

ONLINE DATING

Most people using dating sites are sincere and honest in the information they provide and in their reasons for joining. However, there are exceptions, and you need to be aware of how to keep yourself - and your bank account and savings - protected while meeting people online.

- Never disclose private information on online dating sites.
- Be very careful about how and when you meet people in person.
- Take every precaution that profiles you are looking at are genuine.
- Never be tempted to send or transfer money to people you meet online, however unfortunate their story
- Check if the dating site you are using is a member of the Online Dating Association (ODA www.onlinedatingassociation.org.uk).

Be Anonymous

- Choose a username that doesn't let everyone know who you are. Don't include your surname or any other identifying information such as your place of work either in your profile or when you first make contact.
- Keep contact details private. Stay in control when it comes to how and when you share information. Don't include your contact information such as your email address, home address, or phone number in your profile or initial communications. Take things slowly and share more information when you feel comfortable doing so.
- Stop communicating with anyone who attempts to pressure you into providing your personal or financial information or who seems to be trying to trick you into providing it.

Connecting With New People Online

Get to know people, take your time and trust your instincts. Act with caution and learn more about someone before contacting him or her outside of the dating site. Use their platform and the added security it gives.

Money Requests Are Your Red Light

Why would someone need to borrow money off somebody they have never met, or only just met? There is no reason for anyone to ask you for money or your financial

information, whatever sad or sob story they give. Always keep your bank and account information private. Stop all contact immediately and report the matter to the dating site.

Play it safe when you meet face-to-face

Be smart and stay safe. Going on a date with someone new is an exciting step in a relationship but continue being careful. Even if you feel you have become closer to someone via email and phone, you should still remember that this person is largely a stranger to you.

- It's your date. Agree on what you both want from it before you meet up. Don't feel pressured to meet before you're ready or for any longer than you're comfortable with – a short first date is fine.
- Meet in public. Stay in public. The safest plan is to meet somewhere public and stay somewhere public. Make your own way there and back and don't feel pressured to go home with your date. If you feel ready to move to a private environment, make sure your expectations match your dates.
- Not going well? Make your excuses and leave. Don't feel bad about cutting a date short if you're not keen. You don't owe the other person anything, no matter how long you've been chatting or what's been suggested.

Advice for avoiding scammers

- Never ever respond to a request for money.
- Never give out bank account or other details.
- Beware of the sob story - someone telling you how much they want to visit you but need a loan to pay for the ticket/visas. Or stories about a desperately ill family member who needs help with medical expenses. The same goes for fantastic too good to be true business deals they are in on – 'if only they had some extra up-front money'. Our same warning goes for pleas of urgency – about money needed at short notice. Someone asking you to use a wire service to get money to them is up to no good.
- Don't let the passing of time cloud your judgment. These sorts of pitches may take time to come out in messages, time in which you may very well have come to trust and value a relationship with your online contact. That does not make them any less of a lie.

- Don't be afraid to ask a friend – if you start to commit to a relationship online or in person it can be hard to stay objective. If a contact starts to feel strange and especially if money gets raised you might ask a friend or relative if you are not at a point where you think there is something to report to the dating service. If they advise you to back off ... listen to them.

Reporting a concern or problem

If you suspect that someone you're talking to may be a scammer, stop your communications and immediately report him or her. You should never feel too stupid or ashamed to report someone. You are not the person who should be ashamed and stopped.

Tell the dating site – and talk to the professionals. All Online Dating Association (ODA) members must have reporting arrangements to deal with users concerns about a bad experience or suspicious behaviour.

Any act of violence or abuse should be reported to your local police. If you have been the victim of a sexual assault and do not want to contact the police, the ODA strongly recommends you contact a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC). If you have been the victim of actual or attempted fraud, report it to Action Fraud, the UK's national fraud reporting centre by calling 0300 123 20 40 or by visiting www.actionfraud.police.uk

Information is from:

<https://www.getsafeonline.org/protecting-yourself/online-dating/>