

# How Do I Stay Safe When Dating Online?

ESME's Jackie Pilossoph



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## 10 tips to being safe while still enjoying yourself and having fun

I often look back on my several years of [dating](#) and feel extremely fortunate nothing bad really happened. Don't get me wrong, there were nightmare dates where I'd have given anything to snap my fingers and disappear. There were also men who said things so shocking my mouth was on the ground and relationships that were unhealthy and bad for me. But no dates or relationships ever posed an immediate danger to me (or that I knew of at the time).

Dating safety is a valid concern—especially for single moms—and, unfortunately, many women don't give it enough thought. Single moms are so caught up in the hope of connecting with someone and falling in love that they sometimes lose sight of the dangers that can come with [putting yourself out there](#).

Stef Safran is a Chicago-based dating expert and the founder of her matchmaking service, [Stef and the City](#). Safran says that while dating can still be enjoyable and fun-filled, women need to be more cautious than ever in today's dating world.

"Dating is under construction these days," says Safran, who has worked in the dating industry for 14 years. "What has changed is that you are running into more people, and the old dating rules of safety shouldn't apply to the new dating culture."

Safran says the biggest change in dating behavior that affects safety is the amount of information women are sharing online.

"If you're using your Facebook pictures for dating sites, people can easily find you and find out personal information, including where you live, who your family is, or where you are at certain times," says Safran, who founded her company in 2009. "Based on statistics, when you communicate online, many of the people you talk to are people you may never meet in person or people you may only go on one or a few dates with, yet you are sharing information with them that you might not want them to know for a while—or ever."

Here are Safran's 10 tips for staying safe while dating:

- 1. Do not use your real (or abbreviated) name as your screen name in your dating profiles.** Instead, [create something](#) that does not use your birth year, job, or any other way that makes it easy for someone to find you.
- 2. Make sure your Facebook page is private.** There is no need for outsiders to see your personal information, and some of us put too much of it on Facebook. Keeping your profile private will keep that information between you and the people you know.
- 3. Be careful what private information you place on other social media platforms, too.** If you use Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, or other social media apps for personal reasons (in other words, not for promoting a business), keep it private to your network.
- 4. Don't go on a date if the conversation or texting makes you feel uncomfortable.** It's not impolite to cancel if something just doesn't feel right. Trust your gut, and remember that this person is a stranger to you.
- 5. You can leave the date at any time.** Don't be afraid to leave a date if you feel the person is being too sexual or inappropriate.
- 6. Don't ever get into someone's car on a first date.** And consider not getting a ride home even if the date went well. It takes time to get to know someone, and it's not worth the risk if the person has been drinking (and drank before meeting you) or if the person may want to continue the date in a physical way. Not only is there a risk of date rape or other inappropriate behavior but also the person might be driving drunk.
- 7. Make sure to schedule any dates in a populated area where you can easily be seen.** In other words, do not go for a "walk on the beach" or to other isolated places with someone whom you just met.
- 8. Don't feel pressure to go by the "third date equals sex" rule.** Remember that there are no real rules in dating. Physical intimacy should happen when both people feel ready and comfortable. That might mean the first date, or it could mean the 10th. Also, sexually transmitted diseases are on the rise, so it is wise for you both to be tested before having unprotected sex.
- 9. Do some research.** If you continue to date someone and you feel you need more information, it's OK to use a background-check service. One good one is [CORE Security and Investigations Group and Consultants](#), which can give you both criminal and financial background checks.
- 10. Do not send out sexual pictures or videos to people with whom you are just starting to chat.** It's not just the person you are dating who can end up seeing them. A child or a new girlfriend could access them by mistake, and the results can be disastrous for all involved.

Getting back into dating can be exciting, and meeting different men can be interesting and sexy and enjoyable—just be careful. I still remember how I felt the first time I kissed someone after my [divorce](#). I felt very sad, but there was a glimpse of hope that soared through me, energizing my soul and inspiring me about what the future would hold.

Although there are a lot of very good men out there, there is a lot of inappropriate behavior that goes on in the world of online dating. Using these safety tips will ensure an overall happy, healthy experience.

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