

## Online Dating Safety Tips

### **Tip #1: Keep Your Personal Information Private**

Unless you know who you're dealing with, do not provide your personal information such as full name, address and phone number. This will ensure your physical safety. Most people are harmless and genuine about seeking a partner in love, but the Web is full of individuals with ill intentions. This is not to say that these individuals migrate to our site, but common sense in any arrangement must be applied. This same advice would hold true for meeting someone through the newspaper personals and other options.

### **Tip #2: Carefully Choose Your Online Name**

If you are female and you intend to spend your time online in various chat rooms or signing up for various free e-mail accounts and you don't want to invite sexual innuendo or the virtual equivalent of a whistle and an uninvited sexual reference, then choose a gender neutral name. Of course, if your intention is to invite advances from men, then choose a feminine name, but be prepared for an onslaught of advances. This tip doesn't apply to women only, though, as the Web is full of very assertive women who will target nicks of the male variety. By choosing a gender-neutral identity online, you afford yourself the option of revealing your gender identity (or more) when you're comfortable in doing so.

### **Tip #3: Have Your Wits About You When Meeting in Real Life**

If and when you decide to meet your online friend, don't go alone. Bring a group of friends along with you and schedule your meeting during the day and in a public place. The person you are meeting, if they are worthwhile, will agree to your request to meet in the safest possible surroundings.

### **Tip #4: Trust Your Instincts**

Too many of us don't trust our instincts and betray them, often to our own detriment. Our instincts are always trying to tell us something. Learn to trust your instincts. If something about your online encounters feels uncomfortable, you can almost bet that an in-person encounter will feel the same. With this in mind, don't lead someone on in e-mail. If you get an immediate sense that they are not your type, let them know politely by giving them the digital equivalent of "let's just be friends." If you lead someone on and their emotions get the best of them, there will be trouble. If they persist even after you have proclaimed disinterest, ignore them. This includes their repeated e-mails. If this doesn't work, retain their messages and forward them to their online service provider. It is rare that situations ever get to this point, but if they do, retaining such information will assist you should you ever have to take further action.

### **Tip #5: Beware of Totally Free Personals Services**

Sure, there are an abundance of free personals services across the Web. Many of the larger Web directories offer such services. When a service is entirely free, be cautious of the quality of the individuals with whom you correspond. Free services are easy targets for devious or insincere types because of that fact: they're free. More often than not, individuals who opt for a pay service are usually seeking quality, not only in the service itself, but in the other people who also participate.

As with any online activity, the best advice for online dating is pretty simple: exercise common sense. Think of the Web in terms of a large city. If you were a tourist in California, you wouldn't give your name, address, phone number and credit card number to just anyone on the street. Right?