

## Keeping safe whilst dating online

Online dating is growing in popularity and there are many success stories out there but it is important to keep yourself safe.

### Whilst online

- Protect your personal information

When setting up a profile do not include your last name. Do not share details such as your address, date of birth or any financial information. In early conversations try not to give away too much identifying information, for example where you work.

- Protect your password

Do not let others access your profile. You have the power to decide what information you make public, but if someone can access your account they will be able to access more personal details.

- Do not move the conversation away from the dating website.
- Do not send gifts, vouchers, or money transfers.

These are tactics used by scammers (more on scammers to follow).

### Meeting up in person

- Arrange to meet in a public place

Never arrange to go to someone's home or invite them to your home. You should arrange to meet in public, somewhere busy, for example a restaurant, bar or coffee shop. Ideally somewhere you are familiar with and feel comfortable in.

- Let friends know where you are.

If you are planning to meet with someone you have been chatting with, tell a friend or family member who you are meeting, and where you are meeting them. Do not change your plans without letting others know. There are various apps available where friends and family can check your location. (eg iPhone Find My Friends). You should also arrange to contact a friend once the date is over.

- Travel there and back independently.

You should plan how to get to the meeting place and back home again in advance. Do not leave it to chance and politely decline any offers of a lift. This will allow you to leave early should you wish. Accepting a lift will leave you alone with someone you have just met and it may leave you vulnerable.

- Look after your personal items

Take your mobile phone with you and keep it turned on so that you can get in touch with friends and they can get in touch with you. Keep your purse/wallet phone and any personal items with you.

- Do not leave your drink unattended and watch your alcohol intake.

This will help you remain in control and make you less vulnerable.

- Don't be afraid to leave

If you feel uncomfortable, leave. It doesn't matter at what stage of the date. If anything makes you feel uneasy leave.

## Online dating services and scammers.

Unfortunately, online dating is a platform that provides opportunities for scammers. However, once you know what to look out for it can be easier to spot a scammer.

You should be wary of any of the following signs:

- Someone who comes on too strong.

Scammers will often declare their undying love very early in any communication. They will also go overboard with compliments.

- They try to move the conversation to a different platform away from the dating app or website.

You should only communicate with people you have met on a dating website through that website. They may give legitimate sounding reasons for wanting your email, telephone number or a different way to contact you, but it makes you more vulnerable. Dating websites may be monitored and can offer a certain degree of protection for their users. If you believe someone is misusing the website, you can report it and fake or scam profiles will be removed. Examples of reasons given for moving the conversation from the website include – my membership is up and I'm not renewing (but I'd still like to get to know you). I work on an oil rig/ in the forces etc. and my boss does not allow me to access this website from work.

- They direct you to a different website

This may be a fake website that will either encourage you to enter your credit card details or it may install malware or viruses onto your device.

- They will not meet you face to face.

They may make dates and then cancel at the last minute. Or they may claim to be out of the country, working abroad. Some of the reasons may initially sound legitimate, but will often lead to requests for money. For example, they may claim to need money for their air fare home, or to pay medical expenses for a sick relative.

- They request money, gifts or vouchers.

Once they have built up a rapport with you, scammers will often ask for money, gifts or vouchers. This may be very subtle to begin with. They may mention a sick child or even that it is their child's birthday. (They probably don't have a child and they are using a stock photo from the internet). They may ask for phone credit in order to be able to continue talking to you. Once they think you trust them they will ask for money transfers to help pay for emergency travel home, or emergency medical care for them or their family. None of this is real.

- They ask for personal or financial details.

They may say they want to send you a gift, or some money but once they have your financial details they may be able to access your accounts. Personal details are also valuable to scammers as they can sell them to identity fraudsters.

- They don't answer specific questions. They repeat themselves, or go off topic. In some instances, you may not even be talking to a real person. There are computer programmes which simulate conversations with the aim of getting you to divulge personal information or to direct you to another website.

- They offer you a job opportunity or try to sell you a product. There are legitimate websites for these services. Any company or product using a dating website to promote themselves should be treated with suspicion.

**If you suspect that someone you are chatting to online is not what they seem, you should report them to the dating website. You should also block them so that you do not receive any further correspondence from them.**