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# GLBT Teens And The Internet



**United Way**  
Funded Agency

## Watching Out For Yourself In Online Relationships

### *Tips For The Transgender, Lesbian, Bi, or Gay [queer] Teen*

The online environment mirrors the real world in many ways, both good and bad. And because it's so easy to create a facade, an imaginary vision of who you are by typing whatever you want into an online profile, it's sometimes difficult to discern the good from the bad. There's the potential to get taken advantage of, including sexually, by others who might arrange meetings with you or make you feel uncomfortable online.

Surfing the net can be a wonderful thing and open up many new worlds to you, especially if you're a queer teen. There are tremendous resources and sources of information available to you. But, just as it probably wouldn't be a good idea to put a 10-year-old who's never been out of their small town right in the middle of Times Square, it's also not a good idea to begin your online journey until you're sure you're adequately prepared.

This booklet is designed to help you be safe online, and includes our recommendations to help protect yourself from being taken advantage of. We hope it helps you discover the queer world online, and more about yourself, too.

## People Are NOT Always What They Say They Are

Electronic services allow people freedoms that the world does not. Forty-year-old men can become a teenager again. Wedding bands aren't at all visible in the online world. And everyone's body tends to become thin and smaller when they log on (well, not all areas get smaller).

And if you're a queer teen, you're most likely still in the closet, perhaps just coming to acknowledge and accept your orientation. It can be liberating to find other guys and girls out there just like you. An you can get some badly needed support when you find someone to talk to

## Internet Meeting Places

[www.xy.com](http://www.xy.com)

[www.gaycanada.com](http://www.gaycanada.com)

[www.gay.com](http://www.gay.com)

[www.younggayamerica.com](http://www.younggayamerica.com)

[www.queeramerica.com](http://www.queeramerica.com)



## Sexual Assault Crisis Numbers

Kids Help Phone 800.668.6868

Sexual Assault Crisis Line 306.244.2224

Abuse/Sexual Assault Line 800.214.7083

The Avenue Community Centre 800.358.1833



## In Closing

We don't want to make you sceptical of every person you meet online. In fact, electronic services are often the most important informational resource for queer teens, because for many, it's the first time you're able to find someone else like you to talk to. We know many, many queer teens that have found people online that honestly do care about them, of all ages. For some, this has literally meant the difference between life and death.

Online services like AOL, Hotmail, Yahoo, and CompuServe, the Internet and the World Wide Web are wonderful places to meet people, and perhaps even make irreplaceable friends. They are places where you can come to feel safe in a world where being queer doesn't always make you feel safe and protected.

But be careful, and take care of yourself. Your life is worth it, and you've just begun to live it.

## Where To Get More Information

There is a wealth of resources out there for you to take advantage of. Community centres for lesbians, bisexuals and gay men that offer a whole range of social and support activities. Youth groups where you'll find other guys and girls just like you. Many of them are going through exactly the same things you are, and probably even live pretty close nearby.

It may seem kind a scary at first to think of going to these places, but they're really one of the best ways to begin enjoying your life as a gay teen, and begin the process of becoming a gay adult who's happy with themselves, and living a happy life. Community centres and youth groups have helped so many people accept who they are that we think they're the best place to turn when you want to start meeting people.

It's easy to find these groups. You can check out GayCanada, Young Gay America, Queer America, or *The Avenue Community Centre*. [www.glhs.ca] on the web for listings of groups near you.

that understands what you're facing, and can relate their own experiences.

All of these things combine to make it easy to start trusting someone online. Perhaps over trusting, in some cases. You may decide at some point to get together with your online friend, in the real world. It's not only cheaper, but it's also nice to just have someone to talk to and look at them face-to-face.

But remember, just as in the real world, appearances can be deceiving. There are people who log on simply to find sex partners. There's nothing wrong with that. Consensual sex between two adults, and consensual sex between two younger people, is fine.

We know many queer teens that are looking primarily for friendship, acceptance and understanding. And many of them are going through trying times, and sometimes, don't think as highly of themselves as they should. That happens a lot due to the homophobia that surrounds us every day. So it can be nice when someone, who knows you're gay, lesbian or bisexual, likes you for the total person you are.

The problem is that some people think that everyone is a potential sex partner, simply because you share the same sexual orientation. And they know that they can manipulate a gay teen, playing on your sense of wanting to be wanted, or convincing you that certain sexual activities are what being lesbian or gay is all about.

Sometimes, some people will try to talk you into doing things you might feel badly about later. So it's important to remember that your body is yours and yours alone, and you have the right to stop things whenever you feel uncomfortable.

## Be Careful If You Meet

If you do decide to get together with an online friend at some point in time, then make sure you proceed with caution. Do not go to meet someone at their hotel or their house. Meet only in a very safe environment, such as a shopping mall, or a fast-food restaurant. Get to

know them in a safe setting first, for a few times, before you ever decide to go to a more private location.

To some extent, you will need to spend time getting to know them all over again. To see what just how alike their real and online personalities really are. Because, the repercussions of a mistake in the real world can't simply be erased by turning off your computer.

If you do decide to meet someone, let your family or a friend know where you'll be going (you can do this without telling them who you're meeting or what you'll be talking about, if that's something you want to keep to yourself). Use your own transportation, or make sure you have money reserved to get back, in case things don't go as you hope and you want to make an earlier exit.

And if you ever do wind up in a private environment, then remember again that your body is yours. You are in control of it. If you don't want to be touched, make that known. If something starts going further than you like, past the point where you feel comfortable, then speak up.

If you're truly with a friend, they'll appreciate hearing that, and they'll respect your wishes. Friends are like that. It's when someone does something against your will that you know they're not really your friend. Don't worry about making them unhappy with you, or be afraid that they'll like you less. Don't do anything that makes you feel uncomfortable; after all, you have to wake up with yourself every day.

And if something happens to you that you think is harassment, assault or rape, then you need to take action. Tell someone you trust. Then get help. You'll find crisis-intervention and violence hot-lines in most telephone books, and you can call directory assistance (4-1-1). There is a list of numbers in this booklet. It's often best to call one to these groups BEFORE you call the police, if you can. (BUT GET YOURSELF OUT OF THE PROBLEM SITUATION FIRST!)

And remember that it is NOT your fault. If someone goes too far with you, remember that you did not ask for it, you did not deserve it, and you have the right to respect. If you want to, press charges.

## If You Have Sex, Make It Safer Sex

Consensual sex is very positive. And you shouldn't become bitter or untrusting of everyone around you if you've had a bad experience.

Believe it or not, there are lots of gay and lesbian teens your age. You can find them online, or at the local queer community centre or youth group. Which by the way, are great places to make other queer friends, because they usually have a wide range of social activities and support too.

If you make a friend who is close to your age and start to see them as something more than a friend, it's natural that you'll want to date them. As you get to know them better, you may even eventually decide to make sex a part of your relationship.

If that's the case, then you should ALWAYS practice safer sex. Safer sex means always using a condom or a dental dam, every time you have sex. The most important thing to remember is never let someone else's blood, semen or vaginal fluid into your body.

The best condoms are lubricated latex condoms. Always use latex, because lambskin condoms don't block HIV. Non-lubricated condoms should only be used for oral sex.

Using a lubricant will make things go smoother and reduce the risk of breaking the condom. But always use a water-based lube (such as K-Y™, Wet™, Astroglide™, or Probe™). Oil based ones (Vaseline™ hand creams or lotions) weaken and break latex.

Make sure your condoms are fresh; check the expiration date. Throw away condoms that have been very cold or hot that have been carried around in your wallet or run through the washer. If you think the condom might not be good, get a new one. You're worth it.

*For much more complete discussion of safer sex, you may want to contact AIDS Saskatoon, the Sexual Health Clinic or The Avenue Community Centre.*