PEER TO PEER

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Online Dating

Online dating is a way of meeting a potential romantic partner using a website or mobile application. Single individuals seeking relationships can use online dating applications to meet other single individuals with similar interests who are also seeking relationships. In the United States today, meeting online is the most frequent way that couples are introduced to one another (Rosenberg et al., 2019).

Getting Started

Some people prefer online dating to traditional face-to-face dating for many reasons. For example, online dating provides more control over self-presentation and a slower pace of communication with fewer requirements to interpret nonverbal communication (like body language) and fewer social demands than traditional face-to-face dating (like eye contact).

Getting started is easy!
1. Choose a dating app. There are several dating apps you can choose from.
2. Set up an online dating profile.
3. Connect with a person on the app that you are interested in dating.
4. Set up a date.

It is important to consider that there is a cost to use some dating apps or features in dating apps. If you sign up for a membership that is not free, you will be required to pay a fee each week/month/year to use the dating service. These memberships are auto-renewed each week/month/year and will charge the payment method you provided each month unless cancelled.
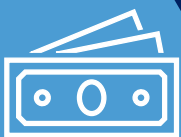
Using an Online Dating Service

Not sure how to choose which online dating site or application to use?

There are several dating apps you can choose from! Some online dating sites allow people to search for a partner that is interested in a long-term relationship (like marriage) and others are for people interested in a more casual relationship.

Dating Site or App	Description
Hinge **Relationship:** Long-term romantic relationship **Cost:** Standard account is *free*. Premium subscription options starting at $19.99 USD/month. **Platform(s):** **https://hinge.co/** App available for iOS and Android.	• Commonly used by adults between the ages of 24-32. • To *Match*, you must "like" a person's profile and they must also "like" your profile. You can send a message at the same time you "like" a profile, rather than waiting for a match. • **To learn more** about using Hinge, visit this **link**.
Tinder **Relationship:** Casual dating relationship **Cost:** Standard account is *free.* Premium subscription options starting at $9.99 USD/month. **Platform(s):** **https://hinge.co/https://tinder.com/?lang=en** App available for iOS and Android.	• Commonly used by adults between the ages of 18-24. • Use the *SwipeRight* feature to like someone. If a person likes you back, you get a Match. Then you can send a message to that person. • **To learn more** about using Tinder, visit this **link**.
Bumble **Relationship:** Casual dating relationship **Cost:** Standard account is *free.* Premium subscription options starting at $19.99 USD/month. **Platform(s):** **https://bumble.com/** App available for iOS and Android.	• Commonly used by adults between the ages of 18-29. • Use the *SwipeRight* feature to like someone. If a person likes you back, you get a Match. Then you can send a message to that person. Bumble requires women in a heterosexual relationship to send a message first to initiate conversation. In a homosexual relationship, either person can message first. • **To learn more** about using Bumble, visit this **link**.
OkCupid **Relationship:** Long-term romantic relationship **Cost:** Standard account is *free.* Premium subscription options starting at $4.95 USD/month. **Platform(s):** **https://tinder.com/?lang=enhttps://www.okcupid.com/** App available for iOS and Android.	• Commonly used by adults between the ages of 18-29. • Use the *SwipeRight* feature to like someone. If a person likes you back, you get a Match. You can send a message to a person once you have "liked" them, but that person will not see the message until they "like" you back. • **To learn more** about using OkCupid, visit this **link**.

Using an Online Dating Service...

While "Hinge has done a phenomenal job designing for users with ASD" according to Brandon Cherry, a User Experience Designer with firsthand knowledge of ASD due to having a brother with autism, below are two exclusive dating apps for autistic individuals.

Dating Site or App	Description
Hiki **Relationship:** Romantic relationship or friendship **Cost:** *Free* **Platform(s):** **https://www.hikiapp.com/** App available for iOS and Android.	• Designed for autistic individuals over the age of 18. • Use the *smiley face* button to indicate interest in becoming friends. Use the *heart button* to indicate interest in a romantic relationship. Use the *X* button to indicate that you are not interested in matching/talking to someone. Once each person has pressed either the smiley face or heart on each other, the app allows you to send a message. • **To learn more** about using Hiki, visit this **link**.
Aspies-Singles **Relationship:** Romantic relationship or friendship **Cost:** Standard account is *free.* Premium subscription options starting at $2.50 USD/week. **Platform(s):** **https://www.aspie-singles.com/** App available for iOS and Android.	• Designed for autistic individuals over the age of 18. • Show interest in a person by befriending them. After your request has been accepted, you can send the messages. • **To learn more** about using Aspies-Singles, visit this **link**.

Set Up an Online Dating Profile

There are many things to consider when creating your online profile. This profile will tell people about you and your interests. Your online dating profile is used to help you meet people that have similar interests.

Tips for Creating a Profile:
1. Be honest!
2. Describe your personality attributes and interests using adjectives and positive wording.
3. You can share about how you live your life, what you care about, and the relationship you are seeking.
4. Choose a picture(s) that show who you are. Use only recent photos (no more than a year old) that show your face unobstructed by sunglasses or something else.
5. Update your profile on a regular basis with relevant information about yourself.
6. Check your grammar and spelling.
7. If you feel comfortable, ask a friend to look at your profile before you finalize it. Friends that know your personality well may be able to offer suggestions about what you can include in your profile to best represent yourself.

Communicating on Dating Apps

DOs!

✓ **DO verify** your profile with the app and check that the people you match with are verified. Being verified means that you/the other person has confirmed their identity on the app to better ensure that they are who they say they are.

Just because someone is not verified does not mean that the person is not who they say they are, but a verified profile indicates greater certainty. On some apps you can tell if other people are verified if they have a blue check mark next to their name or some other indicator. Some apps, like Hinge, authenticate identity through one's phone number, Facebook, or Apple ID when you sign up and may not have an indicator of verification. Other apps may verify that a person is who they say they are by using the phone's camera to scan their face to determine if it matches their picture.

✓ **DO message** them first. People are often nervous about sending the first message, but without it there is no conversation.

Ideas for the first message: Ask about something featured in their bio/captions/pictures. You could also mention something you have in common – like something that you both like or something that you both dislike.

✓ **DO get contact information** from a person before meeting up with them.

Snapchat is preferable because you can see images of their face, but you can also get their phone number. You can also contact them on other social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook/Facebook Messenger or Twitter. While less popular, you could also use a third-party texting app.

There is no set timeline for when you should meet up after starting to talk with someone. Give yourself some time to get to know them – a week or so is probably a good starting point, but it may be longer than that.

✓ **DO ask questions.** This is a great way to get to know someone, and they are more likely to respond if they have a question/comment to build on in the conversation.

✓ **DO make sure that you and the other person remain interested.** This can be tricky in all relationships! Once you have moved past online communication, make sure you continue to monitor reciprocity and check in to make sure that you both are still interested in the relationship. If you or the other person seems more into the relationship, it is probably worth talking with them about that. Instead of trying to read cues, try to have an open conversation about your interest in your relationship.

Communicating on Dating Apps

Don't

DO NOT expect an immediate response from a person you match with. They may not respond for a few hours or a few days.

DO NOT text a person repeatedly within a short period of time. Only send one or two messages in response to a message from them. A good conversation should be pretty evenly divided between the two of you talking/messaging.

DO NOT keep sending messages if they are not responding. If you get "ghosted" or you stop talking to each other, don't let it get you down! There are plenty of other people to talk to. Have you been ghosted? The term "ghosting" is usually used in situations where a person stops communicating or contacting another person without warning or explanation and ignores further attempts of contact – they disappear like a ghost. People tend to do this because they are not interested in pursuing a relationship while avoiding confrontation. Other times, this could be accidental. Just because someone has not responded to a message does not mean that you have been ghosted. If they continue to ignore your attempts to contact them, stop messaging and take this is a sign that this relationship is not going to work out.

DO NOT send anyone money, give them personal information (bank info, social security, etc.), or click any strange links under any circumstance. Bots and scammers exist on apps and may pose as an interested person in order to get money, personal information, or other private details. Be wary of this! Make sure the person you are talking to is a real person. Additionally, be careful with your personal information: do not share your full name, address, workplace/school, or other personal information on your account or in messages with new people.

Maybe...

MAYBE ask what they are looking for (relationships, something casual). This way, you can see whether or not you are looking for the same things.

MAYBE tell them you have autism. This is your choice! You may decide to share immediately, share later, or not share at all.

Planning a Date

Plan dates in public spaces. When you meet someone for the first time face-to-face, choose a public place to meet the person. Coffee shops, restaurants, bowling alleys, and other communal spaces are some ideas. When you get to know this person better you may feel more comfortable being with them in private, but the first few dates should be in public for your safety.

Let someone know the details about your date before you go out. Tell a person you trust (parent, sibling, good friend, co-worker, etc.) when and where you will be meeting the person.

Talk to the person for a few days/weeks to get to know them to see if you have a good connection before asking someone on a date. This way you can gauge interest and get to know them to ensure they are genuine and looking for the same things as you.

Additional Resources

Bair-Merritt, M., Broder-Fingert, S., & Rothman, E. F. (2019). *Safer dating for youth on the autism spectrum*. Organization for Autism Research.

Laugeson, L. A. - PEERS® Dating Boot Camps & PEERS® Virtual Boot Camps -Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior. Los Angeles, CA. UCLA.

Ramey, E. M., & Ramey, J. J. (2008). *Autistics' guide to dating: A book by autistics, for autistics and those who love them or who are in love with them*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Penn State: What is Online Dating?
https://sites.psu.edu/bigdataebook/chapter5/05-02/

SELF: 8 Ways To Create An Amazing Online Dating Profile
https://www.self.com/story/8-ways-to-create-an-amazing-online-dating-profile

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