



## Online Gaming: Privacy Risks and Strategies

### A Note on Language



In this toolkit, we will sometimes use the word woman/women and feminine pronouns for simplicity and to recognize the significant impact technology-facilitated violence has on women and girls. We recognize that TFGBV also impacts trans, non-binary, and Two-Spirit people. We hope that all people impacted by TFGBV will find these documents useful.

Online gaming provides an opportunity for connection, particularly with people who share a common interest. Some games have vast numbers of users, some of whom have played for many years, building a sense of familiarity or community. Some people who are wary of meeting in person or prefer to be able to choose the identity they present to the world may find more flexibility and comfort online. As with any activity, online or offline, everyone should be able to participate free from harassment and abuse.

Unfortunately, many people experience online harassment while playing online games.

## Strategies to Increase Privacy and Safety

### Choose a Safe Username

The ability to remain anonymous online varies depending on the gaming platform. In some games, a user can make up any screen name and choose an "avatar" or online image to represent them. When creating accounts and profiles, choose a username that doesn't include your real name or other identifying information.

### Be Careful What You Share

Users often have a choice about what personal or contact information to share with other users through an online profile or chat conversations with other players. As games cross from having a conversation within the game to real life, privacy and safety concerns may increase. Games may link a player's online presence to a specific location to let other gamers interact with them, but this information could be misused for stalking and harassment. Protect your privacy by not giving out identifying or contact information.

### Passwords

Consider using different email addresses, profile pictures, and strong passwords for gaming and for each game you play. Keeping this information separate from the rest of your life can help avoid doxing or other users being able to connect your gaming profile to your real life.

### Check Your Privacy Settings

Privacy settings can affect who can see if you're online, who you can play with, and whether people can see what games you're playing. You may also be able to block players from contacting you.

### Downloads Aren't Always Safe

Attachments and links could install spyware or other malware on your devices. They can contain viruses that will damage your computer or mobile phone, and give people access to your personal data.

### Trust Your Instincts

If you start to feel uncomfortable, it's always ok to stop communicating with someone.

### Meeting in Real Life

When considering augmented reality games or meeting up in real life, here are some additional steps to consider.

1. Let a friend know ahead of time where you are going and that you will reach out to them after the gaming session is done.

2. Leave an address and some information about where you'll be.
3. Familiarize yourself with the meet-up spot ahead of time. Only meet where you're comfortable.
4. Watch out for people saying they want to visit but need loans to be able to get to you, or who use other stories to gain your sympathy and then ask for money.

It's ok to cut a gaming session short or leave a meeting if it doesn't feel safe or fun. **Trust your instincts.**

## If You're Experiencing Online Harassment

Harassment, threats, and abuse that happen "only" online should be taken seriously.

You may choose to report your experiences to the gaming platforms or the police. Because the technology uses hardware like computers or smartphones, as well as Internet providers and the gaming company's servers, digital evidence may be available. In addition, you may consider taking pictures, [screenshots](#), or saving other relevant information. See our tips on [documenting tech abuse](#) and a [sample documentation log](#).

Online harassment and abuse may fall under several crimes, depending on what is happening. Learn more in our [Legal Remedies for TFGBV toolkit](#).

*Digital Dating Violence is part of a continuum of violence that can be both online and in-person. If you or someone you know is experiencing digital dating violence, you are not alone. Encourage them to chat with a trusted adult, connect with the [Kids Help Phone](#) to create a [safety plan](#), or you can use [sheltersafe.ca](#) to find a shelter/transition house near you to discuss options and create a [safety plan](#). You don't need to stay in a shelter to access free, confidential services and support.*

*Adapted from BCSTH's Technology Safety Project based on their document, [Online Gaming and Privacy Risks and Strategies](#).*

---

© Copyright 2024 Women's Shelters Canada | All Rights Reserved

This project is made possible through funding from the department of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Canada.

