

Security Spotlight

An informational Guide for Securitas Canada Clients and Employees



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Online Dating Can Lead to Offline Danger



We live in a marvelous age; where computers allow us to shop, bank, research, and be entertained without our ever having to get up off the couch. Perhaps it is only natural to expect that people would turn to these incredible machines to assist them in humankind's most universal quest; the search for love.

In fact, according to a study published in the journal, Psychological Science in the Public Interest, in just one month of 2011, nearly 25 million people tried online dating. That is a huge pool of potential mates for you to dive into! Just make sure you are wearing your shark proof wetsuit, because there are a lot of predators beneath the waves.

Safety First

The problem with online dating is that the water is shadowy, so you cannot get a clear image of your potential date. There are a multitude of stories of dishonest people lying about their physical appearance, even to the extent of posting pictures of other people (like professional models) in place of their own likenesses. Those clownfish types can be annoying, but the real danger is the sharks, the online predators who reverse the roles and make themselves the ones who are doing the fishing while you become the unsuspecting minnow.

These predators can be clever, dangerous, and very hard to spot. So how do you safely navigate the waters of online dating?

Keep in mind that your personal safety is the most important thing to guard. There are many good and decent people seeking companionship online; but how do you know your new friend is one of them? Keep your guard up while you gather more information. Do not share any information that reveals where you live. Never disclose your address, phone number, or email address. Conduct all initial contact with this stranger through the online dating service only.

Did you catch the word "stranger" in the previous sentence? It is not a mistake. No matter how long you have been conversing with this person online, they are still a stranger. It is a fact that nearly 95% of human communication is non-verbal. Body language and facial expressions often tell you more about what a person is thinking than their words. You need to see a person's face, analyze their body language, hear their vocal tone and inflection, and gauge their actions to have a better chance of understanding their true personality. Even then you need to be careful as first impressions can be deceiving.

Play Detective

Try a Google search on the person or even an online background check. But remember, Google is not infallible and a background check on a serial stalker will come up clean if they have never been caught. Do not be afraid to ask questions. Is that picture they posted online really how they look? How old are they? What do they do for a living? Where did they go to high school? How long have they lived in their home? Do they live alone or with family or friends? Questions like these are not foolproof and the person may not give you honest answers, but they can be helpful. Remember the answers and ask your questions again at a later date. Compare the answers to see if they are the same each time. If not, it is a red flag that the person is untruthful. Time to pull the plug!

Okay; you have been chatting online with this person for a reasonable amount of time and now you feel you are ready for an in-person meeting. Great! But where can you meet safely? First, never meet near your home. You do not want the person to have any clue as to where you live at this stage of the relationship. Pick a place in an area where you feel comfortable, but not too close to your neighborhood. Second, choose a place where you are certain there will be plenty of people around. Never agree to meet in a park or any secluded spot, no matter how romantic the view. Restaurants are generally a safe place. Pick one that is well-lit, has windows, and usually has a good crowd. Remember all those questions you asked online? Ask them again during your face-to-face meeting and see if the answers still match up. Watch the person's face and listen to their voice. You want to find any clue of dishonesty as soon as possible.

Safety Tips

Here are some important tips from major online dating sites.

- Check your social media profiles. Have you posted information that can lead someone to your doorstep? If so, get rid of it before you begin online dating. The sharks out there know how to sniff out that information like a trail of blood in the water.
- Have at least one telephone conversation before meeting. Your home phone can be traced; use a public phone instead. (Yes, they do still exist; try gas stations, convenience stores, bus stations, etc.)

- Trust your intuition. Often your subconscious will notice things that your conscious mind ignores. If you do not have a good feeling about the person, end the relationship immediately.
- Arrange your own transportation to the meeting. If possible, use public transit or a taxi. Never accept a ride from the person you are meeting. Remember, he/she is still a stranger and you should never get into a stranger's car.
- Tell a friend who you are meeting, where you are meeting, and how long you expect to be gone. Consider bringing a friend along. They can sit at another table and keep an eye on you. If you do not bring a friend along, set up a post-date check in time. If you do not call your friend at the agreed upon time, they should call you. If you do not answer, they should call the police right away. This may sound paranoid, but better safe than sorry.
- Beware of online daters who:
 - Press you to leave the dating website and communicate via personal email.
 - Profess instant feelings of love.
 - Claim to be from your area, but are "temporarily" working overseas or traveling abroad.
 - Ask for money for any reason.

Caution is your shark cage in the unguarded waters of online dating. Hopefully, you will net your perfect match online. It really can and does happen for some people. But as you splash in the waves of the online dating ocean, always be on the lookout for the dorsal fins of online predators.

Additional Resources

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has some good tips at:

[fbi.gov/news/stories/2012/february/dating-scams_021412](https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2012/february/dating-scams_021412)

Online dating sites, Match.com and OkCupid, also offer some good advice at the following sites:

[match.com/help/safetytips.aspx?lid=4](https://www.match.com/help/safetytips.aspx?lid=4)

[okcupid.com/legal/safety-tips](https://www.okcupid.com/legal/safety-tips)

PsychCentral offers further tips at:

[psychcentral.com/online_dating/safety.html](https://www.psychcentral.com/online_dating/safety.html)