



QUICK-GUIDE TO

Online Dating

What is now online dating goes back to 1959, when 98 subjects participated in a Stanford University study on “computer dating.” Today millions of people meet their partners online. A [2017 Stanford study](#) found that “meeting online has become the most popular way couples meet,” for both heterosexual and same-sex couples.

For the most part, online dating is safe, but it is very important to take some common-sense precautions.

Only use reputable online dating sites or apps.

Do a little research to make sure the site is reputable. Know the service's rules, safety procedures and how to block or report anyone who is abusive or makes you feel uncomfortable. Look for services that have safe ways to communicate, including text chat, messaging and video chats.

Do a little research using social media or search.

You might be able to find out a little bit about the person by looking at their social media profile, LinkedIn, or “Googling” them. Many people have the same name so make sure you’re looking at the right person. Look for signs and characteristics that might concern you.

Be aware of online dating scams. People have been scammed into parting with their money and left heartbroken. With anyone you meet online, there is always the possibility they may not be who they claim to be.

Don’t share personal or private information,

including social security numbers, where you live and work or details about your routines.

Dating & COVID-19

COVID-19 presents additional challenges when it comes to online dating. According to The Meet Group, which operates several popular dating apps, people are still looking online for meaningful relationships, though some habits have changed.

ConnectSafely recommends that you and anyone you date be fully vaccinated. In addition, The Meet Group assembled these [pandemic dating tips](#) from their [Safer Dating Advisory Board](#) of epidemiologists and infectious disease experts:

- Check your area for increased coronavirus activity.
- Pre-screen potential dates on video.
- Discuss COVID-19 risk factors openly and honestly.
- Don’t go on a date if either of you is sick or have had contact with someone who is.
- Refer to CDC health guidance on safety protocols and be cautious.
- Meet in a public place that is well-ventilated, uncrowded, or outdoors, if possible.
- Be choosy about who you meet and when in doubt get tested.

More Advice for Safe Online Dating

Getting together.

Avoid an in-person meeting until you have connected by phone or video chat. Consider using Google Voice or another “disposable” phone number rather than giving out or calling from your phone number. Consider also concealing your home address.

If you do arrange an in-person meeting with someone you meet online:

- Make sure the first meeting is in a public place, like a restaurant.
- Let others know where you’re going to be.
- Bring your fully charged cell phone and keep in contact with a friend during the date.
- Limit your use of alcohol or drugs.
- Arrange your own transportation to and from the first meeting.
- Consider using a tool from the service or a third party (like URSafe) that can help protect you during the date by tracking your location and allowing you to easily get help without having to make a call.
- Resist any pressure to go home with the person or invite them into your home during that first date. There is plenty of time for that later.

Watch for red flags.

A red flag can include a person who claims or looks to be a lot younger than you or who sends you a picture that looks as if it came from a fashion site. The FBI warns people to be careful about anyone who claims to be from the U.S. who is traveling or working overseas and suggests that you only deal with reputable dating services. Other red flags include:

- Pressuring you to leave the dating site or app to communicate via email or text messaging.
- Someone who professes instant feelings of love.
- Asking for nude or intimate pictures. Don’t send them (they can be used against you).
- Making any requests for money or gifts, including asking you to help them out of a jam or send money so they can visit you. These are usually scams.
- Being unavailable for a face-to-face meeting.
- Being overly complimentary early in your online relationship
- Making claims or telling stories that are inconsistent or grandiose.

About ConnectSafely

ConnectSafely is a Silicon Valley, California-based nonprofit organization dedicated to educating users of connected technology about safety, privacy and security. We publish research-based safety tips, parents’ guidebooks, advice, news and commentary on all aspects of tech use and policy.