



TIPS FOR SAFER ONLINE DATING



Online dating can come with challenges around privacy and safety, as abusive parties may misrepresent themselves and/or misuse access to and information about a victim to cause harm. The following tips are intended for victim advocates, law enforcement, and other professionals to share with victims when planning for online safety and may help reduce the risks of cyberstalking, image-based sexual abuse, scams, and other forms of technology-facilitated abuse.

Strategies to Limit Information/Enhance Digital Privacy

#1 Get a free or inexpensive VOIP (voice over internet protocol) phone number.

Your real phone number is your lifeline to MANY services. Consider using a dedicated alternate phone number to sign up for apps or give to dating partners early on. VOIP phone services use the internet to make calls and send text messages (rather than phone lines or cell phone towers); common providers include Zoom, RingCentral, and GoogleVoice. Using a VOIP number prevents people you meet from being able to reverse search your actual phone number to find more information about you. These VOIP numbers are easier to disconnect, abandon, or mute than your real number.

#2 Be mindful of your overall digital health.

What information is readily available about you online—and are you comfortable with what is findable? Think about your risk tolerance and preferences, considering your career goals, public persona, and reputation.

- Google yourself—what info is readily available about you to scammers? Consider setting up [Google's "Results About You" feature](#), which will search for your personal information online and help you easily remove it from search results.
- Check your privacy settings on all social media, from Instagram to WhatsApp.
- Passwords: Use strong, unique passwords for sensitive accounts like email, payment, and banking.
- Whenever offered, use two-factor authentication for sensitive accounts.



Strategies to Verify the Potential Date's Identity and Intentions

#3 Trust your gut; try to videochat first.

Video-chatting is a simple way to cut down the likelihood of catfishing (when a person pretends to be someone else) and scams. It allows you to see if the person is who they say they are, and to spot inconsistencies in their appearance that could mean their photos have been AI-generated (mouth/face not matching up to sound, weird/glitchy hands, etc.). Endless excuses for why someone can't video chat is a major red flag—trust your gut if something feels off—and look for apps that use ID verification (where users have to use a physical ID to verify their identity) to confirm your date's identity.



#4 Be wary about "moving to another app."

Common sextortion and trafficking tactics ask you to move the conversation to an "encrypted messaging" app for safety—but it's not for YOUR safety. Encrypted messaging apps, including ones with disappearing messages, can make it easier for someone to send unwanted messages without being held accountable. If the goal is dating, stay on the dating app.

Strategies for Image Privacy—Yours and Others'!

#5 Assess photos before sharing/posting.

Once an image is sent, posted, or shared, it might be public—forever. Before you send a photo or use it in a profile, consider:

- Is this consensual? Do I have explicit permission to use/send this photo from everyone in it?
- Is it within community norms of the app? Is the content appropriate for the app I'm sharing it on?
- Can the photo be used to identify me or others? If yes, are you/they okay with that?
 - both face and body?
 - tattoos?
 - reverse-image searchable? Try copying and pasting it into Google Lens to see the results!



#6 Respect boundaries: yours and other peoples'.

Distributing intimate images without consent *is a crime*.

- Hold and respect each other's digital boundaries in ALL relationships, casual or serious.

Strategies for Safe Meeting

#7 Use an app or built-in "check in" feature.

When going on a date, let someone you trust know where you are going. Considering using a check-in feature to let your trusted person/people know where you are and that you're okay.



- [Apple iPhones have this "Check In" feature.](#)
- Android devices and Google accounts let you [share your real-time location with specific contacts](#), and some have the option to [schedule a "Safety Check"](#).
- Will you be able to easily use your phone if needed? Is it charged and will you have decent phone service and/or wifi?

Know your resources.

Most online dating scams and extortion rely on *isolation*. They want to present situations as time sensitive and/or create reasons why you can't tell anyone what's happening. Harassment, threats, or non-consensual sharing of intimate images are NEVER your fault. Know that there are free, confidential resources to talk about what you're experiencing, including how to access help lines safely.

- [StopNCII.org](#) and [Cyber Civil Rights Initiative](#) help people who have photos shared online without their consent.
- [Clinic to End Tech Abuse](#) offers free digital safety guides.
- [Chayn.org](#) has a free guide to online safety and many other resources.
- National hotlines offer 24/7 support, referrals, and crisis intervention:
 - [988 Lifeline](#) (emotional support, suicide, & crisis lifeline): 988
 - [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#): 1-800-799-7233
 - [National Sexual Assault Hotline](#): 1-800-656-4673
 - [The Network/La Red LGBTQ Hotline](#): 1-800-832-1901

