

The Guide To Safer Online Dating

netsafe | bumble inc.

About netsafe

Netsafe is New Zealand's independent, non-profit online safety organisation. Embracing a technology-positive approach, we aim to help New Zealanders take advantage of the digital opportunities available while managing online challenges. We do this by providing practical tools, support, and advice. We operate independently, adjacent to government and law enforcement, with an unwavering focus on online safety. Our mission is to keep people of all ages safe online by providing free support, advice, and education to all ages.

About bumble inc.

Bumble Inc. is the parent company of Bumble, Badoo, Fruitz and Official. The Bumble platform enables people to build healthy and equitable relationships, through kind connections. Founded by CEO Whitney Wolfe Herd in 2014, Bumble was one of the first dating apps built with women at the centre and connects people across dating (Bumble Date), friendship (Bumble BFF) and professional networking (Bumble Bizz). Badoo, which was founded in 2006, is one of the pioneers of web and mobile dating products. Fruitz, founded in 2017, encourages open and honest communication of dating intentions through playful fruit metaphors. Official is an app for couples that promotes open and honest communication between partners and was founded in 2020.

Netsafe asked Bumble to partner with us on our first online dating safety guide. While much of the advice in this resource is widely applicable across apps, Bumble's commitment to "safety by design" stands out. We have highlighted examples of their expertise in trust and safety processes and design elements throughout this guide. This resource was collaboratively informed by Netsafe and Bumble, with input from both organisations; however, it was fully funded by Netsafe.

Special thanks to Dr Ally Gibson, MRSNZ, Victoria University of Wellington, for their expert contribution to this guide.





Introduction

Online dating offers more opportunities than ever before to connect with new people and create meaningful relationships. Whether you're looking for a long-term partner or just enjoying the dating experience, it can be a fun and easy way to connect with others, and at Netsafe, we believe everyone can enjoy online dating while also being mindful of their physical and emotional safety.

That's why, in collaboration with Bumble, we have developed an online dating safety guide to give you useful tips at every stage of the online dating journey.

The guide provides advice and signposts to additional support, taking you through the stages of online dating from choosing an app, to setting up your profile, through to building positive, healthy connections, to ultimately meeting people right for you.

It highlights the latest tools, technologies, and best practices to help you navigate the online dating world with confidence. Our goal is to equip you with the knowledge and resources you need to help you enjoy finding safe and fulfilling connections online.

Ki te kimi aroha – “to search for love”

Dating app decisions

01

Using online dating apps to meet new people is convenient, flexible, and accessible. With numerous platforms available and millions of users opting for online connections, dating apps provide the opportunity to engage with a diverse range of potential partners that you might not encounter in your everyday life. To set yourself up to have a safe and enjoyable experience when dating online, consider taking the following steps:

Do your research:

Before signing up, research apps with safety in mind by reading user reviews and experiences on forums or asking friends who mobile date for their insights. Beyond finding a match, focus on understanding the app's usability, safety features, overall values and main user experience helping users feel secure while connecting with others.



- Explore the app's community guidelines and safety features so you know what behaviour is accepted on the app, what actions could possibly get you removed, how to set your personal boundaries for safety, and where to go for help if needed.
- Check reviews, forum threads, and reputable articles to assess an app's safety. Explore their blog and social media to gauge their commitment to user safety, look for content on their safety practices, user support, and any success stories that emphasise secure connections.
- Consider which safety features are important to you, such as video chatting, photo verification, or profile screening tools, to help ensure a secure and trustworthy experience on the app.

Getting set up

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Most apps will ask you to sign up, upload a picture, and share personal details to create a profile, along with information about what you're looking for. You'll also be asked to review the app's guidelines and agree to the rules, like respecting other users. If an app doesn't require you to review and agree to its rules, consider if it's the right choice for your online dating journey. Creating a safe and inclusive environment should be a platform's top priority.

Secure your account: Make sure you choose a strong password and enable two factor authentication (2FA) where available. Many platforms will ask you to verify your identity. This is to help mitigate impersonation, fake or scam profiles on the app, which ensures a safer, more genuine experience for everyone.

To find out more about 2FA and securing accounts you can visit [Netsafe's advice here](#)

Get familiar with the guidelines:

Take a closer look at what the app expects of its users and what behaviours will and will not be tolerated. Should you connect with someone who is not sticking to the guidelines and violating the rules, using unkind, disrespectful behaviour, you should make a report to the app's safety team to investigate. Breaking the rules of the community can lead to action being taken against a user, like issuing a warning or having the account removed. It is important that all app users feel empowered to report bad behaviour as this can make the online dating experience more positive and safer for everyone.



Explore the safety features: Even if you did this when you were in the deciding phase, make sure you go back over the safety features of the app, and get familiar with how to use them. Doing so will help you set boundaries from the very beginning and give you the confidence to act quickly if you experience something negative whilst finding a date. Safety features will vary between apps, but many of them are intended to help you set filters and preferences to enhance your personal safety. Most dating apps will have functionality within the app to communicate, get personal, and build a meaningful connection so that you do not have to disclose personal details until you feel ready to do so.

Setting up your profile: When choosing profile photos, select clear, recent images that represent your authentic self, steer away from group or heavily edited photos to avoid confusion or misrepresentation. Show your personality by including pics that highlight your interests or hobbies but be mindful of any specific location details. In writing your bio, take time to showcase your genuine qualities, focusing on what you enjoy and what you're looking for.



Bumble safety feature

Photo Verification allows members to see if a match has verified their photos. If not, they can request that they do so. This adds an extra layer of confidence, ensuring that the person you're talking to matches their photos, so you can connect with ease.



Starting the search

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Before you start your search on a dating app, keep safety in mind by setting clear preferences, protecting your privacy, and prioritising your emotional well-being.

Filtering: You could use filters to help find a compatible match. Set preferences for gender, age, distance, and interests, and if the option is available, consider filtering for photo-verified profiles for added safety.

Distance filter: Adjust your search radius to control how far out from your home you want to search and travel to for dates and a potential relationship. It may feel safer and more comfortable dating within the familiar surroundings of your community, or you may want to date further out to meet new people and see new areas that you haven't been around. Either way, plan for your safety when going on a first date.



Protecting your wellbeing: If you find yourself swiping right to connect with others, often without getting matches in return, try not to take it personally. If you start feeling a dip in confidence, low self-esteem, or dating fatigue, consider taking a break. You could also check whether the app offers any additional advice and support on how to improve your experience while protecting your emotional wellbeing. Speak to friends and whānau about how you're feeling or contact support services for some extra help.

Prioritise your hauora, as online dating should be an enjoyable and positive experience.

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Bumble safety feature

Snooze Mode. We all need a break occasionally. Whether you're taking a breather from dating or just want to spend less time online, Bumble's Snooze Mode lets you pause your account without losing your connections. Your profile stays hidden until you're ready to swipe again, and you can still chat with your current matches while taking a break.



Connecting with someone

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After matching with someone, the next step in online dating is to get to know them better. Starting conversations and building connections online can be exciting and fast-paced, and can lead to meaningful relationships or connections you want to pursue. However, it's important to approach this journey thoughtfully. Below is advice to help you make the most of your online dating experience while keeping safety a top priority.

Starting a kōrero

Be yourself; imagine how you would start a kōrero in person. Show manaakitanga when chatting with someone new, and treat others as you'd like to be treated. Respectful, thoughtful communication goes a long way.


Handling unwanted or abusive messages

If you receive messages that are abusive, threatening, harassing, or make you uncomfortable, use the platform's block and report features. While these features will vary between apps, blocking prevents the user from contacting you or viewing your profile, and reporting alerts the safety team, who will review the account and take appropriate action.


Users can be reported for behaviours which breach the app's rules; this can include abuse and harassment, unwanted sexual images and inauthentic profiles. Dating app users are encouraged to report harmful incidents promptly, helping ensure quick responses and action, and informing future safety improvements on the app.

If you receive abusive messages, use the app's safety tools to manage and report harmful behaviour. If you still have concerns, contact Netsafe for free, confidential advice to help you deal with the situation.

Sharing sensitive personal information: Be very careful never to share sensitive personal information like your address, phone number, workplace details, your children's school, or answers to security questions (e.g., your first pet's name). Reading a match's bio and viewing personal photos can make the connection feel close quickly, when in reality, maybe you've only been getting to know each other for a few hours or days. Remember, it takes time to build genuine trust. Be cautious if someone requests sensitive information or urges you to move the conversation off the app, as this is often an indicator of a scam.



Remember the principles of tika, pono, and aroha, be genuine and treat others with respect.



Stay on platform: When starting conversations and getting to know your match, it's best to stay on the platform. If someone pressures you to move to another platform too soon, take caution. Staying on the app allows you to report incidents to the safety team if needed. As your conversations progress, you'll naturally share more about your life, interests, and goals, however, if you receive a message that makes you uncomfortable or feels abusive, remember that this behaviour is unacceptable. Most platforms offer tools to help you address these situations.

Be vigilant of potential scammers: Romance scams can happen on any platform and target people of all ages. Scammers often use fake profiles with stolen photos and identities, their goal is to gain your trust in order to request money or personal information for financial fraud. Never share financial details or sensitive information, such as your passport or bank account numbers, with anyone you've met online. If you receive requests for money or purchases (e.g., groceries, medication, crypto, or gift cards), block and report the account immediately. Remember, a genuine match will not ask for financial help - they're likely not on the app for the right reasons if they do.

For more information on recognising scams and staying safe, [visit Netsafe's resources on romance scams.](#)



Navigating intimate conversations safely: Building a relationship online can develop quickly, and as trust grows, you might consider engaging in sexually explicit conversations or sharing intimate or nude photos. It is essential to ensure that both you and your match are comfortable, and you feel that they are trustworthy before engaging in this type of behaviour. Given the risks and loss of control and privacy with sharing intimate images, it's important to think carefully and be certain you're making the right decision before sharing with someone you've just met on a dating app. If ever you feel uncertain, trust your instinct and do not engage in this behaviour. A potential partner you've just met online who genuinely respects you is unlikely to ask for intimate or nude images and they should respect your boundaries. Repeatedly asking for lewd conversation and images after you have communicated your boundaries is not respectful and you are not obligated to continue the chat. You can swiftly block and report for your own safety and peace of mind. Always get clear digital consent before starting intimate conversations, make sure you are both firmly on the same page with a resounding "yes" before proceeding.



Tap to see

Bumble safety feature

Bumble's **Private Detector™** feature is designed to protect users from unwanted explicit content.

Using AI, it automatically blurs potential nude images and notifies you. You can then choose to view, block, or report the image to Bumble.

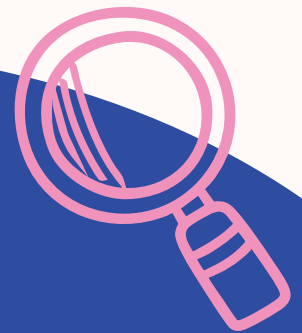


If your intimate images are shared with others: Sharing intimate images is a personal decision, but it carries risks, as you lose control over what happens to the image once it's shared. Image-based abuse is a serious issue. If you choose to share an intimate image and are concerned it may be shared further, discover it has been, or are threatened with its distribution, report the account to the platform immediately and to StopNCII.org. You can take action to prevent the sharing of that image, and have it removed from platforms who have partnered with StopNCII.

If someone has shared an intimate image/video of you or is threatening to do so, report this to the police and contact Netsafe for practical and effective advice. We can often help you get the online content removed and explain the options available under the law in New Zealand.

StopNCII.org, alongside its partners, helps prevent the sharing of intimate images without consent. If you have had an intimate image shared, click [here](#) to learn more and create a case.

Watch out for AI generated profiles: Be cautious of AI-generated profiles, which are increasingly used by scammers on dating apps. While AI can enhance the dating experience by helping users write bios or craft responses, it's also misused to create convincing fake profiles. Signs of an AI-generated profile include: a flawless appearance with a too-perfect photo, generic interests, overly formal or repetitive language, instant replies at odd hours, difficulty responding to personal questions, and a reluctance to meet in person. If you suspect a profile is fake, use an app's block and report features to stay safe.



Bumble safety feature

Bumble's Deception Detector™ feature harnesses artificial intelligence (AI) to weed out fake, spam, or scam profiles so that a large majority of harmful content and inauthentic profiles can be removed from the platform before users are even exposed to it.

Setting up a video or voice call: Some apps offer a video or voice call feature enabling you to send a voice note or have a video call with your match. You don't have to exchange phone numbers, so if something goes wrong, you don't have to worry about anyone having your personal information, maintaining a level of privacy. Making a call, hearing their voice or seeing their face can provide you with reassurance and confidence about your potential match and can serve as an added safety precaution before agreeing to meet in person. Be wary of someone who makes up excuses not to talk on the phone or video call or avoids making plans to meet up.

Trust your intuition: If something feels off, it probably is. Dating can be a vulnerable experience, so regularly check in with yourself, friends, or whānau. Ask questions like "Do I feel comfortable with this conversation?", "Would I be okay if my sister got this message?". If you sense any warning signs or feel pressured, don't hesitate to end the conversation.

Ending a chat or connection: Sometimes connections fizzle out, or your interest shifts to someone else. While it can feel awkward to end a conversation, it's better to be upfront rather than unresponsive. This is where ghosting (ending contact without explanation) often occurs, which can leave the other person feeling confused and hurt. Ending things respectfully helps maintain a positive dating culture, upholds the mana of others, and reflects well on your character. If you're thinking about ending a connection, remember why you started talking, consider how your approach might impact the other person, and choose a respectful, honest way to communicate instead of ghosting.

How to know if it's going well

We're used to spotting the red flags, but what about the green flags? The main thing is to feel respected, comfortable and safe, while having fun.

Here are some green flags to look out for when chatting with someone online:

Engaging in respectful conversations and honouring each other's boundaries

Receiving timely replies to your messages

Giving and receiving genuine compliments

Asking questions to learn more about each other

Sharing personal experiences

Expressing a genuine interest in finding love or a mutual connection

Progressing at a pace that feels comfortable for both of you

Regularly checking in on each other's feelings

Feeling good about yourself and the interaction

Making plans to meet up

Finding someone who aligns with your wairua and shares your values can lead to a more meaningful and fulfilling online dating experience.

Meeting in person

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If you're feeling ready to meet in person, it can be an exciting next step, a chance to see if your online connection translates in real life. For tips on planning and preparing safely for in-person meetups, check out Bumble's advice [here](#).



Need some further support?

If you have immediate concerns for your physical safety or the safety of others, call 111.

Contact Netsafe: If you're experiencing online abuse, have fallen victim to a scam, or need some advice about another online issue, you can contact Netsafe seven days a week for free, confidential and non-judgmental advice and support.

Visit www.netsafe.org.nz to report an incident of online harm or for further advice on a range of online safety topics.

Visit [Bumble's Safety & Wellbeing Center](#) which provides tools, resources, and support for a safer dating experience. It keeps you updated on safety features and offers a direct line of communication with Bumble's team.

Learn more about safe dating and healthy relationships through [Bloom](#), Bumble Inc.'s bespoke web-based support program for members of the Bumble Inc. community who have experienced sexual harassment, assault or relationship abuse.

Support services:

[Lifeline](#) provides 24/7 confidential support and advice to people in distress.

Call: 0508 543 354

TAUTOKO Suicide Crisis Helpline

Call: 0508 828 865 | Text: 4357

[Need to talk?](#) Offers free, 24/7 access to trained counsellors for anyone needing support.

Call: 0800 1737 1737 | Text: 1737

[Safe to Talk](#) provides support and advice to people who have experienced sexual harm.

Call: 0800 044 334 | Email: support@safetotalk.nz | Text: 4334