

Dating services

If you are looking for friendship or companionship, you may decide to seek the assistance of a dating service to meet other people. Check dating services carefully before you sign a contract or pay any money down.

In Wisconsin, dating services are regulated by state law. A dating service is defined as “any service that purports to assist a person in obtaining friendship or companionship through a program in which a person is provided the opportunity to meet other persons.” Under Wisconsin law a dating service is required to:

- Provide the buyer a copy of a written contract.
- Specify the length of time covered by the contract, not to exceed two years.
- Disclose the full price of membership, including any interest or other charges.
- New members must be informed of their three-day right to cancel.

To further protect consumers, dating services that require customers to pay more than \$100 in advance fees are required to establish proof of financial responsibility with the Wisconsin

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection by maintaining a \$25,000 bond, certificate of deposit, or escrow account, or by obtaining an irrevocable letter of credit.

Choosing a dating service

If you are interested in contracting with a dating service, consider the following before making a decision:

- Exactly what services are included in the fees? Several types of plans may be available at different rates.
- What are the fees? Find out the full costs and obligations of the service. Can you afford the program?
- Check out the refund and cancellation policy. Under what circumstances can you cancel? Are refunds available if they do not provide services promised?
- What geographical areas are served?
- Do you have the right to decline an introduction with no penalty against your membership?
- What are the risks? What kind of measures are in place related to confidentiality, safety, and security? Read through the privacy policy carefully.

- What is the reputation of the dating service? How long has it been operating? Can it provide references?

Do not feel pressured by persuasive sales techniques from dating service personnel who may receive commissions for the memberships they sell. Sales presentations may include emotional appeals. Do not let your heart control your purse strings. Take the time to thoroughly review the service and understand any contract you are asked to sign.

Types of services

While traditional dating services still exist, internet or online dating services have emerged as a popular choice. Many online services tend to cater to special interests – age, race, religious beliefs, and common interests.

Another available option is speed dating. Speed dating events usually require pre-registration with a limited number of participants. During the event you meet a pre-determined number of people for a set amount of time. On your “Match Sheet” you can indicate which participants you would be interested in further contact with. If there is a match,

you are able to contact that person for further connection.

Safety tips

While there are no federal regulations, there are some states, like Wisconsin, that have regulations in place.

Online dating makes it much easier for a person to misrepresent themselves. Fake or outdated photos may be used, personal histories enhanced or exaggerated, personal traits fabricated. With traditional dating it is possible to check with friends, family members or acquaintances to check a person's reputation. Online dating does not usually make this possible.

Dating services are not required to do background checks on members. This is typically disclosed within their terms and conditions.

Some safety tips to keep in mind are:

- **Do not provide personal information.** Never include your last name, e-mail address, home address, phone number, place of work or other identifying information in your Internet profile.
- **Use free e-mail accounts.** Online dating sites may provide an anonymous email feature. If you decide to move from that, set up an email account using a free service just for online dating. Use only your first name or something else in the signature block so the email cannot be traced to you.

- **Use an anonymous phone service or block your number.** Do not provide your personal phone number.
- **Do not provide financial information.** Stop communicating with anyone who pressures you for personal or financial information or attempts to trick you into revealing it.
- **Look for questionable characteristics in your communications.** Do they get angry easily? Are they controlling? Do they avoid your questions?
- **Trust your gut.** If you feel something is not right, it probably is not.
- **Beware of married people.** Many married people use dating sites to meet people.
- **Ask for a recent photo.** If you ask for a recent photo and when you meet them you see a major difference, they lied. You may no longer want to pursue that relationship.
- **Beware of scammers.** Once a scammer is confident of having your trust, they will start asking for money. They may tell you they need it to help get money the government owes them, cover the costs of a sudden illness, surgery, robbery, accident, job loss. It may be for them, or a daughter or son. They may ask for money to cover the cost of travel to finally meet face-to-face. You might get documents from an attorney as "proof" of their genuine intentions along with a promise

to pay it back. As real as the relationship seems it is a scam and you will lose all the money sent.

- **Stick with paid online services.** Free services provide a greater opportunity for potentially dangerous individuals.
- **Do not get a false sense of security.** Some services claim to offer "background checks" which could lull you into a false sense of security. Laws differ from state-to-state when it comes to background checks and there are states where they cannot be effectively performed. Because of the inconsistency, critical information can be missed. Never let your guard down.
- **Meet in a public place for your first meeting.** Provide your own transportation. Make sure you let a friend or family member know where you will be and who you are with.

For more information or to file a complaint, visit our website or contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection.

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