

What You Can Do: Personal Guidelines for Love Online

The following guidelines apply to answering all personal ads, but have particular importance for online personals. Clearly, there are good people on the Net. After all, *you're* online and you're a good person! However, the Net is also a perfect medium for devious and mentally ill individuals to take advantage of unsuspecting victims. Be cautious to not count yourself among other victims.

- _ If you intend to have a personal contact with somebody you met on the Net, do so in a *public place*.
- _ Remember most people lie on the Net about *something*.
- _ Meet during the day, preferably in a busy or crowded area.
- _ Find out more about the person – verify their information from other sources. Don't be afraid to call references and friend of his or hers.
- _ Ask direct questions. Don't be afraid of insulting the person; if they're insulted then run the other way, because they probably have something to hide.
- _ Never, under any circumstances, give out your real name, phone number, or address on the Internet without having a sense of who you are providing it to. Remember, if they really want to, other people can see everything that appears online that isn't encrypted.
- _ Be specific about your personality and what you want in your ad. Resist the temptation toward being so flirtatious that it clouds your better judgement, or doesn't communicate what you *really* want.

Remember that on-line dating and personal services are inherently addicting or at least one can become compulsive in their use. The seemingly unending supply of potential dates and mates with sexy and inviting photos and promises of walks in the rain can appear too tempting and if one date or email connection doesn't work there will be countless others to resort to. These sites almost seem to commoditize human beings into dating and mating objects and the search can become the "high" as opposed to a means to an end.