

Office of Sexual Assault Services  
**A Guide to Online Safety**

*A few things to keep in mind*

EMAIL:

- **Privacy:** Information from emails can be obtained from the email provider, the government, your employer etc.
- **Confidentiality:** It is important to remember that the sender or the recipient can reveal information from emails. Only one person has to consent to information sharing for information to be leaked.
- **Spyware:** Others can view email by installing spyware on your computer. This allows the spyware sender to take pictures of your computer screen every few seconds without your knowledge. Spyware is often hard to detect and very difficult to fully remove. Remember spyware can be sent to cell phones as well!

INSTANT MESSAGING:

- **Confidentiality:** Instant messaging programs have a feature that archives IM conversations. Remember that even if you do not have this option selected, the person you're talking to might, and they could choose to use that information. As with email, it only takes one person to share information.

WEB BROWSING:

- **Privacy:** Keep in mind a certain amount of information is shared with each trip to a new website. Your IP address is provided each time and it is likely that information about which sites you have visited also is shared. Different browsers (Internet Explorer, Firefox etc.) have different privacy policies and share different types of information.

SEARCH ENGINES:

- **Saved Searches:** Search engines may save your IP address, your search terms, time of your search and other information.

NETWORKING SITES:

- **Privacy:** Depending on your privacy settings *anyone* can view your MySpace or Facebook profiles, blogs, or picture collections. This includes school officials, employers, parents etc.
- **Deleting History:** Pressing delete does not necessarily eliminate the information you are trying to delete! A website can have an archive or can be cached. This means that past information from the website can be accessed even after the website has disappeared or has been changed.

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## ONLINE SAFETY TIPS

- Select a gender-neutral username, email address, etc.
- Keep your primary email address private
- Get a free email account with a gender-neutral username
- Don't give out information simply because it is requested
- Block or ignore unwanted users
- Don't allow others to draw you into conflict
- Be an observer in a new forum to learn local customs
- If a place becomes stressful, leave it
- When you change, really change (i.e., username, passwords, etc.)
- Watch what you "say" online
- Know what's in your signature file
- Never use a business account for personal use
- Ego Surf ("first name last name")
- Never give your password to anyone
- Don't provide your credit card number or other identifying information
- Be very cautious about putting any pictures of yourself or your children online anywhere, or allowing anyone else (relatives, schools, dance academies, sports associations) to publish any photos  
(<http://haltabuse.org/resources/online.shtml>)

### Networking/ Personal Site Tips

- **Email:** Avoid using the same email provider as your search engine. Using separate sites for email and search engines decreases the total amount of information retained by any one site.
- **Personal Websites:**
  - Avoid using an email account that reveals unnecessary information such as where you attend school. Use a free webmail service as opposed to an "edu" domain.
  - Read the privacy policy for each website. Know your rights for sharing and removing information!
  - If the website is primarily for family and friends use one that is password accessible so you know who is reading the website.

For more resources regarding online safety please contact Trisha Hunsaker, Sexual Assault Educator at [trhuns@wm.edu](mailto:trhuns@wm.edu). You can also visit William and Mary Information Technology's web page at [www.wm.edu/it](http://www.wm.edu/it) for tips on protecting your computer and for additional support!