Social Media Safety Tips

As we all spend more time online, it's important to be aware that our actions on the internet can have real world consequences. Below are some tips that can keep you physically safe while using social networks and online dating services. Please note that this guide is intended for adults and all internet use by children/teens should be monitored by their parents/guardians.

Control the information you post online
- Adjust your privacy settings so that only your friends can view your personal information.
- Don't post your home address or information that could make it easy to find your home such as images of your apartment building or neighborhood.
- Don't post expensive items or indications of wealth as these can make you a target.
- Don't post travel/vacation plans publicly as it can alert criminals that you're not home.
- Protect your passwords and login information. Anyone with this can access all of your personal information and impersonate you.

Block and report abusive individuals
- Most online communities have an option to block any user who you do not want to communicate with. If this individual is abusive, threatening or violating the community guidelines, you should take action to report them.
- Don't tolerate toxic online behavior from friends. If you have a friend that is posting negative information, call them out on it. If they continue, block and report them.

Use caution when meeting up with groups or individuals that you find online
- Verify who you are connecting with before meeting up. Look into their friends, posts and other social media accounts for any red flags.
- Use a free service like Google Voice to set up a separate phone number so you don't have to give out your real number.
- Arrange a quick video chat before meeting in real life to confirm this individual's identity.
- If you choose to meet up, always do so in a public place. Never go to a secluded or isolated area. Meet up during the daytime and don't get intoxicated.
- Don't rely on your date or any other stranger for transportation.
- Don't meet up at your home or reveal your address.
- Inform your friends/family of where you are going and who you are meeting up with.
- Ask a friend to come along so you aren't alone. If not, arrange to call/text a friend during your meetup to let them know things are okay.
- Never be afraid to leave if you feel uncomfortable. Have an exit plan in mind beforehand.
- If you are trained to use pepper spray or another Self-Defense weapon, bring it with you and have it ready to deploy.
- Check out the 2010 documentary *Catfish* to see how deceptive people can be online.