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**PLAYING IT SAFE ONLINE**

By **LINDA J ALEXANDER, ESQ**

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The Internet has become the hot new place for smart, eligible people to find romance, and those looking for love are swarming into cyberspace. As a result, many individuals have begun relationships online with people they have not met and know little about.

With so many people communicating via the Net and deciding to date virtual strangers, it is important to be safe and be smart. Common sense can go a long way to keep you safe. Here are some guidelines for playing it safe:

Watch out for someone who seems too good to be true.

Begin by first communicating solely by email or online chat. Be vigilant in noticing odd behavior or inconsistencies. If someone is evasive, this is a red flag. "Listen" to your correspondent's words. The person at the other end may not be who or what he/she says. Trust your instincts. If anything makes you uncomfortable, walk away for your own safety and protection.

Find out as much information as you can.

Learn to ask many questions. Find out where he grew up, where she works, and how he is connected to his community. These are clues to finding out who this person really is. Be suspicious, if someone is unwilling to reveal any personal identifying information. Probe any discrepancies in their stories. If your correspondent is unwilling to answer your questions, this is another red flag. Continue with a great deal of caution.

Honesty is the key to success.

Talk on the telephone and continue to learn more about your correspondent.

A phone call can reveal a lot about a person's communication and social skills. It is worth the cost of the call to protect your security. But do not give out your phone number to a stranger. Trust takes time to develop. Only when you feel completely comfortable should you furnish your phone number.

Don't rush into anything.

Meeting someone online and then arranging a date in a relatively short time can be dangerous. Take

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time to find out who this person really is. If someone is pressuring you to get together before you are ready, this is another warning sign. If anything feels strange as you get to know this person, then it is time to back away and look for another match.

If you decide to meet for a date, proceed with caution. Arrange the meeting on your terms. The following is a guide to ensure that you have a safe encounter:

### Before You Meet

Before you go out with someone new, it is important to get as much information as you can about the person you will meet.

Always ask for a full name, address, and telephone number before agreeing to go out with someone you have never met.

Never go out with someone who will only give you a pager or work phone number. (There is a very good chance of a spouse in the house.)

When someone gives his or her phone number, find a reason to call unexpectedly. This may help you to find out if she is married or he is living with someone.

Find out where the person works and if you can call him or her at work

### First Date Know-How

Be careful when agreeing to meet anyone in person. Set the conditions for your date and do not let the other person change them. Remember, you really do not know someone until you spend time with them in person.

Represent yourself accurately. Exaggerating or deceiving is easy online. Areas to be particularly cautious about are marital status and physical appearance. Begin with a request for a picture and send them a recent one of you. If someone is unwilling to send a recent photo, this is warning sign. If he or she continuously comes up with an excuse, it is because that person has something to hide. Having a scanned photo is available at Kinko's for less than ten dollars, so there is no valid excuse for not doing it. After you have exchanged photos, continue to fill in the gaps, so that the other person does not create you in their image. Keep it honest.

Always tell someone where you are going with your date and when you will return. Leave your date's full name and telephone numbers with that person and write it down. For a small fee, you can leave information regarding where you are going and all the pertinent details with a service called SmartDate at If your date wants you to keep it secret, this is a very big red flag. Protect yourself.

Always meet in a public place that you are familiar with on your first date. Stay near other people in a lighted area. Getting together for coffee is a pleasant, casual way to get to know someone.

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Never allow yourself to be picked up from your house. Giving your address out to a stranger is not safe. Arrange your own transportation so that you can leave if there is any sign of trouble.

Pay attention to everything that this person has told you about him or herself. If you find out that your date has lied about anything, this is another red flag.

Do not bring your date back to your house after the first meeting. You do not know this person. Use the same kind of common sense and rules that you would use in any type of dating relationship.

Be smart and be safe. Take control of your future. Know what you are getting into before you invest your heart, money, or your life. Information is the key.

LINDA J ALEXANDER is an attorney and the President of WhoisHe.Com and WhoisShe.Com. A

professional service which provides comprehensive background, criminal and civil record checks on prospective mates, employees, business partners, future step-parents, Nanny Checks, business partners since 1997. To contact her call 760-806-4377 or email [checkhimout@whoishe.com](mailto:checkhimout@whoishe.com) and [checkherout@whoisshe.com](mailto:checkherout@whoisshe.com)

### **Now You Can Play Texas Hold 'em At An Online Casino**

**By Kevin Rose**

Looking to play an action-packed game of Texas Hold Em anytime day or night? Keep your car in the garage and hop on the Internet for a quick trip to an online casino.

Texas Hold Em is sweeping the world and you can find thousands of games going on at nearly any online casino. Playing Texas Hold Em online is actually better than playing at a physical casino. Not only do you avoid the expense of travelling to a casino, but you avoid the crowds, the distractions, and the cigarette smoke in your eyes from the player sitting next to you.

But that's all you'll avoid because playing Texas Hold Em at an online casino comes with all of the thrills and some pretty big pots.

Not only can you find an open seat anytime that you want one, but many of the top online casinos sponsor Texas Hold Em tournaments where the prize money can get pretty big.

The rules for playing Texas Hold Em online are pretty much the same as they are in physical casinos, but you should always check for casino-specific variations just to be safe.

If you are not an experienced Texas Hold Em player, you can get wiped out pretty quickly if you're seated at an online casino table with the "big boys". That's why many online casinos offer \$.50-\$1.00 Low Limit Texas Hold Em online poker games. With stakes that low you can afford to make mistakes while you hone your strategy without losing a bundle.

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Once your skill levels improve you can move on to \$10 limit games where you'll be matched against more skilled players but you won't have to be worried about being clobbered by the high rollers who are playing online No-Limit Texas Hold Em.

Just because your bankroll isn't as big as you wish it was, you can still take advantage on the online casino Texas Hold Em tournament action by looking for \$10 Limit Sit-n-Go Tournaments which are limited to 10 players at a time.

Once you are confident of your abilities to play Texas Hold Em at the smaller online casino games, you can try your luck sitting down to play at the No Limit Texas Hold Em table with a buy-in as low as \$50. And when you really reach the top you can even play at multiple Texas Hold Em tables at the same time. That's something that you can only do at an online casino!

With many online casinos offering first-time Texas Hold Em players financial incentives like new player bonus dollars and match-play credits, it just makes sense to treat yourself to an online game of Texas Hold Em instead of packing up the family and heading out to some resort casino where you'll spend hundreds of dollars just on room and meals. Texas Hold Em and online casinos -- it's a sure thing.

Kevin Rose is an author and consultant for The 10 Best Online Casinos

, and has many years of experience in online gambling.



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