenshot them. If this person is dangerous, you want to be able to pass along the information you've gathered to the app, website, or even law enforcement. Red flags may appear when he or she:

- **Asks you for explicit photos or videos**

NEVER share explicit photos or videos of yourself that you wouldn't want shared elsewhere. You never know what someone could do with those images if you decide not to continue your relationship. In addition, online predators and sex traffickers often use explicit photos to blackmail or "sextort" their victims into doing whatever they want.

- **Asks you to share personal information too soon, such as your full name, number, address, or where you work**

If they ask for your number, give them either your email or a google number if you have one.

- **Offers to take care of you – especially if they invite you to move in**
- **Suggests no one loves or cares about you but him or her**
- **Is moving too fast, or gets too personal too quick**
- **Is extremely charming but also controlling**
- **Offers to buy you things in exchange for sex acts**

- **Make sure your social media is private.**

Although this might seem a bit off topic, we all know that if they have enough information to do so, the person you are chatting with will probably look you up on social media. Depending on your posting habits, this could lead them to finding details you might not want them to know yet, like what neighborhood you live in or where you work.

• Talk with them over video chat before meeting in person.

Not only does this allow you to make sure you are dating who you *think* you're dating, it also allows for further conversation, balancing your decision regarding whether or not you really are interested enough to meet them in person.

- Bonus points: Use a video-chatting platform that does not require you to share your phone number with the other person.

• Share your location with a trusted family member or friend.

Always tell someone (like a close friend, parent, or roommate) where you're going, with whom, and when you expect to be back. If you have a smartphone, you can even use its location-sharing features to show a friend or family member where you are in real-time.

- Bonus points: Share a screenshot or link to your date's online profile so they know who you're with and how to get in contact with them if need be.

• Meet up somewhere public

Although a hike or a home-cooked meal might sound like an amazing date with someone you like, it could be a nightmare with someone you may end up NOT liking. Since it takes a while (and many in-person dates) to really get to know someone, save those types of intimate dates for further down the road, if or when you feel more comfortable and safe with that person.

• Go somewhere familiar.

For instance, go to a restaurant where you know someone on staff. If that isn't an option, meet in a place you have been before or show up early to get familiar with the location. Not only will this help you feel more comfortable and relaxed on your date, but it will also come in handy if you feel like you need to make a quick getaway.

- Bonus points: Mention to someone on staff that you are meeting up with someone you met online. That way, they will be far more likely to keep an eye out for you and will be more prepared to help should things go awry.

• Do not allow your date to pick you up or drive you home.

Although this might seem like a romantic gesture for a boyfriend or girlfriend, it's important to remember that this person is still a stranger to you. If you can't drive home yourself, turn to a friend, family member, or trusted ride service to get you home safely.

• Stay alert and aware.

If you plan to eat or drink during an in-person date, keep your food and beverages with you at all times – DO NOT let them out of your sight. Unfortunately, many "date-rape" drugs are colorless and tasteless, making them virtually impossible to detect.

- Bonus points: Don't drink any alcohol. While it might seem like a good idea to use alcohol to "take the edge off" an awkward first date, staying completely sober is a great way to ensure that you are the most alert you can be.²

• Go with your gut.

If you get a bad feeling about the person you are out with, leave – even if it feels it would be impolite to do so. Listen to your instincts. That "gut feeling" is your body trying to communicate with you. Your safety should come before all social pleasantries.

For more information about online sex trafficking and how to keep yourself (and others) safe from it, visit [sharedhope.org/internetsafety](https://www.sharedhope.org/internetsafety).

Consulted Sources:



[Rebecca Bender Initiative Identifying Trafficking Handout](#)



[Safety.com](#)



[RAINN](#)



[Bustle](#)

¹If you are under 18, you should not be engaging in online dating. Not only is online dating extremely risky, but there are no major online dating sites that allow users under the age of 18 to create a profile or use their services.

²Note: Whether they are sober or intoxicated when the crime takes place, victims of sexual assault and exploitation should never be to blame for the crimes committed against them.

The information and links provided in this resource are solely for educational and informational purposes and do not constitute legal advice.