Online Seniors

A QUICK-GUIDE FOR STAYING SAFE & SANE ONLINE

ConnectSafely

The number of online seniors is growing.

A 2018 Pew Research Center survey found that 66% of Americans over 65 were internet users and that number is getting bigger all the time, especially since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic when the internet became — for many seniors — the only way to communicate with friends and family and the safest way to interact with their doctors.

Even before the pandemic, seniors were going online to read the latest news, shop, bank, stay in touch with family, get medical information and access medical records. For many it's also a way to stay in the workforce and launch a new career or business. And some seniors are going online to make new friends or find romantic partners.

Seniors are increasingly social.

Social networking isn't just for young people. A 2016 Pew Research Center study found that 62% of online seniors use Facebook, and that's just one of the major social networking services.

The most common complaint from seniors when it comes to technology...

In a word, frustration. Whether it's an upgraded smart phone or a new streaming service, many seniors find it's difficult to adapt to continually evolving technology that wasn't always designed with them and their needs in mind. The good news is there are many great places to get help with computers, smartphones, and other technology.

Top takeaways

- Even before the pandemic, more than two-thirds of seniors over 65 use the internet and most seniors use Facebook.
- Seniors cite frustration as a roadblock to adopting new technology
- Senior centers, schools, and community organizations offer help and free classes
- Use strong and unique passwords and don't share them
- Beware online scams

- Senior centers, schools and religious or community groups with free or low-cost classes
- Family members, tech savvy high school students (they might get community service credit), friends and neighbors
- Retail stores that sell and service technology products
- Online tutorials & support sites (but make sure they're reputable and don't download any software or let them take control of your device).

*For more information and a printable pdf, visit ConnectSafely.org/seniors.

More Ways to Stay Safe Online

Use strong and unique passwords and never share passwords with anyone, unless you've designated someone you trust to manage your accounts.

One reason for this precaution is to prevent someone from using your account to impersonate you — perhaps asking your friends and family to "help you out" by wiring "you" money in an "emergency," which is a common scam.

Make sure passwords are long — at least eight characters, but longer is much better.

Include numbers, upper and lowercase letters and symbols; avoid using names or dictionary words. You'll find password tips and information on how to use two-step security, aka multi-factor authentication, and fingerprint or facial recognition for more advanced security at C**onnectSafely.org/seniors**.

Use privacy settings on social media accounts.

Most social media services have settings that let you control who can see what you post. Facebook, for example, has extensive controls, letting you post to only friends, your friends and their friends, or to the public. You can also limit specific posts to a smaller group like only family members or specific people (you'll find more on privacy settings at **ConnectSafely.org/seniors**).

Dealing with "spam" or unsolicited email can be challenging.

It's pretty common to be plagued by junk email. Simply getting these messages isn't dangerous, but it can be annoying. The best thing to do is make sure you're using whatever spam filter is provided by your email service. (Visit ConnectSafely. org/seniors for information.) Avoid clicking on links in unsolicited email, as there is a chance they could link to sites designed to scam people or infect computers with malicious software.

Report abuse from anyone, including friends, family and caregivers.

We hear a lot about children being "cyberbullied," but it also happens to adults, including seniors. If you are getting messages on social media or in email that are threatening, extremely angry, or in any way abusive, don't respond; reach out for help from someone you trust or from adult protective services or law enforcement, and report the behavior to the site or service. All major social media companies, and online and mobile service providers, have employees that respond to abuse complaints.

Scams!

If an offer, email, or message sounds too good to be true or just seems plain fishy, go with your gut and do some additional checking. Here's a roundup of some common scams:

Personal emergency scam Scammers email or post social media messages that appear to be from someone you know saying they are in distress, such as having their wallet stolen or having been arrested. If you get such a message, find another way to verify if it's true, such as reaching out directly to the person.

Online dating scam Many people have found love via dating websites, but others have been scammed out of money by online con artists. Some red flags to watch for: A person who claims or looks to be a lot younger than you; anyone who claims to be from the U.S. but is supposedly traveling or working overseas; someone who pressures you to leave the dating site to communicate via email or text messaging; or someone who professes instant feelings of love.

Infected computer scam You might get a call from "Microsoft," saying your computer is infected or vulnerable to hacking, with an offer to fix it for you. Hang up. Microsoft and other reputable companies never make these calls. Also be suspicious of any messages in email or that pop-up on your computer, in your Web browser or on a mobile app warning you of a virus or a security risk.

Speak out and don't be ashamed if you're victimized. Criminals are very good at what they do and there have been lots of very smart people who have been victimized online. If it happens to you, report it to a trusted person and law enforcement.