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Keeping You Safe Online

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Blog **How to Stay Safe Online: A Guide Against LGBTQ+ Cyberbullying**



How to Stay Safe Online: A Guide Against LGBTQ+ Cyberbullying



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We at vpnMentor conducted a survey in which we asked **695 LGBTQ+ people worldwide about their experiences online** as they relate to their sexual orientation and gender identity. The results – referenced throughout this article – illuminated the unique challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community, particularly in relation to LGBTQ cyberbullying.

Here are some of our **key findings**:⁺

73% of all respondents in all categories of gender identity and sexual orientation have been **personally attacked or harassed online**, a clear indication of the prevalence of LGBTQ cyberbullying and harrassment within the LGBTQ community.

50% of all respondents in all categories of gender identity and sexual orientation have suffered **sexual harassment**



online.

When it comes to sexual orientation, **asexual people feel the least safe online**, and gay men the safest.

When it comes to gender identity, **transgender women feel the least safe online**, and cisgender men the safest.

Transgender cyberbullying is a significant concern, with **transgender women being the most likely to be outed against their will online**, while cisgender men are least likely.

+For complete results, see the [appendix](#).

As experts in the field of cybersecurity, our mission is to **provide practical strategies for coping with adversity, bigotry, and abuse on the web**, which is why we created this guide.

Whether you are part of the LGBTQ+ community or are an ally, we hope you find this guide helpful.

Finding LGBTQ Communities Online

The internet facilitates a sense of community among LGBTQ+ people, regardless of their physical proximity to one another. Alienated from their family, condemned by their community, and isolated from their friends, **many in the LGBTQ+ community turn to the internet for solidarity.**



“The internet and social media are essential to connecting individuals to information and people of the LGBT+ community,” states Mara,* who’s bisexual/pansexual.** “[It provides] spaces for them to find acceptance, community, and support. It is extremely important to keep these connections alive.”

In part due to the high rates of LGBTQ cyberbullying, the suicide rate for LGBTQ+ youth is substantially higher than that of their heterosexual and cisgender peers and the internet can literally become life-saving.

“There are so many wonderful support groups that help so much, they seriously **saved my life and made my search for my identity so much easier**,” recounts Mariela, a lesbian.

“[The internet is] definitely a great information sharer for our sometimes disjointed community, especially in rural areas,” says Blair, who’s genderqueer/non-binary.*** **Lots of my trans identity was discerned through language I accessed online** as well as looking at other trans narratives online.”

Fortunately, numerous online communities and organizations are dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ individuals. These platforms provide safe spaces for connection, information, and solidarity:

The LGBT National Help Center offers free and confidential support and local resources



PFLAG unites LGBTQ+ people with families, friends, and allies

The Trevor Project provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ+ youth

GLAAD works through media to share stories from the LGBTQ+ community

Trans Lifeline is a peer support hotline run by trans people for trans and questioning callers

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) advocates for LGBTQ+ equality and educates the public

The LGBT Foundation provides support services to LGBTQ+ individuals

The National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) advocates for policy change to advance transgender equality

Q Chat Space is an online community for LGBTQ+ teens to chat and find support

The LGBTQ+ Subreddit (r/lgbt) is a forum where individuals can share experiences and seek advice

It Gets Better aims to uplift, empower, and connect LGBTQ+ youth around the globe

Understanding LGBTQ+ Cyberbullying



While the internet offers a haven for many in the LGBTQ+ community, it can also be a hostile environment. Just read the comments on any viral social media post and you'll see a slew of insults and misdirected aggression. LGBTQ+ cyberbullying is rampant, and a large portion of these **hateful comments include homophobic, transphobic, and biphobic slurs.**

"I feel like there is a significant amount of intolerance from within the LGBTQ community" explained Gill, a genderqueer lesbian. "I've honestly been attacked more from within the community than outside of it."

According to the National Library of Medicine, LGBTQ youth are more likely to experience anonymous forms of cyberbullying than their heterosexual counterparts. Additionally, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reports that LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to suffer severe forms of harassment, such as the distribution of humiliating photos, dissemination of false or private information, stalking, and physical threats.

Given this ugly reality, we believe **that all LGBTQ+ people should know how to defend and protect themselves online.**

Therefore, we created this guide to minimize your personal exposure to LGBTQ cyberbullying and harassment.

"I haven't experienced anything negative online," explains Harris, who's genderqueer and gay. "[But it's] because I've worked very hard to not put myself in situations where I might



be vulnerable to attack. **This sort of extra mental effort keeps me safe online, but it does come at a price.**"

Common Forms of Cyberbullying in the LGBTQ+ Community

Awareness of the specific tactics used by cyberbullies can empower LGBTQ+ individuals to recognize and respond to harassment effectively. Cyberbullies often employ methods that exploit personal vulnerabilities, and anyone who might be targeted should understand these strategies to safeguard their mental health and well-being.

Outing: Sharing someone's sexual orientation or gender identity without their consent can have devastating consequences, including social ostracism and emotional distress.

Trolling: Deliberate attempts to provoke and upset individuals by posting inflammatory comments or messages.

Flaming: Sending aggressive and offensive messages intended to incite anger or humiliation.

Fraping: Gaining unauthorized access to someone's social media account to post inappropriate or damaging content.

Doxxing: Publishing private or sensitive information about someone without their consent, potentially leading



to real-world harm.

Catfishing: Creating fake profiles to deceive others, which can lead to emotional manipulation and exploitation.

These tactics are alarmingly common. LGBTQ+ youth are almost three times more likely to be bullied or harassed online than heterosexual students. Recognizing these forms of LGBTQ+ cyberbullying is a critical step toward prevention and intervention.

Notable Cases of LGBTQ+ Cyberbullying

Examining real-world incidents of cyberbullying against LGBTQ+ individuals sheds light on the severity of the issue and underscores the urgent need for action. These cases illustrate how online harassment can escalate into tragic outcomes, affecting both individuals and entire communities.

Tyler Clementi (2010): An 18-year-old Rutgers University student who died by suicide after his roommate secretly recorded and shared footage of him with another man. Tyler's case brought national attention to the consequences of cyberbullying and led to legislative changes, including the [Tyler Clementi Higher Education Anti-Harassment Act](#).

Channing Smith (2019): A 16-year-old from Tennessee who took his own life after classmates shared on social



media his private messages revealing his sexual orientation. The incident [sparked debate about the role of schools and authorities](#) in addressing cyberbullying and protecting student privacy.

O'Shae Sibley and Laura Ann Carleton (2023): Both individuals were killed in separate incidents after confronting homophobic harassment. O'Shae Sibley was stabbed to death in Brooklyn, and Laura Ann Carleton was shot after refusing to remove a Pride flag from her store. These tragedies highlight a disturbing [increase in violent incidents against LGBTQ+](#) individuals in the U.S.

These cases are not isolated incidents but are part of a broader pattern of discrimination and violence. They emphasize the critical need for increased support, legal protections, and public awareness to combat LGBTQ+ cyberbullying.

Our hope is that one day none of this will be relevant, and all people, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity, will feel free to express themselves online in any way they see fit, without fear.

Cyberbullying is a Near Universal Experience

According to our study, **73% of LGBTQ+ people have reported being personally attacked or harassed online.** These



incidents frequently revolve around attempts to alter or criticize a person's sexual or gender identity.

Shauna, a lesbian respondent, recalls, "some lady commented on a post I made on social media that my being gay was a phase and that if I found Jesus, I would be converted just like her."

"Back before Facebook filtered messages from people you aren't friends with, I would often receive messages calling me [gender slurs] or similarly abusing me," adds Dylan, a non-binary respondent.

The abuse isn't only verbal, but can lead to physical violence. According to Zsófia, a genderqueer/non-binary lesbian living in Hungary, "In 2012, my whole Facebook profile was published (with several other [members of the] Hungarian LGBTQ+ community) on a far-right group's website." According to Zsófia's description, even the list's name was a slur against the LGBTQ+ community.

In addition to these assaults, we found that **most of the online harassment respondents experienced was sexual in nature, which is a common aspect of LGBTQ cyberbullying.**

One respondent, Jamie, explained that they'd received lewd images via text when they had requested responses for a roommate, or information about their missing cat. They were



also told that their sexual orientation was a result of a lack of the correct partner, and that they could be “cured.”

Jamie’s experiences were echoed throughout our survey, with **dozens of people reporting that they had received unsolicited pornographic photos** or vulgar, sexually explicit messages.

When Tamika, a genderqueer lesbian, posted a photo saying “I wish I could just keep my mouth shut,” multiple people offered lewd solutions.

“I have had death threats against myself and my family,” disclosed Nova, an asexual transgender woman. “Bullying from outside and inside the community. **[I’ve] been creeped out so much that I have left social media.**”

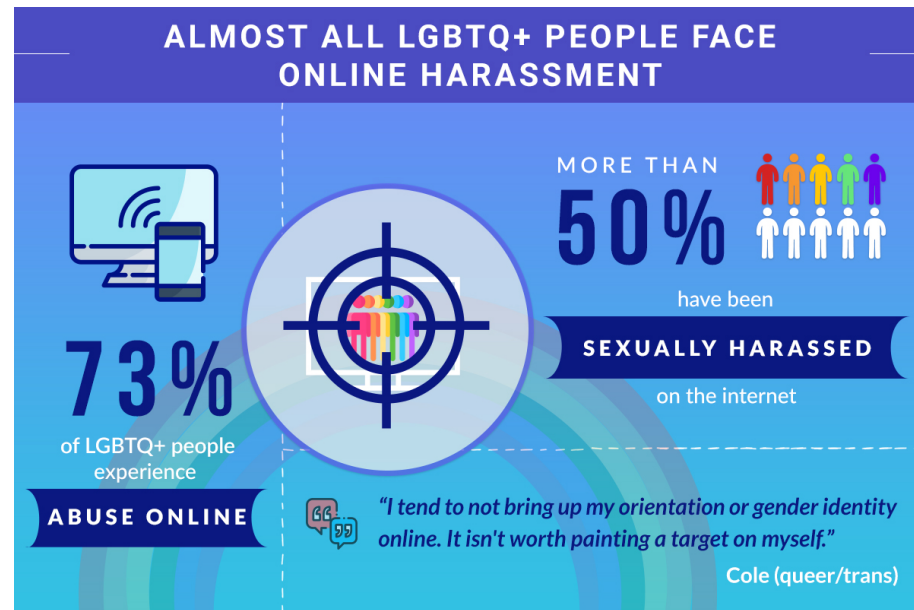
Asexual people described feeling threatened by their non-asexual counterparts who refuse to accept asexuality as a valid orientation. Some of these men, women, and non-binary or genderqueer people would accuse asexuals of having a latent or “not yet developed” sexual interest.

“People think they can cure my asexuality by sending me [lewd photos] or just repeatedly telling me everyone has a sex drive you just need to wait for yours,” says Elijah, who’s genderqueer and asexual.



Despite reporting frequently receiving sexually inappropriate content or comments, **many respondents downplayed the harassment they received** and even excused this behavior as “just the usual.”

LGBTQ cyberbullying should never be accepted as “just the usual.” There are ways to filter out the abuse.



Cyberbullying on Social Media

For LGBTQ+ people – especially those who are not supported by their families or friends – social media may be the only place they can find a loving, supportive community. Unfortunately, social media is also a hotspot for LGBTQ cyberbullying.



Research shows that cyberbullying among youth is increasing. A [2023 study by the Cyberbullying Research Center](#) found that 26.5% of middle and high school students reported being cyberbullied in the last month, up from 16.7% in 2016. With increased access to technology and social media, opportunities for cyberbullying have increased, providing bullies with more opportunities to target others from behind their screens, often without the immediate repercussions of face-to-face interactions.

Research has also shown that cyberbullying causes depression, and many victims turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as drugs, alcohol, and self-injury. This can lead to further issues, including mental health struggles and increased risk of suicide. That members of the LGBTQ+ community are at greater risk of being cyberbullied means they are also at greater risk of these negative consequences.




While an individual can't stop harassers from bullying in the first place, there are ways to shield yourself from them, making the repercussions of LGBTQ cyberbullying less severe.

Sometimes it's as simple as **blocking and reporting abusive users**, so you don't have to interact with them at all.

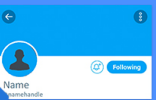


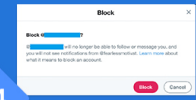


HOW TO BLOCK PEOPLE ON SOCIAL MEDIA




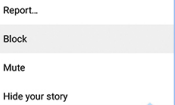
FACEBOOK

- Click on the question mark icon at the top right of any page. 
- Click on the Privacy Shortcuts tab and select see more privacy settings. 
- Click on the Blocking section, and type in the name of whom you want to block. 
- Choose if you want to block completely or block a specific feature.


TWITTER

- Visit the profile of the user you want to block. 
- On the top bar, click on the far-right icon (the three dots). 
- From the list select Block. 
- Confirm your decision in the pop-up box. 

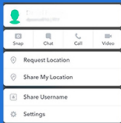
INSTAGRAM

- Go to the user's profile. 
- Click on the settings icon. 
- On iOS, this is the cog icon; on Android, it's the three dots. 
- Select the Block option from the menu. 





1 Click on the user profile you wish to block.




Select Settings at the bottom.

3 Click the button to block.

Remove Friend

Block


Report



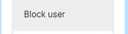
1 Go to the channel of the person you want to block.

PLAYLISTS CHANNELS DISCUSSION **ABOUT**

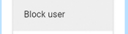
2 On the menu under their profile picture, click the About tab.



3 Click on the flag icon to open the menu.



4 Select Block User.



If problems persist, **you also have the option of reporting the abuse to the platform** – though unfortunately, site administrators don't always take the necessary action to shut bigots down.

When blocking someone online is not an option, there are other steps you can take to limit your exposure to them. Any of the following tactics can help you take control online:

Manually remove comments on your posts.

Most sites allow you to delete specific comments, so you can remove the offensive responses quickly.



Report the incident to the platform.

If you don't want it to be obvious that it was you who took action, reporting allows you to anonymously flag the issue, so the company can take action. You can find reporting instructions for some of the most popular platforms here:

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

[X \(formerly Twitter\)](#)

[TikTok](#)

[Snapchat](#)

[YouTube](#)

Create private lists and groups.

Most social networks have a feature to make messages, posts or groups private. By doing this, you can choose to include people you trust and keep potentially sensitive conversations away from harassers.

Understanding LGBTQ Cyberbullying in Online Forums

Online forums are a fantastic way to interact with your community, but they can be a catalyst for arguments and discussions that can turn nasty. LGBTQ+ people are often



unfairly targeted on public boards, just because of how they identify — making them prime targets for LGBTQ cyberbullying.

LGBTQ youth should never be forced to mask their identity, but unfortunately, the world can be a very ugly place, and **some people may choose to keep certain information private in order to keep themselves safe.**

Some details you should consider avoiding when talking to people you don't know include:

Address and Contact Information: LGBTQ

cyberbullying is one thing, but having an aggressor know where you live – or how to contact you – can put you in physical danger. Never share these details with anyone online, unless you know them personally and it's via an encrypted chat. Even general information, such as your town or city, can be used to locate you, so keeping it to yourself is the safest option.

Real Names: People can quickly connect the dots to work out who you and your friends are, so some choose to use pseudonyms for themselves and people to whom they refer in their posts. This simple habit is easy to adopt and will afford you considerable privacy, while still allowing you to share your experiences and opinions.

Links to Social Media: If you're commenting in forums, consider not linking your social media account, or at least keeping your social media settings private. While being verbally attacked on a thread is one thing, your social



media account usually has a lot more personal information about you that could escalate harassment to a different level.

Closeted People Risk Being Blackmailed

Although more and more LGBTQ youth are comfortable coming out of the closet, many who don't feel safe enough to do so. And **cyber criminals are ready to take advantage of that and are actively looking for victims to blackmail and extort.**

Therefore, you should know how to keep certain information private.

Most online platforms have started to take privacy seriously and offer settings to hide parts of, or all, profile information from some users.



HOW TO USE PRIVACY FEATURES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Below are instructions on how to enable privacy features on common social media sites.

FACEBOOK

1 Click the down arrow in the top right corner.

2 Select Settings from the drop down menu.

3 In the menu on the left, find and click the Privacy Tab.

4 Choose who can see specific information, such as your posts, contact details, photos, and friends list.

5 Visit the Timeline & Tagging section to specify what the public can see.

TWITTER

1 Click on your profile icon in the top right corner.

2 From the drop-down menu, select the Settings and Privacy option.

3 Click on the Privacy and Safety tab on the left side.

4 Choose your preferred settings.

INSTAGRAM


1 Go to your profile.


2 Scroll down until you see the Private Account option.

3 Swipe the toggle right to activate that only approved followers can see your posts.


4 Click OK to confirm your decision.

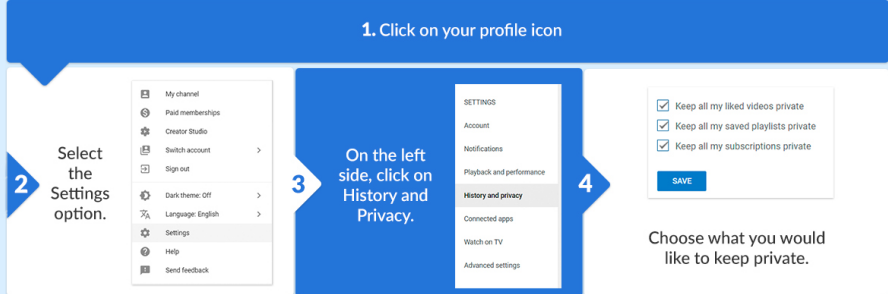


 **SNAPCHAT**



- 1 Swipe to view your profile
- 2 Click on the cog icon in the top corner.
- 3 Scroll down the setting to the section that says Who Can...
- 4 Adjust the settings and add your preferences.

 **YOUTUBE**



1. Click on your profile icon
2. Select the Settings option.
3. On the left side, click on History and Privacy.
4. Choose what you would like to keep private.

Protecting Your Identity During Transition

For many transgender people, the period of transition can be an extremely vulnerable time, particularly in the face of LGBTQ cyberbullying; the possibility of being outed is one of the biggest threats. In fact, **26% of transgender women and 21% of transgender men report having been outed against their will**, a form of digital bullying of queer youth.

Some of the respondents to our survey shared stories about how their friends and classmates maliciously revealed their



gender identity on social media platforms – or even blackmailed them.

According to Dante, a bisexual/pansexual trans man, “The person [blackmailing me] said they will share my personal information (gender identity and sexual orientation) if I [didn’t] do some certain things.”

In order to avoid being outed, which could potentially create a hostile family dynamic, cost them their job, or instigate a barrage of hateful messages, many choose to live in secrecy. This fear of being targeted by LGBTQ cyberbullying drives some to extreme measures.

As Jolene, a transgender lesbian woman recalls, “I live stealth. I hide my sexual orientation and gender identity online.”

Because most people transition as adults, they very likely have an online presence that presents them with the gender they were assigned at birth. As a result, **those who fear being blackmailed or involuntarily outed will often choose to remove their previous identity from the web.**

Bianca, a trans blogger, created an online community where she was able to help others in the same situation as her. However, it led to an inability to secure employment and feed her child. According to her, “Then came reality. The world does not like trans – does not understand the cause or the effect.” Because



of this, she removed her trans identity from her online presence to avoid further LGBTQ cyberbullying.

Similarly, Yahel, a trans man, first came out in an online forum he worked for, and was immediately met with harassment: "They started opening topics about me **saying I'm a girl and that I have a mental illness**; they used 'she' pronouns."

Fortunately, because he was a staff member, he could block the offending users.

However, he also noted the limits to his abilities, observing that "when I left my position as a staff member in order to focus on my grades at school, the harassment continued, and I couldn't do anything about it. **When I reported it, no one did anything about it.**"

If you are in a similar situation, and are afraid of the consequences of exposing your assigned gender or transition, you have the option of modifying your online persona to protect yourself from LGBTQ cyberbullying.

How to Reinvent Your Online Presence

Delete your social media accounts and create new ones that reflect your true gender. To help with this, follow these guides on how to delete accounts for [Facebook](#), [TikTok](#), [X](#) (formerly Twitter), and [Instagram](#). Once you've



set up new accounts, start posting more photos to build up memories over time.

Contact websites that present you with your assigned gender, and ask them to remove or update their information on you – you can find out what’s on the web by Googling yourself.

If you don't want to take these steps because you'll lose your online following or contact list, you could just update your current accounts.

If you changed your name, update it on every account.

Delete or untag old photos from your social media accounts.

Contact websites, friends, and followers to delete or untag any images that you can't untag yourself.

Create new photos, videos, and posts that reflect your true self.

Some social media platforms, like Facebook, give you the option to choose a custom gender. This feature can help prevent LGBTQ cyberbullying by ensuring your profile accurately reflects your identity.

Fortunately, **with greater trans visibility, more and more people are open about and proud of their journey.** Alex is a trans woman who found it was easy to come out online. According to her, “Changing my identity online was very simple



for me mainly because I already surrounded myself with supportive people. So, like, when I did change everything, everyone was already on board.”

Although she did experience some hate – particularly on dating sites – by being open and finding support among her friends, she found it easier to filter out the noise. Furthermore, **she chose to keep posting some photos that presented her with the gender she was assigned at birth**, and even said that it seemed to help her parents adjust to the idea of her transition.

The decision about how open to be online is deeply personal, and no one should be pressured to reveal more or less than they feel comfortable with. You should decide what’s best for you.

LGBTQ+ Online Dating

Online dating is a huge part of modern relationships. Apps, dating websites, and social media all provide a platform for folks of any gender or orientation to meet, hook up, or fall in love. And they can be especially **helpful for sexual minorities looking to find partners in a largely cis-hetero world**.

Many of the people we interviewed who are in happy, long-term relationships met their partners on the web.



Ronnie found the love of her life online. “Once I decided to just talk to someone who I had judged was way out of my league. After a couple of weeks she asked me on a date [...] now 6 months later, I’m so unbelievably in love.”

Unfortunately, online dating sites can be breeding grounds for LGBTQ cyberbullying and sexual harassment.

In the survey we conducted, **more than 50% of respondents who identify as gay, lesbian, queer, asexual, or bisexual/pansexual suffered sexual harassment online.**

Similar studies reveal that sexual harassment affects a third of LGBTQ youth. For example one study, by [GLSEN](#), found that **LGBT youth were four times more likely than non-LGBT youth to experience sexual harassment online** and three times as likely to face harassment over text.

That’s why it’s so important to protect yourself from the risks of LGBTQ cyberbullying. Dating should be exciting and fun. In order for it to stay that way, check out the tips below.

Safety Tips for LGBTQ+ Online Dating

Meeting someone you first connected to online could potentially be risky. Even if they appear legitimate, **there's no way to guarantee the authenticity of their identity**, and – even if they are the person they say there are – you don't know how they might act or behave in a face-to-face encounter.



While this shouldn't stop you from meeting new people, you need to maintain a strategy to stay safe, should the situation take an unwanted turn. Follow these steps to help:

Don't meet at home because you don't want strangers to know where you live until you've vetted them. It may seem inconvenient, but it will make you much less vulnerable.

Tell a friend all the details of the arrangements, including who you're meeting, where you're meeting, and when you should be back.

'Ask For Angela' or use a similar scheme. Across the world, codes exist that allow you to discreetly ask for help at bars or restaurants should you feel unsafe during a date. Research the options used in your locale beforehand.

Use police apps such as SafeTrek (see below), which allow you to notify the police of your location and alert them to danger, without having to make a call. By pressing a single button, you can dispatch authorities without your date knowing.

Do your research before you meet. Most people have an extensive social media presence that you can use to validate their identity. If they don't, then you know to be extra cautious during your date – or you might decide to skip the meeting altogether.



Safe Dating Apps

As more and more people rely on their smartphones, **dating apps have largely taken the place of traditional dating websites**. Some of these attract users who are looking to just hook up (and if that's what you want, great!), while others are geared more toward those looking for long term relationships.

In either case, **users are vulnerable to the same dangers, including sexual harassment and LGBTQ cyberbullying**. Following the best practices for **online dating safety and security** is important for protecting yourself from potential risks.

Fortunately, a plethora of apps have been designed to make your dating experience safer. These include **online dating platforms with built-in security measures**, as well as intuitive programs that can track your safety while you're out.

Taimi: An LGBTQ+ dating app focused on fluidity, diversity, and identity exploration. It offers features like Stealth Mode to hide profiles and Taimi Protect for added security through biometrics and passcode locks. Users can verify their identities with photo verification, and a



24/7 moderation team ensures safety by addressing reports and preventing impersonation.

Grindr: The largest platform for gay, bi, trans, and queer individuals, providing features for connecting with nearby users. Grindr includes tools for reporting and blocking users, alongside automated systems to filter harmful content. The app also promotes respect among users through its "Kindr" initiative.

HER: Designed specifically for lesbian, bisexual, queer, and other marginalized genders in the LGBTQ+ community. With a dedicated Trust and Safety team and social media verification, HER provides a safe and respectful space for sapphic individuals to meet and form connections.

Scruff: An independent LGBTQ+ owned app for men seeking friendships, dates, or hookups, while also connecting travelers with locals. It offers a range of filters, profile verification, and features like SCRUFF Match for finding compatible users, making it a secure and versatile platform.

Safe Sexting

With the rise of dating apps, sexting has become a common phenomenon. As a result, many have nude pictures stored on their phones.



Whether you take these pictures for yourself or for others, you can't ignore the possibility that **if they fall into the wrong hands, the result could be embarrassing – or even have devastating effects on your personal or professional life considering the potential for LGBTQ cyberbullying.**

But swapping cheeky photos can be a fun and fulfilling part of your romantic life, and we want you to have fun. Just make sure you take precautions.

Apps to Secretly Store Your Photos

There are certain apps that you can use to increase security and store your intimate photos in a locked part of your phone. The following all provide this feature:

KeepSafe: KeepSafe provides an easy way to protect your pictures. Just transfer your intimate photos into the app, and it will lock them with a password.

Best Secret Folder: This privacy app allows you to hide the app (and your photos) entirely, as it appears on your phone as a "Utilities Folder," which diverts any suspicion as to what it contains.

KYMS: KYMS provides the standard locked album features but takes it a step further by appearing as a calculator on your phone's menu. As long as no one



grabs your phone to do some math, your secret photos will remain hidden.

Vaulty: As well as providing your photos protection, Vaulty also comes with a plethora of editing features. Plus, if you lose your phone, you can restore your pictures from another device.

Have Your Photos Self-Destruct

Often no real need exists to store your nude photos on your phone at all. Once you've sent them to the desired recipient, you may not have a use for them. Many apps exist that allow you to take and send pictures, but will automatically delete them from both phones after a certain amount of time. These platforms allow genuinely stealthy sexting:

Snapchat

StealthChat

Telegram

Instagram

However, be aware that there are ways to get around this – meaning that the recipient of your photos could take a



screenshot or save them in some other way. So **never sext with someone you don't trust.**

How to Not Get Hacked

Unfortunately, more than physical theft could expose your private photos and information. Hackers are becoming incredibly sophisticated and can find your intimate information without you even knowing it.

To [protect your privacy](#) and prevent LGBTQ cyberbullying, follow these essential online protection tips:

Install antivirus software that will alert you if you accidentally download spyware onto your phone. Spyware intercepts your files, passwords, and online activity, and transfers them back to the hacker.

Only download apps from trusted users. Some unofficial apps are trojan horses for malware. If an infected program enters your phone, it can easily grant a third party access to your messages and photos.

Use privacy and security tools like password managers, ad blockers, and anonymous browsers to strengthen your overall online protection.

Regularly update your apps, since updates usually include patches and fixes for security flaws.



Use two-factor authentication (2FA) on all your accounts to make it more difficult for cybercriminals to access your files via brute-force attacks. This setting requires an additional code from a third-party platform, like your SMS or email, so (unless someone has managed to hack into several of your accounts) they won't be able to gain entry.

Always use a VPN when using unsecured public WiFi networks. Open hotspots do not encrypt data, so other users can see and access your files. Rogue connection points also exist to intentionally farm your data. Using a VPN will encrypt your traffic and bypass this issue altogether. If you're not sure which to use, here are some of [our favorites](#).

Avoid Unwanted Advances

Unwanted sexual advances, from illicit photos to sexual requests, can happen to anyone. However, LGBTQ+ people often face specific perils, including digital bullying of queer youth.

For instance, **if you're trans, you may be bombarded by intimate questions about your genitalia and sexual experiences**, or be solicited for paid intercourse.

According to our survey, when comparing the experiences of people with different gender identities, **transgender women felt the least safe online**, and cisgender men felt the safest.



Transgender people are frequently fetishized due to their gender, making them vulnerable to LGBTQ cyberbullying. Many have the experience of being asked to expose themselves to their cis peers under the guise of learning about their transitions.

Dean, a transgender man recalls, “A high school classmate asked to see me naked so he could understand trans people... even after I told him to research on his own. Then he started making sexual advances.”

Similarly, **lesbian couples might receive unwanted advances from straight men** that have fetishized their relationships, and bi women are often perceived as being hypersexual and open to any sort of encounter.

Not all uncomfortable interactions rise to the level of harassment. Especially on dating sites, where many are looking for a hook-up, **what might feel like crossing a boundary to one person could be a welcome proposition to another**. If the interaction falls into that gray area, you’re going to have to make a call as to how to deal with it.

Also, remember that **it’s not your job to educate people** if you don’t want to. While it’s true that some act from a place of ignorance, rather than malice, helping them see the light requires the type of emotional labor you don’t owe anyone.

With that in mind, here are some steps you can take for various scenarios in which you are made to feel uncomfortable:



If you do choose to engage, inform the problematic person that they're causing offense and explain how. Who knows, they might see the error in their ways and apologize for having crossed a line.

If they're being totally rude and unacceptable, but you still want to respond in some way, you can tell them that if they continue their behavior you'll report them to the platform. Sometimes a simple threat is enough to make online trolls step down.

If you're not interested in a discussion, just block their account and report them to the platform.

If harassment persists or escalates, and you fear for your safety, report them to the police. While the authorities often don't adequately respond to online harassment, it may be worth a shot, and reporting an incident at least begins an official paper trail that may become useful down the road.

LGBTQ+ Cyberbullying in the Workplace

Despite growing visibility and acceptance, some LGBTQ people still face discrimination in the workplace. LGBTQ cyberbullying is an increasing concern, especially as more interactions move online.



In 28 US states, it's still legal to fire someone based on their sexual orientation, and termination due to gender identity is still allowed in 30 states. This lack of LGBTQ-inclusive policies puts many at risk.

"I'm worried my sexual identity being in the open could hurt my future career," explained Courtney, a bisexual woman.

These figures are truly shocking, but they highlight why knowing your rights is so important.

Social Media Boundaries with Colleagues

By no means should anyone ever feel pressured to stay in the closet. That said, **those who fear cyber harassment or discrimination should know how to keep their personal and professional life separate** if they so choose.

But what if a coworker friends you on Facebook or follows you on Instagram? Do you block them or ignore their request, potentially leading to an awkward work dynamic, or even confrontation? These decisions can be complicated by the threat of LGBTQ cyberbullying.

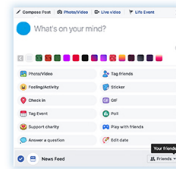
If you do feel pressured into a friendship with anyone you're not comfortable with, there are ways to filter what they see. **Most platforms let you customize who can see each post**, so you can vary the information you share with certain people. Here's how to do this on popular social network sites:



HOW TO CHANGE YOUR PRIVACY SETTINGS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

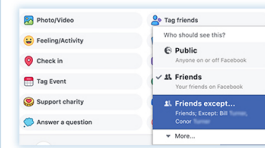
Filter Your Facebook Profile

1



When you post a status, look to the bottom of the box where it specifies where your message is shared. Next to where it says news feed, there's a drop-down icon which should say friends or public.

2



Click on this to open the menu, and choose the bottom option that says friends except...

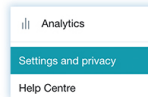
3

Search the name of the people you want to hide the post from and save the changes!

Change Your Twitter Followers

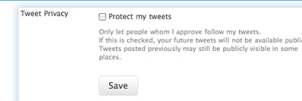
1

Click on your profile picture to open the menu and visit the Settings and Privacy tab.



2

Open the privacy tab and check the Protect My Tweets box.



3

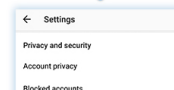
Save the settings, and now you'll be able to select whether new followers can see your posts or not.

Hide Your Stories on Instagram

1

You can't hide posts from approved followers on

2



3

Hide story from
0 people





Combating Workplace Harassment

Experiencing harassment or discrimination in your workplace can be deeply distressing. With today's digital world, you might be subjected to LGBTQ cyberbullying or other forms of online harassment from your colleagues. But that doesn't imply you're helpless. Here's your initial point of action:

Document every relevant interaction and collect evidence to take to HR or your lawyer.

Use your phone to **record potentially problematic conversations**, so you have first-hand proof of what happened.

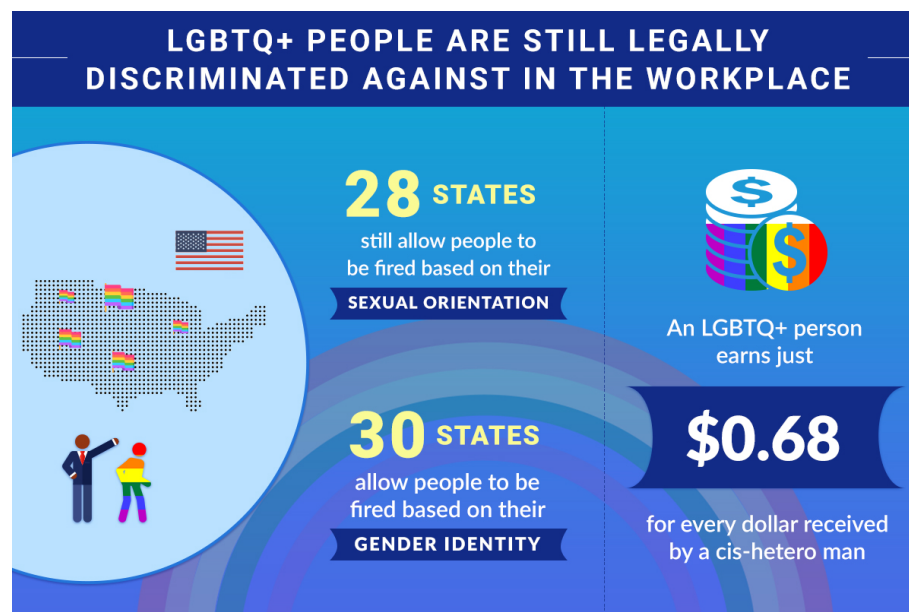
If any evidence exists **within your work email correspondence, be sure to copy and paste or screenshot the content elsewhere** – because your employer can delete or edit messages that exist within the company's internal system. This applies to Slack or other online chat groups as well.

Find someone you trust to help gather documentation. **Having a witness will increase the credibility of your claims.**



If HR doesn't take your accusations seriously, **find a third-party you can contact to push the case further.**

Know your rights. Being able to refer to specific legislation and guidelines regarding discrimination will help you go to battle with confidence.



Tips for Parents of LGBTQ+ Youth

If you are the parent of an LGBTQ+ child, you'll want to verse yourself in online safety, especially given the increasing risks and consequences of LGBTQ cyberbullying.

Queer youth are especially vulnerable to abuse and depression; they have less ability to organize their lives around finding a supportive community. LGBTQ cyberbullying can



exacerbate these challenges, making it important to stay involved in your child's life and be aware of their mental health.

By maintaining an open dialogue and monitoring their online activity, you can help keep them safe from cyber harassment and the dangers of being bullied online.

Similarly, if you discover that your child is queer but has not disclosed that information to you, don't confront them about it. Instead, have an open dialogue and incorporate statements about the LGBTQ community that will help your child feel safe.

Talk to them, but more importantly LISTEN. Ask what help they need and what tactics they're using to protect themselves online from LGBTQ cyberbullying. Many resources exist to support LGBTQ youth and their parents, so feel free to reach out and connect with others.

Below is a list of organizations that offer resources for LGBTQ youth and their loved ones.

Support Organizations for LGBTQ+ Youth and Their Families

It Gets Better: Created by married couple Dan Savage and Terry Miller, *It Gets Better* started as a social media campaign to provide hope for young LGBTQ+ people who



face bullying and prejudice. Today it is an international media network with numerous partners.

GLAAD: *GLAAD* was founded in response to the slanderous coverage of the 1980s AIDS epidemic. Today, it plays a major role in tackling problematic media narratives and encouraging essential conversation about LGBTQ+ issues.

Born This Way: This foundation was created by Lady GaGa and her mother, following the success of the song of the same name. The organization aims to support and empower young people through research and by connecting them to mental health resources.

FFLAG: *Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays* is a registered nonprofit whose primary focus is to support and share information with the friends and family of LGBTQ+ people. In addition to providing resources, they also connect members with local groups and contacts.

Helpful Blogs & Forums

You can also find blogs and forums that are used to discuss problems and share personal experiences. Popular blogs for LGBTQ+ youth and their parents include:

Q Christian Fellowship Forum (formerly Gay Christian Network Forum): A supportive online space for LGBTQ



Christians and allies to discuss faith, identity, and spirituality.

Transparenthood.net: A resourceful community for parents of transgender children, offering advice, stories, and support.

Parentingjeremy.com: A blog about a mother's journey raising her transgender son, sharing personal stories, struggles, and insights.

Raisingmyrainbow.com: A blog documenting the experiences of raising a gender non-conforming child, offering support and advice for parents in similar situations.

Exploitive Relationships and LGBTQ Cyberbullying among LGBTQ+ Youth

Studies show that LGBTQ+ youth are presented with more relevant risk factors than any other group of young people.

Often this occurs when children or youth come from homophobic/transphobic families that don't give them the support they need and deserve. **Young people who are forced to stay in the closet due to fears of backlash from their parents are particularly at risk of sexual extortion and cyber harassment.**

"When I was younger, and the internet more ruthless, I had a man threatening to come to my house to tell my parents unless I



sent him pictures,” recounts Giselle, an asexual transgender woman. “I had [nowhere] to go and thought that some stranger was going to tell my parents everything.”

In extreme (though unfortunately not uncommon) cases, youth without familial support end up homeless and often are forced to **turn to sex work as their only means of survival**. According to Gil Fishhof, the Director of the Human Rights Youth Organization: “these kids are engaging in sex as a means of acquiring the basic necessities that we take for granted like food, clothing, and shelter.”

Even those who don’t engage in sex work can be vulnerable to exploitation from adults. In explaining some of the potential reasons why young people who identify as LGBTQ+ might fall into unsavory relationships, Fishhof says, “youth are less likely to say no in these situations because **they feel like they need to validate their sexual identities**. It creates a fertile ground for sexual assault.”

In these situations, the responsibility falls to parents and educators to keep a watchful eye on the young people they care about. Particularly important is to keep an open dialogue about internet use and **ensure that minors stay away from the adult dating community, which can be a source of LGBTQ cyberbullying**.



The following are all 18+ apps that those who are underage shouldn't be on:

Tinder

Grindr

Zoosk

HER

Hotornot

Badoo

Skout

If your child or a young person you care about is using one of these apps, have a conversation with them, and make sure they understand the risks of getting intimate with adults.

That said, while open and honest dialogue is always the best option for teaching your child about safety, if you think it necessary and have the ability to do so, **you could also block their usage of these apps entirely.**

One way to do this is by using [parental control software](#).

These let you block apps, as well as track activity and messages. They can be as intrusive or unobtrusive as you want



them to be, so you can **find the balance between respecting your child's privacy and keeping them safe from digital bullying of queer youth.**

The following are all highly-rated parental control programs:

Norton Family Premier: Available by itself or as an extension to the Norton Security Suite, this control app allows you to set “house rules” for each device. These can determine time limits, app restrictions and under 18 filters.

FamilyTime: FamilyTime is available on most operating systems and allows you to monitor and manage your kid's web use – giving you access to phone logs and location, and letting you block apps and implement geofencing.

Qustodio: This option allows you to set individual time limits for each app, or block them completely. It's also simple to monitor your child's texts and calls through the admin panel.

Net Nanny: Net Nanny is award-winning software that offers real-time analytics, and monitors activity and prevents users from accessing age-inappropriate content.

Pumpic: Targeting mobiles specifically, Pumpic gives you remote access to your child's device, and the ability to



block or moderate the content they see. It provides logs of their activity, calendar, contacts, and messages.

Prevent LGBTQ+ Cyberbullying: Stay Safe Online

In a perfect world, LGBTQ+ people wouldn't face a heightened risk online and would be free to express themselves however they wish. Sadly, **social norms aren't changing fast enough**, and we still have a long way to go before that reality is realized. Unfortunately, this means that LGBTQ+ people have to be extra careful, especially online, to protect themselves from LGBTQ cyberbullying.

We hope our guide helps you take control of interactions online and makes you feel safer, while at the same time **empowering you to fully enjoy the digital aspects of your personal, intimate, and professional life.**

*All names have been changed to protect individuals' privacy.

**For the purposes of our survey, the categories bisexual and pansexual were combined.

***For the purposes of our survey, the categories genderqueer and non-binary were combined.

Appendix



Harassment Online

Respondents were asked, “Have you ever been personally attacked or harassed online?”

Answer	Result
No	27%
Yes	73%

Sexual Harassment Online

Respondents were asked, “Have you ever received unwanted sexual texts/messages/pictures/advances online?”

Sexual Orientation	Result
Asexual	
No	57%
Yes	43%
Bisexual/Pansexual	
No	50%
Yes	50%
Gay	



Sexual Orientation	Result
No	49%
Yes	51%
Lesbian	
No	51%
Yes	49%
Queer	
No	41%
Yes	59%

Safety by Sexual Orientation

Respondents were asked, “In general, how safe do you feel online? Answer on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being ‘very safe’ and 1 ‘not at all safe.’”

Sexual Orientation	Number of Respondents	Average Response
Asexual	37	3.49
Lesbian	138	3.50
Queer	58	3.52



Sexual Orientation	Number of Respondents	Average Response
Bisexual/Pansexual	248	3.56
Gay	112	3.63
Straight	4	3.75
Total	597	3.552763819

Safety by Gender Identity

Respondents were asked, “How safe do you feel online? Answer on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being ‘very safe’ and 1 ‘not at all safe.’”

Gender Identity	Number of Respondents	Average Response
Transgender Woman	23	3.217391304
Transgender Man	43	3.441860465
Genderqueer/Non-binary	116	3.50862069
Cisgender Woman	276	3.565217391
Cisgender Man	138	3.65942029
Total	596	3.553691275



Outing by Gender Identity

Respondents were asked, “Have you ever been outed against your will online?”

Sexual Orientation	Result
Cisgender Man	
No	89%
Yes	11%
Cisgender Woman	
No	88%
Yes	12%
Genderqueer/Non-binary	
No	84%
Yes	16%
Transgender Man	
No	79%
Yes	21%
Transgender Woman	
No	74%



Sexual Orientation	Result
Yes	26%

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Sarah is an experienced cybersecurity blogger, tech expert, and social activist. She's making the internet a safer and more inclusive place for everyone, and works tirelessly to share her knowledge. Plus, she has an undying love for herbal tea!

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