

SafeSurfing Guide - Personal Ads

While the Internet provides millions of opportunities for people to meet, you must remember to use common sense. It's easy to get swept-up into a fantasy world, but reality begs for us to use caution. Like the offline world, the online world has its ups and downs - good people and bad people. While the majority of people can be trusted, we must all be aware of the scammers, liars and the rare but present predators. While there are risks, hiding from the world is not the answer. There are many ways to protect yourself and find someone online! Here are several tips for you to remember.

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Advice for Advertisers

What's in a name

Firstly it may be best for most people to set up a different online identity based on your activities: a dating identity, a business identity, and a family identity and possibly a cruising identity, which should have different email addresses (although they can be redirected to one address to enable you to read them - see below). To help remember, use a name that you can easily retain and add a number or letter sequence on the end to reflect the account type:

Fred1234D@somewhere.com = Dating
Fred1234C@somewhere.com = Cruising

- You could also consider using a name which implies what you are like or what you are looking for (e.g. cuteolder4younger) but bear in mind you have to live up to it! A name which has a sexual connection will attract attention but not always the attention you want.
- Use letters and numbers. Don't use hyphens or other characters in your name - the chances are others will miss-spell them.
- Don't use an email address or ID that can obviously be used to identify you, for instance your initials.

Where to put your ad

Having established what identity you are going to use and created the email addresses, here's how to create and ad that will be noticed.

- Put your personal ad on the larger recognised Personals sites that are application/database driven (Match.com, Yahoo Personals, Gay.com etc.) or sites for mature men/admirers (Apollonet, Relocate4U). See the GrayGay.com personals links page for reviews and analysis.
- If you are at all concerned about someone finding your ad, don't post it on a site that uses HTML for the data and can therefore be indexed and searched using search tools. If the page you are looking at ends in .HTML or .HTM and there is no search or password facility just a list of ads, then you are likely to be using an unsecured site.
- Some dating sites require your address when you register for their Zip/Postcode matching service but don't include your home number or address in the ad that will appear online.
- Never, ever give out personal information. This may be the most important thing for you to remember. Your personal information includes your real name, telephone number, personal email or home address. If they want to send something to you through the mail, get a post office box. They're not expensive! No matter how nice the other person may seem, you do not know them. While most people are decent, you can never be absolutely sure. Don't risk having this information fall into the wrong hands.

Communication

- On the telephone
 - Activate your caller ID blocking feature to keep your number private if you call someone.
 - Don't call collect! Your number will show up on their phone bill.
 - If you want the other person to be able to contact you, get a pager or use a personal cellphone/mobile number - not one that they might call you in the office on.
 - Use a payphone. It may be a hassle, but well worth it!
- By Email
 - Don't reveal your office or personal email address - use the address for your gay dating identity only.
 - Yahoo Mail and HotMail both have a facility to redirect mail from their system to another email address. This enables you to use a Yahoo/HotMail address for your dating activities but still receive the emails in your usual email inbox, but without the sender being aware of this - **provided you only reply from your Yahoo/Hotmail address**

What's in the Ad

- Be honest in your ad - if you're just looking for sex then say so. Don't lie about your age, weight or hair colour since most people have a very good idea what they are looking for and you're wasting their time as well as yours. If they are looking for someone older, generally they want them to look their age.
- Use language which fits what your looking for - if you're looking for a relationship put the accent on the positive things you like to do rather than just your sexual interests. Tell guys what you do like, rather than what you don't. "Looking for masculine guy with slender to athletic build" comes off so much better than "no fats or femmes."
- The bigger the personals database the more chance you have of meeting someone compatible. But this also depends on the type of people/relationship you are looking for. For instance general dating sites (e.g. Match.com, Yahoo) are geared more to relationships. Others such as Gay.com are offer a more sexually explicit service.
- When giving out your location try to limit yourself to a region only, rather than the exact name of the town, province or neighbourhood. If you live in a large city, giving that information out is okay, if you're in a rural area, it's better to stick with regional information.
- Don't respond to immediate requests for money or support - if the relationship is unbalanced at the start it is likely to be unbalanced throughout - and there are plenty more to choose from.
- Don't publish explicit photos on the Internet or email them to others if you are at all concerned about others seeing them - you have absolutely no control over their destination once they are posted.
- Don't send explicit photos that include your face to anyone unless you know them really, really well-probably after a face-to-face meeting
- Use a different email address for personal ads and redirect the mail to your usual email address (Yahoo mail and Hotmail both allow this)
- Use more than one personal ad if you want to be explicit or consider password protecting the explicit section of your ad (some personals sites allow this e.g. Gay.com).
- Update your ad on a regular basis even if it just changing a comma. This should improve your search ranking.
- Adding a photo as will increase your reasons up to 25% but make sure that it is current and one that shows your best features! Be honest and post a current photo even if you've gained a few pounds.
 - Smile unless you're trying to look assertive.
 - Take the photo it in daylight but not midday or in very well lit interiors but take care with items in the background.
 - Avoid shadows on the face
 - Take a number of head and shoulders and full-length shots
 - If you don't have a digital camera or a scanner, use a good ordinary camera and ask your photo lab to create digital images
 - Don't use WebCam photos since the resolution is almost always too low and the light can make you look like an axe murderer!

Responses

- It is perfectly acceptable not to reply to responses, but it's nice to provide a quick "Thanks but no thanks", especially if the guy comes across as decent.
- **WARNING:** Some sites that offer "Free" listing of your ad, but a payment to respond to other advertisers, will enable you to register your ad for free but shortly after you have joined send you a message, supposedly from another user, saying they are interested in you. This message makes no reference to the content of your ad and is to entice you to pay the joining fee. They will also send a similar message if you don't renew your membership.

Advice for respondents

- If the other person's picture seems to be outdated, and they refuse to update it, you must put them in the "dishonest" pile. Even if you do not have a scanner, there's a variety of cheap and easy ways to get a photo scanned. There's no reason for someone to lie, unless they're hiding something. Don't put up with their dishonesty.
- Be clear about which advertisement you are responding to, as some people have more than one ad on different sites and won't know how much information you have seen about them already.
- If he doesn't respond to you, it usually means he's not interested for one reason or another - and that's okay. If you must follow up, make it brief and witty. And only once.
- Put some effort into your responses; it's easy to tell when someone is just using the form letter type inquiry. Tell the guy why you're responding to his ad in particular.
- Be honest about yourself and what you are looking for whether that's a one-night-stand or an extended relationship.
- Don't worry if you get a negative response or no response to an add - there are plenty more frogs to be kissed - think of it as their loss. Don't be petty. If someone doesn't respond to you or return a photo, don't bad-mouth him in your profile. It makes you look pitiful and vindictive and that's no turn-on for anyone.
- When giving out your location try to limit yourself to a region only, rather than the exact name of the town, province or neighbourhood. If you live in a large city, giving that information out is okay, if you're in a rural area, it's better to stick with regional information.
- Don't publish explicit photos on the Internet or send them via email if you are at all concerned about others seeing them - you have absolutely no control over their destination once they are posted.
- Don't send explicit photos that include your face to anyone unless you know them really, really well - probably after a face-to-face meeting
- Use a different email address for personal ads and redirect the mail to your usual email address (Yahoo mail and Hotmail both allow this)

Red Alerts...

- Get the details. Scrutinize the emails and chat sessions you have with another person. If they seem too good to be true, they probably are. If they're vague about their life, try to non-intrusively get some details. Red flags are people who are vague, talk in circles, or answer questions with questions. Be very cautious with these types of people. They may be playing hard to get or they may be looking to deceive you.
- Are they hiding something? If the other person can only meet and chat with you in the middle of the night, they may have a secret. If you call them and they talk in a hushed voice or "have to go" all of a sudden, they may not be as single as they claim. If you call at a non-designated time and they get angry, feel free to assume that they're hiding something from you. Red Alerts are anyone who uses fancy footwork, excuses, or evasive manoeuvres when asked straightforward questions. If they cannot be honest with you from the start, don't count on them to be so later.
- Instant love may not be what it seems. While you may feel an instant connection or powerful attraction to a person online, this does not qualify as falling in love. It may however fall under puppy love, infatuation, and even lust. But scammers and con artists have used the "I'm in love with you" angle offline for countless years. What's stopping them from going online to make their next score? Love takes time no matter what the fairy tales imply. Red Alerts are people who, after minimal online contact, express their undying love. Other hints may be that shortly after talking about being in love with you, they also mention how broke they are, how they just got laid off from work, or how their accountant took off with all their money. While the other person may just be a lonely soul who's truly attracted to you, you can never be sure. Slow things down and don't let "love" rob you blind.
- Get their background checked, especially if you're planning to take the next step and meet the other person face to face. By that point, you should know their name, so put your mind at ease with a background check. You can find several services online, many for a reasonable price. Even if you don't notice any Red Alerts or get a gut instinct to back off, it's a matter of respecting yourself and your safety. Your only Red Alerts here will show up in black and white.
- Don't put off meeting in person. While online relationships can be full of romance and intrigue, your ultimate goal is to meet someone, date them and possibly more. Why put it off? Why invest in a relationship online if it's going nowhere offline? Make sure the spark you get from your chat sessions and email also exists in the "real world". Red flags are anyone who puts it off or avoids answering your questions about meeting.
- If you do not have the money or time to invest in a long distance relationship, don't start one. Online dating requires that your brain and your heart work together to make the best and safest decisions for you.

Advice for a first date

- Talking on the phone first is a good way to get to know your potential trick better. But don't give your number out to anyone about whom you have even the slightest suspicion.
- Trust your instincts. If you're getting any kind of creepy feeling, forget it.
- Know the age of consent laws in your jurisdiction. Be aware that, in addition to age of consent laws, many jurisdictions have specific laws forbidding the "grooming" of anyone under the age of eighteen for a sexual encounter via the Internet. If someone represents himself as under eighteen, have nothing to do with him.
- Once you've agreed to meet face to face, don't ask the other person to pick you up. Get yourself to and from the date, even if you have to beg a ride off of a friend or take a taxi.
- Before you go, make sure that friends know where you're going, who you're going with and when to expect you back. Make sure everyone writes down the information so that there are no misunderstandings.
- Arrange to meet in a neutral but public place (e.g. a bar or café) and let someone else (even a barman) sees you there together. If you don't hit it off, it's much easier to say that you have a meeting or some other commitment that requires you to end the date prematurely.
- Stay in a public place. If they pressure you to go elsewhere, say NO. If they pressure you, they obviously don't care about your feelings - don't spare their feelings. End the meeting and leave. If they start to follow you to where you've parked, stop and hail a cab. Come back later for your car with a friend or family member.
- Don't be pressurised into giving away too much detail about yourself in the first instance - saying what you do is one thing - saying exactly where you work is quite another.
- Let your date know if you're going to be late
- Take a cell/mobile phone. If you need help or feel a little nervous, excuse yourself to the bathroom and call for back up! Put together an instant, "accidental" meeting with a friend. They're also good for emergencies or in case you think your online love is an offline stalker who's following you home. Use the cellular phone to call the police - just don't head back home. Keep the person far from there. Drive to a police station if you feel it's necessary.
- Never leave your personal belongings unattended. A purse or wallet contains all of your personal information. In your jacket pocket could be your keys. Just don't take the risk.
- Do not leave your drink unattended if you do ask for another drink. Or ask for it in a bottle.
- Don't drink too much - being drunk is not a good way to be safe.

Is it Mr Right?

- Don't feel pressurised to leap into bed on the first date. If it is Mr. Right (or even Mr Right Now) then if the chemistry is there they will wait. If not then they probably weren't right anyway.
- If you are new to dating, try to step back and analyse what you and your prospective partner want from this relationship. If possible, discuss the issues with a mutual friend and find out what you can of your prospective partner's background.
- Find out if your proposed partner has a history of quick dating or forming relationships, if that's what you're after.
- Don't respond to immediate requests for money or support - if the relationship is unbalanced at the start it is likely to be unbalanced throughout.
- If all goes well, set-up another date before the first one comes to an end. Use your best judgement and gut instincts to determine whether or not the other person is worthy of a second date. Be sure that this second date (and any others thereafter) incorporates all of these safety tips. You're worth the effort! If the other person truly cares about you, they'd expect nothing less.

Extra tips for meeting a long distance interest

Be sure to use all of the tips mentioned above, plus the following tips if you plan to travel to meet your online interest:

- DO NOT plan to stay at the other person's home for your visit. If you cannot afford a hotel, do not go.
- If you've made hotel reservations, do not tell the other person where you're staying. They don't need to contact you there. You can contact them. Tell them you're staying with a relative if they get too inquisitive and then if you want to reveal your hotel later, you can say that the relative had to go away so you are now staying in a hotel.
- Be sure to keep in touch with friends and family. Have a schedule in place as to when you should call and ask your date to remind you to call - they are then aware that you have a call to make. And make

sure they know where you're staying and how to reach you. Again, this is a good time to carry and use a cell/mobile phone.

- Just in case...keep your valuables in an in-room safe or in with the front desk - they often have safety deposit boxes available for free or a minimal charge.