

Primer for Students: Meeting your Match

Being a snoop and finding out who the mystery person is on the other side of your computer screen...

We all know that it is easy to hide our true identities on the Internet. While this can be a good way to protect our privacy, it can also lead to misunderstandings or situations where someone is purposefully misleading you. For example, consider the situation where a 14 year old girl thinks she is chatting with a 16 year old boy. When she decides to meet the boy at a nearby coffee shop she is surprised to find out that she has been chatting with a 45 year old man!

Consider also the boy who sends pictures of himself to a girl in the hopes of getting a date with her. Later he realizes that, without his prior knowledge, his pictures are being posted on an illegal website which is frequently accessed by men who have been known to sexually abuse younger boys. In both situations the youth are just trying to get to know people on the Net, but instead end up being deceived.

What can you do?¹⁰³

- If you must meet someone in person who you have only talked to on the Internet, make sure you take a parent or friend along with you.
- If you are going to meet someone in person who you have met on the Internet, be sure to meet in a public place. If possible, take someone with you to the meeting. Tell your parent or guardian where you are going.
- Arrange your own transportation to and from the meeting.
- Set your conditions for the encounter and do not let the person you are meeting change them.
- Stay in public areas so you can get help if you need it.
- Try to find out ahead of time as much information about the person you are meeting as possible. If things happen and you decide to report the person, you will at least have some information, false or not, to tell the police.

