



Sexual violence and online safety: dating and relationships

There are many different kinds of sexual violence including unwanted sexual attention, harassment, sexual bullying, being exposed to pornography, sexual assault and rape.

Any form of sexual contact which you do not agree to is sexual violence. Anyone who does not respect your privacy, who will not leave you alone, who posts embarrassing or threatening statements about you, or 'shares' photos online without your permission is being abusive.

The person who commits any kind of sexual violence and abuse is always responsible for it. Even if you know that you have taken risks or done something that made you vulnerable, this does not mean that you caused or invited the abuse to happen.

Sexual violence and the online connection

The internet makes it very easy for people to quickly connect with others and find out and send very personal information. But it also allows people to hide who they really are and what they are doing. Some people use the internet to harm others. This could be someone they know or a stranger.

Some examples are:

- » Putting women under pressure to send intimate photographs of themselves
- » 'Grooming' women through dating websites under false pretences for sexual purposes
- » 'Cyber stalking' as part of a pattern of stalking and harassment – this could be in the context of an intimate relationship, with the perpetrator a former partner or it could be someone you know of but not well, or someone you don't know at all
- » Taking photos of sexual assaults with mobile phones and sharing them by email, text and posting them on social networking or porn sites
- » Distributing intimate photographs of former sexual partners, which were originally taken consensually, in order to harass and distress them

Some of these examples can be a form of victimisation from the outset. Some may become a problem because of conflict in a relationship/friendship or after a relationship ends.

This can affect anyone. If someone targets you in this way, it can be upsetting and frightening.

This leaflet suggests some ways to keep yourself as safe as you can when you use the internet, for example for dating. It also suggests where you can get help if you experience sexual violence from someone you know or a stranger.

There is more information on our website at www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk

Managing your online presence

Remember that you cannot control what happens to information or images which you give or which are taken from/of you

It can be particularly difficult if the person who is threatening or harassing or stalking you, or seems to be simply 'chatting' to you, is someone you know in real life, for example a former partner. This is because they may know a lot about you and may use what they know against you or to trick you.

If an intimate partner is sexually abusive to you in your 'everyday' life, they can do the same online as well. For example they may make you give them your login details so they can read your emails or post photos you do not want other people to see. A former partner or someone else may stalk you using your (for example Facebook) status. It may even be possible to locate the geographical area from where you posted photos and status (using a process called 'geotagging'). This allows others to know where you are or know where you were when you were using social networking.

Some ways to reduce risks and stay safe from people you know/strangers are:

- » Never disclose private or identifying information when using social networks
- » Check your privacy settings to make sure you are not sharing more information than you intend. Review and reset them regularly
- » Pick a user name which does not include any personal information or identifying location
- » Keep your profile 'closed' and allow only your friends to view your profile
- » Be wary about who you invite or accept invitations from
- » Use 'strong' passwords and change them regularly; don't use the same password for different websites
- » Be careful about the information you give out about yourself in a chat room. Everyone else in the chatroom can see what you write
- » Do not send or post photographs online which you would not want anyone else to see. This includes any photographs which someone sends to you
- » Relationships change. Someone you feel close enough to now, to share personal information or images with may not be close in the future; they may even want to do you harm
- » You may need to change passwords and security information if you have given them to a partner or former partner who now wants to harm you

Remember that the people you meet online may not be who you think they are:

- » They may not be who they appear to be; or the age they say they are; or look the same as their photographs; in fact everything they tell you may be untrue
- » The people you meet in chat rooms or dating websites may be 'cyber stalkers', or may intend to manipulate, threaten, harass or abuse you

Making friends and meeting partners online and meeting people in person

If you meet someone in person who you have only had online contact with, there are risks. This is because you cannot guarantee anything about them or what they intend. Being aware of the risks is the first step in keeping yourself safe.

Some suggestions are:

- » If you use a dating website, make sure you check it out. Look at reviews and ask around, just as you would for any 'service'
- » If you decide to phone an online contact, withhold your number (dial **141** first)
- » Only when you are satisfied that you can trust someone enough and are confident about your safety, should you consider sharing any personal information about yourself
- » Be very careful about where, how and when you meet online contacts in person
- » Tell a friend or family member who you are meeting, where you are going and when you will be back
- » Always meet and stay in a busy public place; do that for several meetings
- » If someone you meet online is sincerely interested in you, they will want you to feel safe and they will be happy to let you apply a few common sense rules when you meet
- » Find ways of checking that the person you are meeting is sincere. One way to test this is to take a picture of them early on. If they are sincere, they will not object
- » Take your mobile phone and keep it switched on
- » Do not accept a lift from your date; do not go to their house; and do not invite them to yours
- » Stay sober



Help from the law

See www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk for information about how the law can help. You can also phone or email the RCS helpline (see below) and we can tell you more.

Reporting abuse

- » If you are worried about something which is happening to you or someone you know, contact the police by phoning **101**. If it is an emergency, dial **999**
- » If you are reporting to the police or others, it is good to keep evidence, for example of offensive text messages, photos, comments, chat room commentary and so on
- » To take a snapshot or copy of anything on the screen, including chat or online conversations hold down the 'ALT' key and press 'Prt Sc – SysRq' or 'Print Screen'. Open up a new text or paint document and paste the image into it. Note the time and date of the conversation. (If using an apple computer press 'Cmd + Shift + 3'. This will take a snapshot of your screen and save it as an image to your desktop)

Help and information

Sexual violence in any form is traumatic. It is important to be able to confide in people who understand what you/your children are experiencing. You may find it helpful to speak to a support worker from the Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline.

Rape Crisis Scotland Helpline

08088 01 03 02 (6pm-12 midnight daily)

Email: support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk

Free confidential support and information for women and men, aged 13+, affected by sexual violence at any time in their lives; also support for friends, family and professionals.

Get Safe Online

www.getsafeonline.org

Practical advice on how to protect yourself, your computers and mobile devices against problems encountered online. Useful sections on cyber stalking and safe online dating.

Action Scotland Against Stalking

www.scotlandagainststalking.com

Information about stalking.

National Stalking Helpline

Call: **0808 802 0300**

Email: advice@stalkinghelpline.org

www.stalkinghelpline.org

Scottish Women's Aid

www.scottishwomensaid.org.uk

information about domestic abuse and how local Women's Aid groups can support women experiencing abuse.

stoprevengepornscotland.wordpress.com

Crimestoppers

blog.crimestoppers-uk.org/?p57

Information about online dating.