



Getting
started
with
**Online
Dating**

A guide from

**CHRISTIAN
CONNECTION**



Introduction

More and more couples are meeting online. According to a recent study, it's now the second most common way of meeting your partner.

As Christians, we can sometimes struggle with the idea of online dating: 'Shouldn't I just leave it up to God?', 'Don't only desperate people go online?', 'Isn't the Internet full of weirdos?!'. The reality is that, while online dating can be challenging, it can also be highly rewarding. When it comes down to it, creating an online profile is just another way of meeting new people. It's ideal for anyone with a busy lifestyle and can widen your social circle.

This guide is here to offer some help and advice for getting the most from online dating, and give you the best chance of finding and connecting with someone special.



Getting started: Choosing a site

Think about what's most important to you. Is it vital for you to find a partner who shares your exact beliefs, or are you willing to meet someone with a different worldview? As one member put it: "Keep an open mind when it comes to the superficial things in life, but stick to the script when it comes to the core values you're looking for."

For many Christians, faith is central to their values and identity; they're seeking someone to share their spiritual journey. Sites like ChristianConnection.com do some of the work for you, ensuring that you'll have the opportunity to connect with other Christians. Meanwhile, more general sites like Match.com may initially provide access to a larger pool of people, but you'll need to filter who you connect with and be clear about what you're looking for.

Before you sign up, do a little homework. Find out if the site is a member of the Online Dating Association (the regulating body for the online dating industry).



Members of the ODA adhere to a strict code of practice and have a clear complaints procedure. You can check if a site is an ODA member at www.onlinedatingassociation.org.uk

Read the site's 'About us' page and T&Cs to see who runs it. Not all sites are what they appear—some sites may be part of a shared network and your profile might appear on other dating sites without your knowledge. Trustworthy sites will be transparent about who runs them. Joining more than one site can increase the number of people you're able to interact with but remember to pace yourself. It can be easy to become overwhelmed by matches, messages and profiles.

Writing your online dating profile

Once you've decided which site or app to join, it's time to write your profile. A quick guide to remember is:

Be authentic. Be positive. Be specific. Be concise.

We hear from lots of successful couples about what worked for them. Your profile should be a fair representation of who you are, but try to focus on your positive attributes. It's not a CV so allow your personality to shine through. If you're funny, be funny! Get another perspective by asking a friend to help with what they think your best qualities are. Having someone proofread can help avoid typos and spelling mistakes, too.

Avoid cliches and broad generalisations. Rather than writing 'I enjoy spending time with friends', be more specific. How do you spend your weekends? Do you prefer the great outdoors or curling up with a book? What gives you energy? When are you at your best? Focus on what you're passionate about and look for like-minded people.

Be honest about your age, height and relationship status—these things will become apparent in time anyway. Decide how much you want to reveal about yourself in your profile. There's no right or wrong answer here, but it's worth spending time considering what's right for you.

Make your profile long enough to give people an idea of who you are, but short enough to read in 2-3 minutes. Save some details for one-to-one conversations. We don't recommend writing a long list of the qualities that you're looking for in a partner, but you could indicate what kind of relationship you're looking for.

Choosing your profile photo

Or, how to make a great first impression! Your main profile photo will be the first thing that people see. It will appear in several places—search results, dating site emails and as a thumbnail next to each message you send on the site. Spend some time choosing the right photo and don't be shy, even if it's tempting to hide. Our stats show that 80% of members are unlikely to contact somebody without a profile picture.

Your main profile photo should just be a clear portrait of you. It should also be recent, (within the past 12 months). You don't have to choose a photo where you're smiling, but pick one where you look relaxed and approachable.

Use additional pictures to give a sense of who you are. Photos taken on holiday or doing activities can work well. Do you play a lot of sport? Include photos which show that. Around 3-4 photos should be enough to give people a sense of who you are.



Searching and messaging

Time to get started! It's best not to approach your search like a shopping expedition—put aside your list of 'nice to have' qualities and be as open-minded as you can. Don't narrow your focus too much at this early stage, particularly when it comes to geographic location. Some of our happiest couples found each other on opposite sides of the country.

Evaluate profiles one by one rather than spending hours scrolling through. Click in and read what they have to say. It can be easy to miss someone's individuality and potential when you're in a rush, so take your time and you may find someone who surprises you!

Try limiting yourself to viewing a certain number of profiles in one session and commit to messaging at least one. Look for similar interests and values on profiles that appeal to you - they make great talking points.

Most sites have a simple first step icebreaker, usually in the form of a 'wink' or 'wave'. It's one click to show you've noticed someone's profile and are interested in making contact. If you really like someone, take the plunge and send a message instead. An engaging first message gives you the best chance of receiving a reply.

Open with something that caught your attention about their profile, such as a common connection or interest. Avoid short, impersonal messages, and remember that physical compliments don't make good conversation starters. Simply saying 'Hi' or using a 'copy and paste' message won't win you many replies. Try asking a question unique to their profile, instead.

Try not to take it personally if your message goes unanswered. Frustrating as it can be, there may be a number of reasons people don't respond. They might not have logged in for a while; they might be messaging someone already, or if they're not interested they may be unsure about how to respond. If you get a 'no thanks' message, simply wish them well and move on.

It can take time to find the right person. We've heard stories of people finding their partner on the first day of joining. While others whose search may have taken years tell us it was worth the wait.

Deciding when to meet

Once you have messaged online and developed a rapport, it's a good idea to meet in person. No profile can tell you everything you need to know about how you might get on face-to-face. If there's any interest at all, meet and find out.

If you have connected with someone, don't be afraid to arrange to meet sooner rather than later. There's research to suggest that the most successful relationships which started online met face-to-face within one week of making the initial contact.

Don't get too invested in the relationship online before you meet in person. It's been said that "You haven't really met until you've met in person."

The **first** date

Everyone gets first date nerves, so we recommend keeping things simple the first time you meet someone you've been speaking to online. Keep the first date brief and meet in a public location. A coffee or a quick lunch can work well and give you something to focus on.

Remember, there may not be fireworks at the first meeting. Many promising scenarios are cut short if there's no 'spark', so try to make allowances for nerves and give it time.

Be safe. Tell a friend or family member where you're going and arrange to message when you arrive and when you get home. Make sure your mobile is fully charged in case you need to make a call and don't leave your phone, your drink or personal belongings behind if you need to leave the table, even to pop to the loo.

Arrange your own transport to and from the meet-up and don't go to their home, or invite them to yours, on the first meeting. Trust your instincts—if the meeting is not going well and you are feeling uncomfortable then make your excuses and leave politely.

Relax! You can have a great time whether or not your date is the person you form a long-lasting relationship with. Setting your expectations too high can make them hard to live up to. If you're both relaxed, you're more likely to chat easily and find out if there's the possibility of a relationship developing.



The **second** date

We all hope for an instant connection, but many of our successful couples say they didn't know whether their other half was a good match right away. It can take time to relax and get to know someone, so if you're getting along, give it a second chance. Second dates are often when you really find out whether someone is right for you, once the nerves have worn off.

Second dates can be a good opportunity to arrange an activity. Try something new, or why not share your passion for rock climbing or modern art? Doing something fun can be a good way to relax and learn more about each other.

If you're not interested in taking things further, respectfully and politely let them know. Don't be tempted to 'ghost' someone and simply stop communicating altogether. A brief but short message is kinder than silence. Something like, "It was lovely to meet you yesterday, but I don't wish to take things further. God bless and all the best with your search".



Protecting your privacy

Be wise. You may be surprised at the amount of personal information that's available online. Here are a few tips to help you have a safe and happy online dating experience:

- Set up a separate email address just for online dating and use this to sign up and give to others when you're ready. It can be easier to manage if you're signed up to several sites, and you can easily dispose of it once you're finished.
- It's also a good idea to choose a photo that you haven't used on any other social media profiles and think about your privacy settings there too.
- Take your time. Don't give away your personal information until you've got to know someone well. In particular, avoid sharing your full name, home address, workplace, date of birth or phone number in initial messages.



Safety online and avoiding scams

Reputable dating sites want you to succeed and they do a good job of spotting and removing fake profiles and fraudsters. Contact the site straight away if you are concerned about any member, feel uneasy or simply want a second opinion.

Be aware of how romance scams work and be cautious of anyone who expresses deep emotions early on, such as declarations of love, particularly if they are unable to meet in person. Beware of sob stories that require your urgent financial support. Though it can be tempting to help, **never give money to someone you've met online**, even if you feel you have got to know someone and can trust them. Always report anyone who asks you for money to the help desk.

Dating sites usually have fraud monitoring software in place, so it's always safest to chat via the onsite mailbox at first. Scammers often try to encourage you to communicate outside the site as soon as possible.

A good site will have a customer service team who'll be happy to help resolve any concerns. Providing you follow a few basic guidelines, online dating can be a safe and enjoyable way to meet others.



We hope this guide has given you a few pointers and the confidence to get started with online dating.

You'll find weekly blogs, dating advice, top tips, success stories from happy couples and more on our website.

Find us at ChristianConnection.com or download the app from the App Store or Google Play Store.

Whichever site or app you choose to join, our very best wishes with your search and happy dating!

