

# TEEN TURNING POINTS



## Safe Online Dating

As we progress in this digital age, more and more people are trying online dating. Many people have had success with meeting people and developing long term relationships through online dating sites. Online dating can be a good way to meet new people on your own time, which is helpful in today's busy world. However, online dating can also be dangerous. It's important to approach online dating with caution.

Although many people who use online dating sites are sincere, some people use these sites to scam money from people or collect information or pictures to use as blackmail. Others may lie about their appearance or their intentions.

### **How to Be Safe**

You should always use caution when talking to someone new online. Here are some ways you can stay safe while getting to know someone on an online dating site:

- If you can, do an online search their profile picture and reputation. Make sure they are who they say they are.
- Get to know the person well before you meet. Talk on the phone or video chat a few times.
- If someone is saying inappropriate or offensive things, harassing, or threatening you online, discontinue communication and report them.
- Never send money or give any of your financial information to someone you meet online. If someone asks you for money, cut off communication with them.
- Never send nude or incriminating pictures of yourself to someone online. They could potentially use pictures like these to try to blackmail you.

### **Meeting Up Safely**

If you decide to meet with someone you've been talking to online, meet in a public place, and make sure you have your own transportation and a way to call for help. Let someone know where you're going to be and how long you will be gone. Be careful not to leave your drink or personal items unattended. Do not drink to the point where your judgement may be impaired.

For a first meeting, never go to someone's house or invite them to your house. If the person has a problem with this, it is a red flag. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, leave.

Never feel embarrassed or guilty about discontinuing communication with someone online or not wishing to see someone again after you meet them. Remember, your safety is the most important thing.

### **If you need help**

You can call Crisis Services at (810) 257-3740 or toll free at (877) 346-3648, where someone is available 24 hours a day. TTY users call (810) 232-6310. For more information on safe online dating, visit [www.getsafeonline.org](http://www.getsafeonline.org), [www.genhs.org](http://www.genhs.org)

