

UC SAVE

**SEXUAL AWARENESS &
VIOLENCE EDUCATION**

UC UNIVERSITY OF
CHARLESTON



A guide to

online safety,

dating,

& healthy relationships



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online dating safety

More and more people are using online dating services or dating apps to meet people. The majority of users say their overall experiences have been positive, but many users report being harassed, or sent unwanted explicit messages or images on these platforms.

Dating apps don't conduct criminal background checks on users, so it's up to each user to determine if they are comfortable meeting up with someone. However, it is important to remember that if you do experience sexual assault or violence while dating online or using an app, it is not your fault.

Below are some steps you can take to increase your safety when interacting with others through online dating apps and services.

Whether you are interacting virtually or in person. Like any safety tips, they are not a guarantee, but they may help you feel more secure.

Be careful with personal information.

Some dating apps ask you to list where you work, the school you go to, and other personal information. Consider listing vague answers for some of those prompts to protect your identity until you get to know someone better.

Check out your potential date on social media.

If you know your match's name or handles on social media—or better yet if you have mutual friends online—look them up and make sure they aren't “catfishing” you by using a fake social media account to create their dating profile.

Wait to Share Personal Information.

Never give someone you haven't met with in person your personal information.

Block and report suspicious users.

You can block and report another user if you feel their profile is suspicious or if they have acted inappropriately toward you. This can often be done anonymously before or after you've matched. As with any personal interaction, it is always possible for people to misrepresent themselves. Trust your instincts about whether you feel someone is representing themselves truthfully or not.

Below are a few examples of suspicious behaviors people may use to build trust and sympathy so they can manipulate another person in an unhealthy way:

suspicious behaviors, methods & manipulation:

- Gives vague answers to specific questions
- Overly complimentary and romantic too early in your communication (sometimes known as love bombing)
- Pressures you to provide your phone number or talk outside the dating app
- Requests your home or work address under the guise of sending flowers or gifts



consider reporting if:

- Sends harassing or offensive messages
- Attempts to threaten or intimidate you in any way

when meeting in person

Video chat before you meet up in person.

Once you have matched with a potential date and chatted, consider scheduling a video chat with them before meeting up in person for the first time. This can be a good way to help ensure your match is who they claim to be in their profile. If they strongly resist a video call, that could be a sign of suspicious activity.

Tell a friend where you're going.

Take a screenshot of your date's profile and send it to a friend. Let at least one friend know where and when you plan to go on your date. If you continue your date in another place you hadn't planned on, text a friend to let them know your new location. It may also be helpful to arrange to text or call a friend partway through the date or when you get home to check in.

Meet in a public place.

For your first date, avoid meeting someone you don't know well yet in your home, apartment, or workplace. It may make both you and your date feel more comfortable to meet in a coffee shop, restaurant, or bar with plenty of other people around. Avoid meeting in public parks and other isolated locations for first dates.

Don't rely on your date for transportation.

It's important that you are in control of your own transportation to and from the date so that you can leave whenever you want and do not have to rely on your date in case you start feeling uncomfortable. Even if the person you're meeting volunteers to pick you up, avoid getting into a vehicle with someone you don't know and trust, especially if it's the first meeting.

Have a few ride share apps downloaded on your phone so in case one is not working when you need it, you'll have a backup. Make sure you have data on your phone, and it's fully charged or consider bringing your charger or a portable battery with you.

Stick to what you're most comfortable with.

There's nothing wrong with having a few drinks on a date. Try to keep your limits in mind and do not feel pressured to drink just because your date is drinking. It can also be a good idea to avoid taking drugs before or during a first date with someone new because drugs could alter your perception of reality or have unexpected interactions with alcohol.

Enlist the help of a bartender or waiter.

If you feel uncomfortable in a situation, it can help to find an advocate nearby. You can enlist the help of a waiter or bartender to help you create a distraction, call the police, or get a safe ride home.

Trust your instincts.

If you feel uncomfortable, trust your instincts, and feel free to leave a date or cut off communication with whoever is making you feel unsafe. Do not worry about feeling rude—your safety is most important, and your date should understand that.

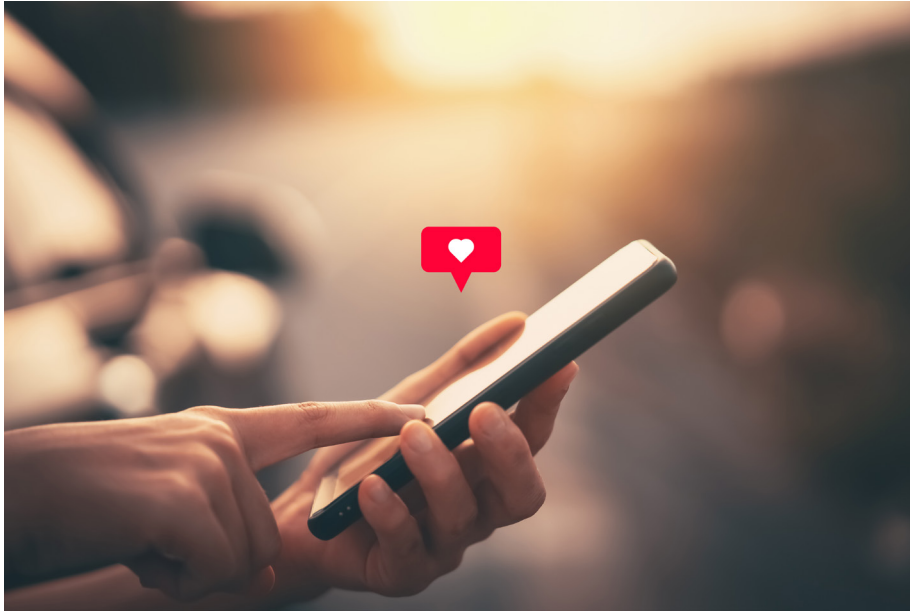
If you felt uncomfortable or unsafe during the date, remember you can always unmatched, block, or report your match after meeting up in person which will keep them from being able to access your profile in the future.



Sexual assault and harassment are never acceptable and are never the victim's fault no matter what you were wearing, drinking, or whom you were with.

*The National Sexual Assault Hotline is anonymous, free, and available 24/7.
(800-656-HOPE) ■ www.rainn.org*

ride share safety



Uber's disruption of the transportation industry dramatically increased our collective willingness to hop into strangers' cars. Now, apps like Uber and Lyft facilitate over 14 million rides daily, and there's some inherent degree of risk in every ride.

On March 29, 2019, Samantha Josephson, a 21-year-old senior at the University of South Carolina, was kidnapped and murdered when she was targeted by a person posing as a rideshare driver. The #WhatsMyName campaign is working to educate students on ride share safety in the hopes of preventing another unimaginable tragedy.

Make yourself less vulnerable with these insights and tips:

Wait for your ride in a safe place.

Since apps will tell you exactly where your driver is, you only need to go out and meet them at the last possible minute. Request your ride while you're still inside and remain in an area that is well lit, comfortable and in the presence of other people for as long as possible.

Always ask “What’s my name?”

University of South Carolina and the family of Samantha Josephson are spearheading the #WhatsMyName campaign to promote rideshare safety by always positively identifying your driver. Never get into an Uber, Lyft or any other private car unless the driver can first identify you by name. If they're your actual driver, they will also know your destination.

Verify the car and driver.

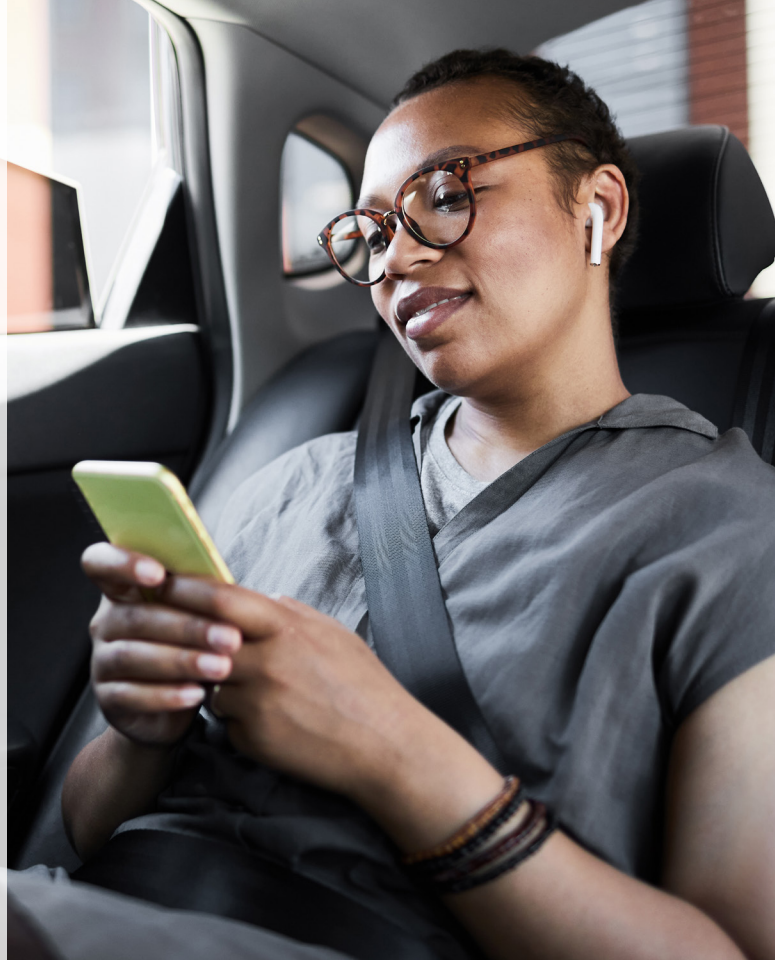
You must also match the make, model, and license plate of the car to what's listed in the app. Make sure their personal appearance matches their profile photo. Also check to make sure that the Child Safety Lock is turned off (on the inside of the passenger door).

Don't ride alone.

If you can share a ride with a friend, do it. There is strength in numbers, and you can split the cost of the ride.

Use trip-sharing features.

Both Lyft and Uber have in-app trip sharing features that allow you to share live updates on your trip with trusted friends. Simply hit “Share trip status” in Uber or “Share route” in Lyft.



Let the driver know that the trip is being tracked.

People are more likely to commit crimes when they think they're not going to get caught, so give some indication that people are looking out for you. Make a phone call and tell someone that you're in an Uber. If they don't answer (or you don't want to call at an odd hour) one trick is to leave yourself a voice memo instead. A script like this might help: "Hey mom, just calling to let you know that I'm in my Uber now. I'll be there in about 15 minutes, and you can also follow along on the app. See you soon!"

Choose where to sit wisely.

Uber advises that it's safer to sit in the back of the car because it creates two possible exits and increases space between the driver and the passenger. Additionally, sitting on the passenger side instead of directly behind the driver can help you keep an eye on both the driver and the road. However, all vehicles and situations are different. In a large car or shared ride, try to choose a seat with easy access to the door, a good vantage point of the driver and the road ahead, and courteous distance between other passengers. If you feel safer in the front seat, a good driver shouldn't mind if you sit there. Consider it a red flag if a driver tries to force you into a certain seat.

Do not share personal information.

If you need to communicate with the Uber or Lyft driver, you can do so via the app without giving out your contact information, social media handles or last name. Remember that there is no legitimate reason to give your driver a direct payment. If you're on the way home, consider being dropped off at a safe nearby location that doesn't give away your address.



Trust your gut.

If anything seems "off" about your driver, car, route, or anything else, speak up. Prioritize your own wellbeing over your passenger rating. Don't get in the car if your instincts are tingling. End the ride if you're not comfortable, as long as you're in a safe place to exit and find another ride.

Give feedback about your trip and driver.

If you were sketched out by anything that happened during your ride, don't hesitate to report it. You might have avoided harm or trauma, but the next person might not be so unfortunate. Do your part to help cull problematic drivers from the pool. whatsmyname.org

dating & boundaries

We need boundaries to maintain happy, healthy relationships. But not everyone knows what boundaries look like or how to set them... especially when it comes to dating. It can be scary to establish boundaries. “When we’re nervous about holding onto someone else’s approval, we can compromise on boundaries,” Rachael Lloyd, a relationship expert from eharmony states. “But once you start doing that, your own sense of self can erode, and you can soon lose yourself in the relationship.” You might not always be aware of your own boundaries until they have been crossed, but “you’ll know when a boundary is overstepped because you’re likely to feel triggered emotionally”.

Whether you’re dating someone new, just hooking up with someone, or in a long-term relationship, boundaries are super important. When our boundaries are respected, we feel respected, safe, and validated. Boundaries help prevent any added stress or anxiety that you want to avoid.



physical & sexual boundaries

When it comes to intimacy, it's advisable to bring up sexual boundaries before you've entered a sexual encounter with that person. In the moment, if you are having sex with someone and a boundary is being crossed, remember that consent can be withdrawn at any point, and each new sexual act that's introduced in an encounter needs to be consented to.



"I'm not in the mood for cuddling."
"I don't like being touched like that in public."
"I need my personal space."
"I have the right to my privacy, including my phone."
"Are you okay with this?"
"I don't like this. Let's try something different."
"I don't feel like having sex right now."
"I don't want to send a nude."

emotional boundaries

Opening up and being vulnerable with someone you like, or you've just started dating, can be SCARY. Even communicating your emotional needs and boundaries in a long-term relationship can be tough. But expressing your feelings and communicating your needs is SO important for the health of your relationship and your emotional well-being.



"What you said last night really hurt my feelings and made me feel disrespected."
"I know you're trying to help, but I just need you to listen instead of giving me advice or trying to fix my problems for me."
"Can we talk about this later when I'm in a better headspace? Now's not a great time."
"It's hard for me to share things with you when I feel like my feelings are being dismissed."

time boundaries

It often feels like there aren't enough hours in the day! You have school, work, and social responsibilities. Maybe you're a student athlete on top of that! Sometimes we have to set boundaries when it comes to access to our time.



"I could really use a chill night by myself. Let's hang out tomorrow instead."

"It's been a while since we had a date night. We should make it a regular thing."

"I can't, I have plans with my friends that day."

"I can come along, but only for a couple of hours. I have to be up early."

divethru.com

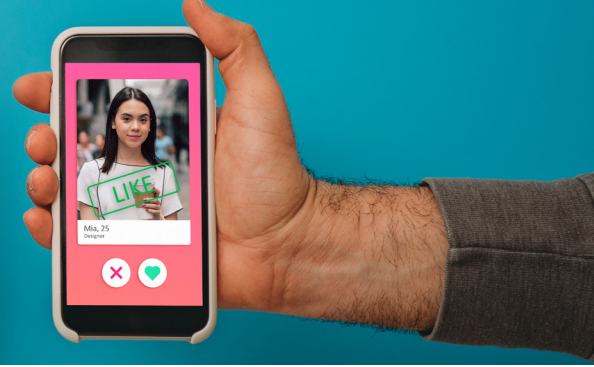
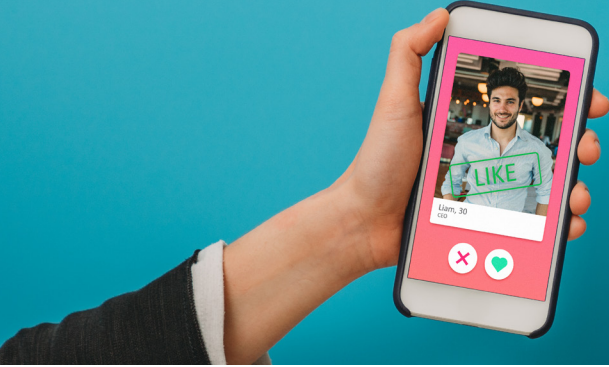
hookup culture

In recent years, casual sex or hookup culture has gained popularity. Combined with the increased use of dating apps, hookup culture almost seems like the default these days. Data shows that between 60% and 80% of North American college students have experienced a "hook-up" in some capacity.

This can make dating difficult if you are looking for a real connection and commitment from someone. Some people struggle with differentiating between their sexual desires and their romantic desires. Relationships between hookup partners can become complicated if one person becomes emotionally attached and the other does not. This can have a negative effect on your self-esteem and may increase stress and anxiety. Having multiple partners can also increase your chances of contracting a sexually transmitted infection. Practicing safer sex and communicating with your partners is an important part of participating in hookup culture.

On college campuses, many hookups take place at parties and/or in the presence of drugs and alcohol. Being under the influence of any substance prevents someone from giving or obtaining proper consent. Sexual trauma can take a huge toll on someone's mental health, and it's critical that if you choose to engage in casual hookups, you do so in a safe, consensual manner.

modernintimacy.com



ghosting

Ghosting refers to abruptly ending communication or cutting off contact without explanation. The concept most often refers to romantic relationships. Even when the person being ghosted reaches out to re-initiate contact or gain closure, they're met with silence.

Being ghosted can feel hurtful and confusing. Technology and dating apps make it easier for people to ghost. Sometimes people ghost because they are uncomfortable with conflict and would prefer to avoid it all together, rather than having an honest conversation with someone about their lack of interest. Rejection isn't easy, for either party, but being up front with someone you have been talking to, is much kinder than disappearing.

Sometimes, however, ghosting is necessary. If the person you are communicating with starts to make you uncomfortable or concerned for your safety, ghosting may be the appropriate action.

breadcrumbing

Breadcrumbing (or orbiting) refers to leading someone on. If someone keeps giving you hope that they'll commit but never does, you might be getting breadcrumbing. Breadcrumbing happens when someone gives you just enough time, energy, affection, and attention to keep you interested. They might flirt with you periodically, send random texts or DMs, but never have any intention of committing or taking it further.

This can be extremely hurtful and confusing to the subject of the breadcrumbs, especially if that person has true feelings for the person who is breadcrumbing. The breadcrumb likes the attention and keeping the other person on the hook but has every intention of staying single and keeping their options open. Breadcrumbing can be a sign of emotional abuse since it often involves manipulation.

healthy relationships

Healthy relationships involve honesty, trust, respect, and open communication between partners, and they take effort and compromise from both people. There is no imbalance of power. Partners respect each other's independence, can make their own decisions without fear of retribution or retaliation, and share decisions. If or when a relationship ends, there is no stalking or refusal to let the other partner go.



Characteristics of Healthy Relationships

- Respect for privacy and space. You don't have to be with your partner 24/7.
- Your partner encourages you to spend time with friends without them, and to participate in activities that you enjoy.
- You feel comfortable expressing your opinions and concerns to your partner.
- You feel physically safe and your partner doesn't force you to have sex or to do things that make you feel uncomfortable.
- Your partner respects your wishes and feelings, and you can compromise and negotiate when there are disagreements or conflicts.

The foundation of a healthy relationship includes:

- Boundaries: You and your partner can meet each other's needs in ways that you both feel comfortable with.
- Communication: You and your partner can share your feelings, even when you don't agree, in a way that makes the other person feel safe, heard, and not judged.
- Trust: Building trust can take time and allows couples to be vulnerable with one another knowing that they can rely on the other person.
- Consent: Most commonly used when you're being sexually active, giving consent means that you are okay with what is happening, and that no one is forcing you or guilt-tripping you into doing anything that you don't want to do.

Please keep in mind that in some abusive relationships, trying to enforce boundaries, honest communication, trust, and other healthy behaviors could put your safety at risk. Remember, abuse is about power.

relationship violence

& emotional abuse

Emotional abuse centers around control, manipulation, isolation, and demeaning or threatening behavior. Signs of abuse include:

- Monitoring and controlling a person's behavior, such as who they spend time with, what they wear, or how they spend their money.
- Threatening a person's safety, property, or loved ones.
- Isolating a person from family, friends, and acquaintances.
- Demeaning, shaming, or humiliating a person.
- Extreme jealousy, excessive texting, and constant monitoring.



love bombing

Love Bombing occurs when someone “bombs” you with extreme displays of attention and affection. Love bombers sweep you off your feet. It’s nice to be flooded with dopamine, the feel-good chemical your brain releases when you receive attention, texts, and gifts from your new love interest. At the beginning, you might view this person as charming. They will idealize you, and praise you endlessly. But they also seem to emotionally attach way too quickly. And although this can seem normal at the beginning of a romantic relationship, it can also be a red flag and lead to a cycle of abuse.

The difference between someone being excited about a new crush or love interest, and love bombing, is what follows. True love bombing is followed by a devaluation stage. Your partner may go from showering you with love and attention to someone who is cruel and withdraws all affection or positive reinforcement. They may give you the silent treatment, belittle you, play mind games, or display passive-aggressive behavior. Love bombers often seek out partners who are vulnerable. For example, they may look for partners who have just broken up with someone or partners who have low self-esteem and self-worth.



Relationship violence can also include physical violence, and sexual violence.

Examples of physical abuse include:

- Scratching, punching, biting, strangling, choking, or kicking.
- Throwing items at you like a phone, book, shoe, or plate.
- Pulling your hair.
- Pushing or pulling you, or forcibly grabbing your clothing.
- Threatening to use or using a gun, knife, or other weapon against you.
- Touching any part of you without your permission or consent.
- Forcing you to have sex or perform a sexual act.
- Grabbing your face to make you look at them.
- Preventing you from leaving or forcing you to go somewhere.

Gaslighting

Gaslighting is when someone manipulates you by psychological means into questioning your own sanity. This could be by blatantly lying over and over until you start to question your own version or understanding of an event. Someone who is gaslighting you may tell you that you're "overreacting" when you call them out for crossing your boundaries. They may call you "too sensitive" or "crazy" when you express your needs or concerns. They may belittle you, but then follow it up with "I was just joking", when you get upset. They may accuse you of being paranoid or tell you that "you're imagining things".

Thehotline.org

Examples of sexual abuse include:

- Unwanted kissing or touching.
- Unwanted rough or violent sexual activity.
- Refusing to use condoms or restricting someone's access to birth control.
- Preventing someone from using protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Sexual contact with someone intoxicated from drugs or alcohol, unconscious, asleep, or otherwise unable to give clear and informed consent.
- Threatening, pressuring, or otherwise forcing someone to have sex or perform sexual acts.

Loveisrespect.org



stalking

Stalking occurs when someone (usually a current or former partner) watches, follows, or harasses you repeatedly, making you feel afraid or unsafe. Stalking behaviors can include:

- Showing up at your home or workplace unannounced or uninvited.
- Sending you unwanted texts, messages, letters, emails, or voicemails.
- Leaving you unwanted items, gifts, or flowers.
- Calling you and hanging up repeatedly or making unwanted phone calls to you, your employer, a professor, or a loved one.
- Using social media or technology to track your activities.
- Spreading rumors about you online or in person.
- Manipulating other people to investigate your life, including using someone else's social media account to look at your profile or befriending your friends in order to get information about you.
- Waiting around at places you spend time.
- Damaging your home, car, or other property.
- Hiring a private investigator to follow or find you as a way of knowing your location or movements. Loveisrespect.org

notes



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For more information: www.ucwv.edu/save

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