

Online Allure 2.0 Personal Security Safety Update.

Hey, it's Mike.

In the few years since we released the first version of Online Allure, the world of online dating and cyber-security have intersected and evolved.

Scamming and “cat phishing” (aka pretending to be someone you're not) have always been prevalent on many dating sites and apps. Previously, when people thought of “scamming” in online dating, they thought of people out to get your money. “I'm in a bind, can you wire me some funds?” “My mom's in the hospital, I just need to pay the deductible for insurance to kick in... can you hook me up with your credit card info? Don't forget I need those last 3 digits on the back, baby.”

The variations on this type of financial scams are endless. Yes, you should be on the lookout for scammers.

But today let's talk about personal safety.

Quick caveat. I'm not a lawyer, nor have I ever played a lawyer on tv, movies or stage. Following the safety tips I provide here does not guarantee your safety. These are merely tips. And if at any time you feel that someone you are communicating with online could be a threat to you or someone you know, you should immediately report the person (and/or their profile) to the authorities and the online platform.

As I always say, listen to your gut. If your gut tells you something is wrong, even if you have *no proof* someone is a scammer or

catphisher, it's best to err on the side of caution and block. It's not a court of law. You don't have to prove anything.

Though most dating sites and apps have some precautionary measures in place, you can never be too careful.

Because now, with these online dating apps, people can more accurately find "targets" in their immediate geographical area.

Some *scammers* make up life stories and use photos of unsuspecting victims to create fake identities. Cat fishers make up fake jobs, life experiences, hobbies, and photos to fake accounts.

I know a young woman who was "catphished." Unfortunately, she was cat phished for two years. The person who was doing the cat phishing pretended to be another woman wanting to be her friend. The catphisher also said that that woman had cancer and was going to die. Then, eventually, that person, (the cat phisher,) did die, and the cat phisher resurfaced as the original person's brother.

This is not the end of the story. That cat phisher, who was the brother, who was a man the whole time, ended up moving into my friend's building. It was terrifying. When it was all figured out, there was nothing the police could do so my friend had to move.

A lot of folks think that cat phishing only happens to really old women who know nothing about technology. But unfortunately, that's not true. Like in the story that I just told you. The woman that this happened to is 27 years old and tech savvy.

The cat phisher just played on her insecurities and her empathy.

Here's some numbers on cat phishing. More than 53% of Americans fabricate parts or all of their online dating profiles.

11% of people using online dating sites and apps are already married and 51% of online daters are already in a relationship of some kind. In the year 2011, FBI internet crimes complaint center

lodged 5,600 complaints from victims of romance scammers with collective losses of over \$50 million. But it's thought that these numbers are actually much less than the real total because many people are too embarrassed to come forward after they've been cat phished. I think we can all agree that online dating can be some seriously scary stuff.

Cat phishing isn't just something that's happening to your grandma. It is something that happens to many people every day and sometimes lasts for years and years.

How does one prevent from being cat phished? You need to do your research and look for red flags. As soon as someone contacts you, your best bet is to do some investigating. This might seem a little creepy but you have to take care of yourself first. A good offense will always be your best defense.

Check out their dating profile. Make sure it looks like someone spent time on it. Google their name (if it's available) and check and see if they have any other social media accounts or anything else that will suggest that they are a real person.

Here are some red flags.

Red Flag #1 Dishonesty

With some dating apps, you don't always have access to someone's real name until they choose to reveal it to you. As soon as you find out someone's name, look up their social media. Aside from the obvious (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, also look up their LinkedIn profile. You wouldn't believe how many people lie about their job title/status on dating sites.) Why would you care if someone lies about something small, like their job title?

Four words: Little Lie, Big Lie. If someone is confident in lying about seemingly inconsequential things, then they're going to be well practiced at lying about big things. Little liars always turn out to be big liars.

Red Flag #2 Lack of (or Too Much) Social Media Presence

If a guy doesn't have any social media accounts like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or, by contrast, they have more than one profile on each service, it's time to be cautious. They have exceptionally low friend counts on their social media accounts. That is how I know someone's not real and usually a bot or possibly somebody else making a fake profile.

Now, some people choose to avoid social media altogether (some older men, for example). However, I find it hard to believe that someone would avoid social media and then step into online dating. It just feels contradictory, amiright?

Red Flag #3 Overly Staged, Glamorous, or Fake Looking Photos

Their photos are only of them in modeling type shots or activities. Only professional photos is a really big red flag. Their photos do not include other people like family or friends. There are no "tags" for any of their photos.

Is this their real photo?

When you first meet someone online make sure to do a Google Reverse Image search of one of their pictures. How do you do a Google Reverse Image Search? Well, I'll tell you how to do it using your mobile device and you're going to need the Chrome app. You can search Google to find images that are similar to the ones you see in the search results. This is available on the Chrome app for your Android, iPhone, or iPad or desktop.

Using the Chrome app, do a search. Touch the image you want to search to open a larger version of the image. Press and hold the image. In the box that appears, touch "search Google for this image." You can find out more how to do this on Google's support.

If you discover that there are any “stock photos” in the person’s profile, block them immediately.

They constantly play for your sympathy and ask for help. They contact you out of the blue outside of your online dating service. They declare their love for you very quickly, before you’ve even met in person.

Red Flag #3: Other Message Apps

They want to move the conversation to an app with “disappearing” messaging app, like Snapchat, WhatsApp, Telegram, or Burnchat. (There are many others.) My biggest tip is to keep your private life to yourself until you have really gotten to know the person. This includes, at least, one or two in-person meetings.

Here’s another red flag to keep an eye out for... When a cat-phisher lets his guard down, he’ll contradict himself. While his profile may say he’s an animal lover, he may let it slip in conversation that he’s never had a pet. Someone may say he owns his own business, but in conversation, he’ll rail on his boss or management. Most cat-phishers aren’t this careless, but it happens. Be vigilant.