

Stay safe with online dating



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Stay safe with online dating

Online dating can be a great way to connect with people and form relationships, but there are safety measures you should take when meeting people online.

Research has found that 37% of dating app users have reported someone to the app for inappropriate behaviour. 63% have felt uncomfortable on a date from a dating app, and 33% have experienced harassment or abuse while on these dates.¹

Everyone deserves to feel safe. This toolkit will provide you with key information about staying safe when online dating, including what signs to check for, advice for your first meetings, and information on healthy relationships.

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-62206485>

Advice for online dating

When you start using dating platforms, remember these eight key safety checks:

- **Use a reputable dating app or website**

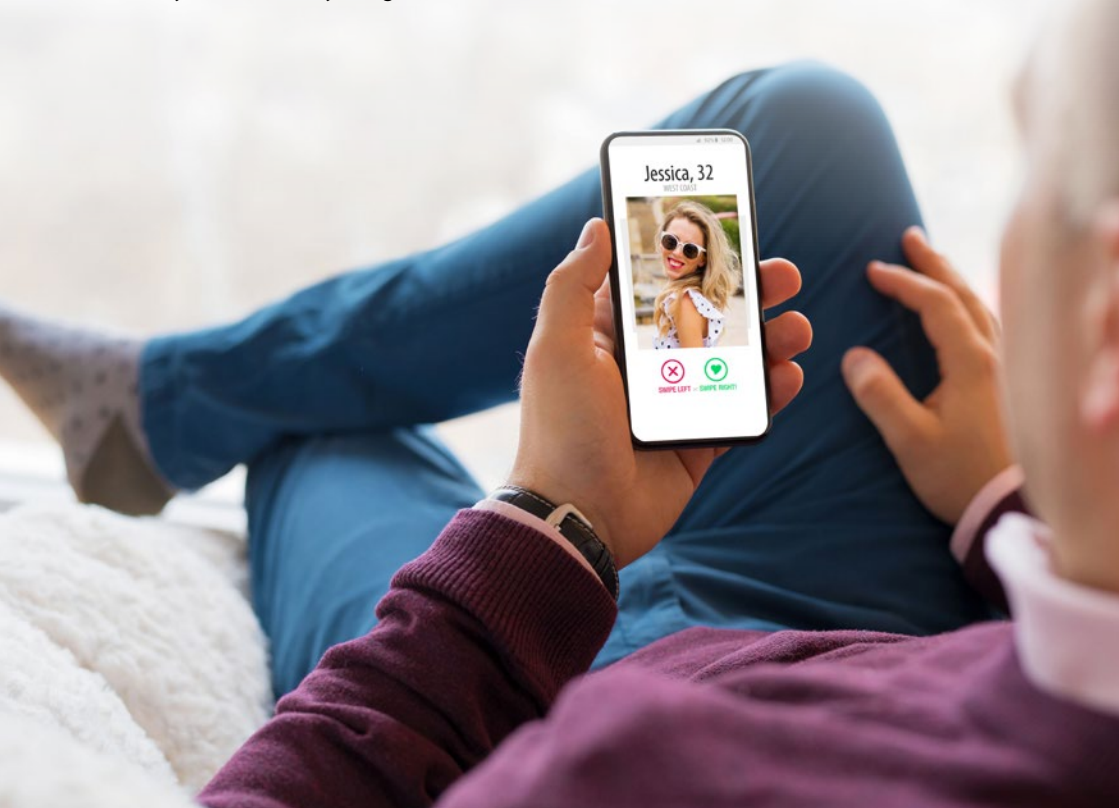
If you use a well-known dating platform, there will be a reduced chance of coming across unpleasant situations because these sites are more likely to have checks and safety features in place.

- **Get to know the safety features**

Understand the app or website you are using. Make sure you know how to block and report any suspicious or unwanted accounts.

- **Be careful which photos you share**

Photos can show personal information which you don't want to share with people you don't trust. Photos can also be reverse image searched, which can lead people to your social media accounts if you use the same photos. Live or motion photos may also include your geolocation.



- **Avoid suspicious profiles**

If the person has no bio, no social media linked, and only one photo, it can be a sign that they are a fake account and should be avoided.

- **Double check profiles**

You can cross check someone through various sources to make sure they are who they say they are. For instance, you could check through any mutual friends or social media accounts. You can also reverse image search their photos, and if they come up as a different person, this could be a sign that the person you're speaking to isn't who they say they are. On some dating platforms you can verify your account by proving to the site that you are a real person. These verified accounts are more likely to be who they say they are.

- **Block and report suspicious users**

Reputable dating platforms allow you to block and report any suspicious profiles. This can be done anonymously, before and after you match with someone.

- **Wait to share any personal information**

Never give anyone you haven't met in person, or don't trust, personal and important information. This includes any of your banking information, the addresses of your home or workplace, and any passwords. If they are trying to get this information from you, remember you can block and report their account. It is also worth keeping your communications within the app or website for a while, instead of giving out personal information like a phone number. Plus, many well-known apps or sites will prevent images or videos being sent, which will reduce the risk of scammers or encountering unsavoury behaviour.

- **Watch out for strange behaviours**

If a user is acting suspiciously, including irregular communications, refusal to answer any video calls, reluctance to share any information, or pressuring you in any way, it can be a sign that they are not to be trusted.

Advice for first meeting

Take some safety precautions before you meet in person for the first time.

- **Video chat before you meet**

By arranging a video chat before meeting the person, you can check that they are who they say they are. If they are avoiding video calls it can be a sign they are not to be trusted.

- **Tell a friend where you're going**

Once you've arranged a date, tell a close friend or family member who you're meeting, and consider sharing your date's online profile with them through screenshots. Share the location and time of the date, including any changes made along the way. You can also plan to check in with them at a certain time during the date, or after the date is finished. This way, someone trusted will know where you are in case of emergency.

- **Meet in a public place**

For a first date, avoid meeting in any isolated areas or personal locations like your home or workplace. Public places such as cafes, restaurants, and pubs with lots of people around would be best.

- **Don't rely on your date for transport**

Have your own way of getting to and from the place you are meeting. This way you can leave the date if you're feeling uncomfortable or unsafe, without having to rely on the other person for transport. Avoid getting into the vehicle of someone you don't trust and don't know for your first meeting.

- **Stick to what's comfortable**

No one should pressure you to drink more than you'd like. You know your own limits.

- **Get help from waiters and bar staff**

Get help from waiters and bar staff if your date is not who they say they are, or if they're making you uncomfortable. You can talk to the staff in the venue you are at.

- **Trust your instincts**

If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe in any way, trust your instincts - you can leave the date and cut contact. Remember you can always block users you don't feel comfortable with. Don't worry about being rude or impolite, your safety and happiness is more important.

- **Spiking**

Signs of drink spiking can include confusion, nausea, hallucinations and paranoia, disorientation or poor coordination, struggling to communicate properly, and unconsciousness. If you feel any of these symptoms, get the attention of a member of staff or security, and report to the police. To reduce the chances of spiking, never leave your drink unattended, be cautious if you are bought or given a drink, be wary of people reaching over your drink, and alert staff immediately if you see someone acting suspiciously around your drink.



Healthy relationships

You deserve to be in a happy, healthy relationship. Be aware of the following signs.

Healthy relationships	Unhealthy relationships
✓ Good and open communication	✗ No communication or constant arguments
✓ Happy for you when things are going well	✗ Jealous of you when things are going well
✓ Trusting each other	✗ Not trusting each other and feeling the need to go through each other's devices constantly
✓ Supporting each other emotionally, during both good and bad times	✗ Constantly bringing you down or not being supportive during difficult times
✓ Makes you feel safe	✗ Tries to control you
✓ Makes you feel comfortable	✗ Gets violent, and loses their temper quickly
✓ Likes that you have friends and respects your family	✗ Keeps you from seeing your friends and family

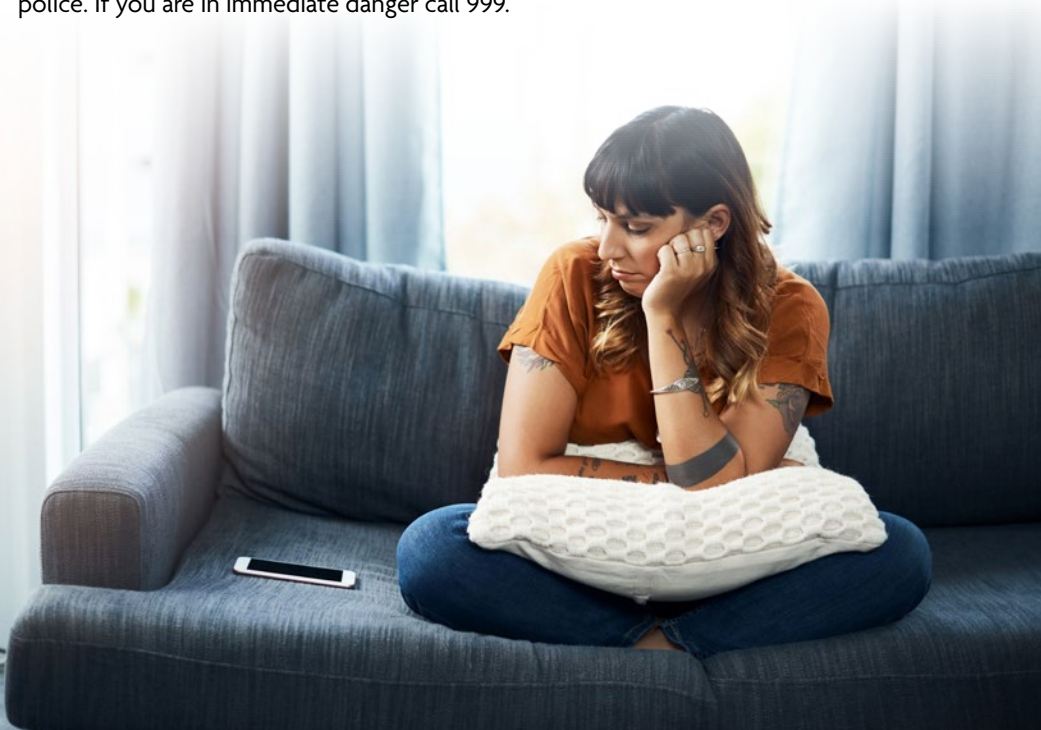
Many of the signs of an unhealthy relationship are also considered domestic abuse. Abuse is not always physical - it can include manipulative and controlling behaviour. If you are suffering from domestic abuse in any form, help is available. Find out more information on support that's on offer at the [end of this toolkit](#).

Online abuse

Abuse can happen online and in person, and neither are acceptable. As technology improves, so does the amount of online abuse. Online abuse can include:

- Someone repeatedly sending harassing messages through texts, emails, and social media
- Sharing intimate photos or videos of you online, known as revenge porn
- Using intimate photos and videos as blackmail
- Being pressured into sexting - sharing intimate photos or videos or sending sexually explicit messages
- Being sent insults or constantly putting you down
- Using apps or GPS to constantly track your location

If you are experiencing online abuse, document everything by taking screenshots or print the pages - it can be useful evidence. You can report online harassment to the police. If you are in immediate danger call 999.



Clare's Law

Once you have started a relationship, if you feel unsure about your partner and are wary of their past behaviour, you can use Clare's Law.

Under Clare's Law, also known as the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, you have the right to make an application for information to the police about your partner, or ex-partner, if you are worried about any past domestic abuse which may put you at risk.

If you are over 16 you have a right to ask the police for information about your partner regardless of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. If the police find a record of abusive and violent behaviours which could put you at risk, they will share that information with you.

If you're worried about a close friend or family member's partner, you can also make an application as a third party. The results of the inquiry will only be sent to the person at risk, and the third party will remain anonymous.

For more information and to apply visit <https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/request/domestic-violence-disclosure-scheme-clares-law/>

Hollie Guard app

This app is a useful resource to have if you're planning to meet someone for the first time, or to keep you safe in general. The app acts as an alarm and an evidence catcher if you find yourself in an unsafe situation. With Hollie Guard, you can:

- Set off an alert, which will also activate your phone's camera, and send a pre-determined message and recording to your emergency contact.
- Set a meeting timer which will count down until deactivated. This means the user has to mark themselves as safe, or an alert will be raised.
- Set a journey, and the app will monitor you until you arrive at your destination. It will then tell your nominated contact that you're safe, or it will set off an alert if there are any problems.

For more information visit: <https://hollieguard.com/>

Do you need help?

No one deserves to experience abuse in any form.

If you are experiencing domestic abuse, help is available.

- **Next Link**

Next Link is North Somerset's domestic abuse service. If you are in an abusive relationship, they can offer advice and support in leaving and emergency accommodation. If you or someone you care about are experiencing abuse, call Next Link on 0800 4700 280, or contact their helpline and live chat at www.nextlinkhousing.co.uk. They also run an out of hours service, so you can speak to someone 24/7.

- **Revenge Porn Helpline**

Revenge Porn Helpline provides information and help on getting online images removed. You can call them on 0345 6000 459 from 10am-4pm on weekdays. Find out more on their website <https://revengepornhelpline.org.uk/>

- **National Stalking Helpline**

This helpline provides information on how to report stalking and harassment. You can call them on 0808 802 0300 (9.30am-4pm weekdays, and until 8pm on Wednesdays) or visit their website <https://www.suzylamplugh.org/refer-someone-to-us>

- **National Domestic Abuse Helpline**

The National Domestic Abuse Helpline can be contacted on 0808 2000 247. The line is open 24/7. Find out more at: <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/>

- **Galop**

Emotional and practical support for LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse is available at Galop. You can call them on 0800 999 5428. Find out more at: <https://galop.org.uk/>



**Safer Stronger
North Somerset**