

## EVANSTON REVIEW

# Love Essentially: How to stay safe when online dating



By **Jackie Pilossoph**

Love, Essentially

A friend of mine who is recently single just began online dating. After chatting via text and email with several men – none with whom she felt a love connection, she met "Jim." Finally, a spark!

She and Jim met for dinner a few days later, and she said the date was wonderful. They ended up talking at the restaurant for four hours.

Thrilled to hear of her success, I said to her, "So, tell me more about him." Then I asked, "What's his last name?"

She replied, "I don't know. We haven't exchanged last names yet."

Huh? Two people spent four hours face-to-face, talking, laughing and having a meal together, and they still didn't trust each other enough to disclose last names?

Apparently, online daters are being really careful these days when it comes to sharing personal information, which according to dating expert Stef Safran is smart.

"All of these new dating apps use your Facebook picture, which helps people figure out your last name and other information," said Safran, a 14-year veteran in the dating industry and founder of her Chicago-based matchmaking service, Stef and the City.

Safran said online daters should not only be aware of potential physical danger, but should be aware of the potential for emotional hurt, as well.

"Many people are serial daters who enjoy the attention but don't intend to meet you or don't intend to take meeting you to becoming a significant other," she said.

Here are Safran's nine tips on how to stay safe when online dating:

1. Be Mindful When Posting Pictures: Online dating means exposing your photos to thousands of men and women you know nothing about. So, while people always want to show off their children and express how much they love being a parent, it's not worth strangers seeing the photos. Once you have met the person a few times and trust him or her, that's when showing photos of your kids is great.

2. Talk to the person on the phone before meeting. Also, meet in a public place where you feel comfortable and take your own car.

3. Do a Google search and Google image search. These days, it's so easy to check someone out yourself. Once you know the person's last name, start with

a Google Image search. You can learn a lot, most notably, if the person is assuming someone else's identity or is pretending to be someone else (also known as "catfishing.")

4. Don't put your last name, your address or where you work on dating apps.
5. Use Facebook referrals. In other words, if you see that the two of you have mutual friends on Facebook, reach out to those people and ask about him or her.
6. Don't use your regular cellphone or home phone. Instead, you can use a Google Voice account, which is a free service that you can easily sign up for at no charge. If you want to go a step further, there is a new app called Burner, which is a phone number that disappears if you choose to no longer allow this person to contact you.
7. Don't share and check in where you are going on Facebook. Instead, post pictures when you get home. There is no need for anyone to know that you aren't at home, especially someone you might have dated where the relationship ended badly.
8. Don't spend too much time in a texting/phone relationship. After a few conversations or a couple weeks at the most, move it offline or move on to someone else.
9. Expect that you will meet people who disappear for no reason. It's hard not to take things personally when dating, so if someone stops responding or is suddenly not on the app anymore, assume he or she either got back together with someone else or met someone special and decided to be exclusive. We would all like to hope that someone would give us an explanation, but that usually doesn't happen. Try to move on and realize it was most likely nothing you said or did.

*Jackie Pilossoph is a freelance columnist for Chicago Tribune Media Group. She is also the creator of her divorce support website, [Divorced Girl Smiling](#). Pilossoph lives in Chicago with her two children.*