

Remember

- There are never any guarantees that a person is telling you the truth about who they are, where they live or go to school, what they do for a living, their relationship or their STI status.
- Cyberdating has an advantage in that people might not be drunk or high when they are online (unlike being at a bar or club). But emotions can run very high when you are chatting or surfing and can affect your judgment.
- Learn to trust your gut. It's the most important online skill you will learn – the equivalent of being "street-smart."
- There are laws in Canada around sexual activity and the age of consent. To find out more, visit Justice for Children and Youth: www.jficy.org.

For further information or to book an appointment:

For youth ages 13-29 - Planned Parenthood Toronto Health Services

Offers drop-in and scheduled appointments
Call 416-961-0113 or visit www.ppt.on.ca.

Teen Health Source

Offers anonymous and confidential sexual health information for teens by teens.
MSN chat TeenHealthSource@hotmail.com, email TeenHealthSource@ppt.on.ca,
call 416-961-3200 or visit www.TeenHealthSource.com.

For women - Bay Centre for Birth Control

Offers drop-in and scheduled appointments
Call 416-351-3700

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Dating & Hooking Up Online



Do you find yourself checking out dating sites? Not sure what to do when someone you aren't really into won't stop messaging you? How about meeting more people than you have fingers to type in a chat room? Finding intimacy online can be risky, but it can also be very rewarding. Here are some tips for how to get what you want, stay true to your needs and protect yourself online.

Navigating the World of Online Dating

- Know what you are looking for. Many dating websites have a specific focus or theme. Are you interested in making new friends? Casual dating? Hooking up? Something long-term? We are often still trying to figure out our needs and wants when it comes to sex and relationships, but we need to be as honest as possible. Be clear in your profile/message about what you are looking for.
- Many dating websites are limited to people age 18 and over. If you are under 18, look for youth-friendly sites that seem to have a broad age range or are free, with a focus or theme (MySpace, Facebook, BlackPlanet, Plentyoffish, Meet Me In TO, virtual worlds such as Second Life or WoW) as opposed to "single and looking" generic chat rooms.

Your Profile

Any new profile or picture attracts a lot of attention. You don't have to respond to every single person who contacts you. Take your time, look through profiles, think about who you want to talk to and what you want to say about yourself. Online, there is no rush.

- Choose a non-identifiable screen name. Do not use your real name.

From Choice, a World of Possibilities



- Analyze online nicknames. Nicknames can be what people really are or how they want to be seen by others.
- A nickname (sexygirl_69, discreetlover22) isn't necessarily obvious or true – it could be a reference to a person's situation, what they are looking for, a pun, or something they wish they were.
- Think about your own nickname and what it tells people.
- Feeling good about yourself and being sex-positive is important, but it is also important to know that explicit online names may attract a certain amount of unwanted attention. People often start a conversation by asking about your online name and what it means.
- Remember that if you give your picture to someone or post it online, it can be copied and pasted just about anywhere in cyberspace where it can stay for a very long time.

(Adapted from Advocates for Youth)

When You Find Someone You Like

- Never give out any personal information at the beginning. When you are ready to tell someone your real name and/or where you live, stick to first names only and give out loose information about your city, neighbourhood or community. Be wary of people who ask for specific details or who are pushy.
- When you are ready to chat online, outside of the dating site, use a separate, anonymous e-mail and/or Instant Messaging (IM) account.
- Keep an open mind. People online can be somewhat selective with the truth about age, weight, etc. Remember, most people want you to like them.
- Ask for a recent photograph, but do not rely on pictures. It could be old or a picture of someone else!
- Consider a webcam – you can chat with someone in real time, see who they are, learn facial cues, etc. But webcams work both ways – if you don't want someone to see your surroundings, use the blur option on camera or hang a blanket to cover up what's behind you. Don't leave your webcam on all the time.
- Make sure you know how to save copies of your chats – especially if someone is harassing or bullying you. Most of the time, it's as simple as copying and pasting the conversation into a Word document and saving it.

- Remember your Netiquette: Just because someone is not your ideal match, it doesn't give you the right to be rude or insulting. Online, a simple "no thanks; I'm not interested" is understood and people move on.
- You have the right to change your mind at any point or say "no" to anything you're uncomfortable with.
- We are always giving – and receiving – more information than we think. Use of icons, "smileys", tone, spelling and grammar, profile, pictures and what kinds of questions get asked and how they get answered can tell you a lot about a person. They can also tell someone more about you than you think or want. Be thoughtful about how and what you're communicating.

Moving Offline

- It's easy to feel like you really know your new friend after a few long conversations, but don't be in a rush to meet them offline and don't let them rush you.
- When you are ready to move offline, start with a phone call. Many of us have access to cell phones. This can be tricky because cell phones give privacy but also make it easier to be secretive. Tracing a landline, however, can give someone access to details about your family, home and address.
- When you do meet, do it in daylight, with a friend, in a very public place.
- Tell someone you trust where you are going. Make a plan to call them at a certain time. Have an emergency plan and money in case something goes wrong.
- Get to your first date on your own – cycling, public transit, taxi, driving or getting a ride. Do not have the person pick you up.
- Go home on your own. Do not leave or go home with the person you meet until you are comfortable doing so.
- If you are being harassed or stalked online, learn how to delete and block someone via the website, email and IM. Simply deleting someone doesn't mean they are blocked from seeing your actions. Know that you can report a person's actions and figure out the best person to report to – a chatroom moderator, website owners, a teacher, or the police.