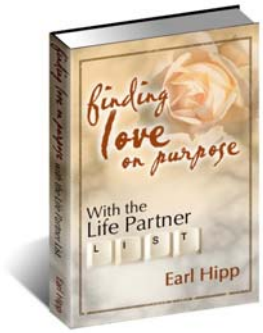

finding love on purpose

By Earl Hipp

10 tips for online dating safety

Trish McDermott, VP Romance, Match.com

Match.com offers a fun and secure environment to meet other quality singles. It's also a great place to build loving and trusting friendships that can lead to lasting, offline relationships. Whether you decide to correspond online or meet members offline, please use sound judgment, and be responsible for your conduct. In both the virtual and real worlds, common sense is your best safety tool.

1. Start slow Watch out for someone who seems too good to be true. Begin by communicating solely via Match.com Messenger or email, then look for odd behavior or inconsistencies. The person at the other end may not be who or what he or she says. Trust your instincts. If anything makes you uncomfortable, walk away for your own safety and protection.

2. Guard your anonymity All correspondence between Match.com members takes place through our double-blind system, ensuring your true identity is protected until you decide to reveal it. Never include your last name, email address, home address, phone number, place of work, or any other identifying information in your member profile or initial messages. When corresponding with another Match.com member, turn off your email signature file. Stop communicating with anyone who pressures you for personal information or attempts in any way to trick you into revealing it.

3. Exercise caution and common sense Careful, thoughtful decisions generally yield better dating results. Guard against trusting the untrustworthy; suitors must earn your trust gradually, through consistently honorable, forthright behavior. Take all the time you need to test for a trustworthy person and pay careful attention along the way. If you suspect someone is lying, he or she probably is, so act accordingly. Be responsible about romance, and don't fall in love at the click of a mouse. Don't become prematurely intimate with someone, even if that intimacy only occurs online.

4. Request a photo A photo will give you a good idea of the person's appearance, which may prove helpful in achieving a gut feeling. In fact, it's best to view several images of someone in various settings: casual, formal, indoor, and outdoors. If all you hear are excuses about why you can't see a photo, consider that he or she has something to hide. Since Match.com offers free scanning services to its members, there's no reason someone shouldn't be able to provide you a photo.

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5. Chat on the phone A phone call can reveal much about a person's communication and social skills. Consider your security and do not reveal your personal phone number to a stranger. Try a cell phone number instead or use local telephone blocking techniques to prevent your phone number from appearing in Caller ID. Only furnish your phone number when you feel completely comfortable.

6. Meet when YOU are ready The beauty of meeting and relating online is that you can collect information gradually, later choosing whether to pursue the relationship in the offline world. You never are obligated to meet anyone, regardless of your level of online intimacy. And even if you decide to arrange a meeting, you always have the right to change your mind. It's possible that your decision to keep the relationship at the anonymous level is based on a hunch that you can't logically explain. Trust yourself. Go with your instincts.

7. **Watch for red flags** Pay attention to displays of anger, intense frustration, or attempts to pressure or control you. Acting in a passive-aggressive manner, making demeaning or disrespectful comments or any physically inappropriate behavior are all red flags. You should be concerned if your date exhibits any of the following behavior without providing an acceptable explanation:

- Provides inconsistent information about age, interests, appearance, marital status, profession, employment, etc.
- Refuses to speak to you on the phone after establishing ongoing, online intimacy.
- Fails to provide direct answers to direct questions.
- Appears significantly different in person from his or her online persona.
- Never introduces you to friends, professional associates, or family members.

8. Meet in a safe place When you choose to meet offline, always tell a friend where you are going and when you will return. Leave your date's name and telephone number with your friend. Never arrange for your date to pick you up at home. Provide your own transportation, meet in a public place at a time with many people around, and when the date is over, leave on your own as well. A familiar restaurant or coffee shop, at a time when a lot of other people will be present, is often a fine choice. If you decide to move to another location, take your own car. When the timing is appropriate, thank your date for getting together, and say goodbye.

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9. Take extra caution outside your area If you are flying in from another city, arrange for your own car and hotel room. Do not disclose the name of your hotel and never allow your date to make the arrangements for you. Rent a car at the airport and drive directly to your hotel. Call your date from the hotel or meet at the location you have already agreed to. If the location seems inappropriate or unsafe, go back to your hotel. Try to contact your date at that location or leave a message on a home machine. Always make sure a friend or family member knows your plans and has your contact information. And if possible, carry a cell phone at all times.

10. Get yourself out of a jam Never do anything you feel unsure about. If you are in any way afraid of your date, use your best judgment to diffuse the situation and get out of there. Excuse yourself long enough to call a friend for advice, ask someone else on the scene for help or slip out the back door and drive away. If you feel you are in danger, call the police; it's always better to be safe than sorry. Never worry or feel embarrassed about your behavior; your safety is much more important than one person's opinion of you.

While liars, cheaters, and imposters certainly ply their craft on the Web, you'll also find them in nightclubs and offline dating services, cocktail parties or even sitting across from you at your local café. Regardless of where you meet someone**, dating is never a risk-free activity**, but a little caution will reduce your risk in matters of the heart.

More dating articles and services available at http://www.onlinedatingservice.net

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