Dating Advice: How to Protect Yourself and Your Privacy Online

Online dating is, without a doubt, a standard feature of modern lifestyle. Traditional dating went digital through dating sites, and the phenomenon leaped into dating apps to become more accessible as the smartphone became ubiquitous in society.

The ease of access to online dating, with all the personal data that goes along with an individual's online dating profile, has given rise to a number of concerns regarding privacy. In the United States of America, alone, approximately 33.9 million users accessed online dating sites in 2018. This speaks to massive amounts of data collected from users, like

their relationship preferences, dating habits, and biometric data, to name just a few.

It goes without saying, then, that users of dating apps should be aware of safeguarding their privacy while engaging in online dating and using dating apps. We offer a few tips on how to do just that:

Do Your Research

Conducting your own research into which dating app is right for you is a necessary first step in ensuring your online safety while using dating platforms to find a relationship or suitable partner.

The first thing to look out for should be whether the app offers safety guidelines. If the dating app is seen to promote safety guidelines, this is a great sign for its users who will feel more comfortable to seek relationships on the platform. [With 18 to 24-year-olds making up 27% of users on online dating sites](#) — according to a study from the Pew Research Center in 2016 — it's hopeful that users, like these, growing up with higher digital literacy rates than previous generations would be attracted to platforms who prioritize safety.

Look Out for Safety Guidelines

For a dating app to offer safety guidelines is a good screener for the platform that you plan to engage with, but you should also check whether the app of your choice offers controlled visibility of your profile on the app. It's advantageous if

the app or platform allows you to select who you want your profile, and your personal information that goes with it, to be visible to. Allowing you to block certain users from viewing your information, at your discretion, is a plus when it comes to online safety.

Keep Up With What They Know

Keep up with the change in algorithms that occur on the dating apps you engage with. For example, [Tinder announced a change to their ranking algorithm in March of 2019](). This altered the way that the attractiveness of its users to match them with others was determined, meaning that the visibility of your behavior on the platform is analyzed and is used to drive the functioning of the app.

This betrays the fact that on many apps, [your activity is monitored](). The platforms' AI functions to understand you, the user, to understand more than just who you are and how you behave, but also what you want in a relationship and what you're looking for in a partner.

With [personal and somewhat intimate data being collected about you](), some high-profile dating apps also have access to gathering information from your device — location, Wi-Fi connections, and even audio collected from the app accessing your microphone. In the worst-case scenario, Datingroo admitted that your saved billing information could be vulnerable to hackers in the event of a data breach.

In the event of a data breach, any information about you that's stored on the dating app becomes compromised — mostly not of your own negligence, especially if you've done your research and opted for a reputably safe platform. However, romance scams that prey on your own vulnerability can turn you into a victim of fraud. [Such romance scams accounted for a financial loss of $143 million in 2018](), with a median loss of $2,600. Sadly, that figure rose to $10,000 for people over 70.

Stay Ahead of Fraudsters

Real people with bad intentions luring you in from the other side of a dating app can result in financial, emotional, and psychological damage. Unfortunately, this also occurs with chatbots (or just "bots") which work as [automated scammers](#) on the dating platform's message service. They are designed to send and interpret messages based on certain keywords — some more sophisticated in their replies, while others can come across as clumsy or nonsensical when replying to your messages. They're also not limited to dating apps alone.

Test the waters by typing gibberish to elicit a response from the other end. Chances are, you'll be able to tell if the one you're chatting to is an actual person or not. On the other hand, if you need to confirm that the person on the other end really is the person with whom you want to move your relationship to the next level, [Nuwber](#) can access all publicly-available information on the individual. This also helps if you want to find out more about a suspected dating app fraudster before they've managed to cover all tracks.

Report Suspicious Behavior

Suspicious behavior should be reported, whether you suspect it's a chatbot or a real human being. What are some examples of suspicious behavior on dating apps?
According to Tinder, the following constitutes behavior that violates their terms of use:

— Fake profiles (otherwise known as catfishing)
— Users requesting money on the platform
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— Harassment
— Spam, e.g. advertising
— Underage users

Tinder wants users to report users who partake in actions, like the above, that violate the rules of the platform. Those

users are investigated, often resulting in the termination of the offending user's account. If Tinder doesn't take necessary action or deems their actions permissible, while you're made to feel uncomfortable, it would be best for you to block the user or find an alternate dating app.

Compartmentalize — Separate Socials

Harassment that may lead to stalking can be prevented, to a degree, on dating apps. Make a point of keeping your other social media accounts completely separate from your dating app profile and account. If you ever have problems on the dating app and the relationship hasn't made it to the physical, real life yet, chances are that your harasser would try to get a hold of you on other social media platforms, like Facebook.

Keeping these dating and purely-social platforms apart has become a pressing concern — On the Coffee Meets Bagel app, there has been an [increase of 378% in requests for non-Facebook logins](#) after the Cambridge Analytica data-harvesting scandal.

Common sense should guide you when on the online dating scene, but it's only beneficial to take heed of any sound tips when you're allowing yourself to be vulnerable online.