

Technology & sex: Internet safety & mobile use

The number one stress that disabled people have with online dating?! “Should I, or should I not put a photo of myself in my wheelchair/signing/with my guide dog? Better yet, should I put something witty about my impairment? Will it make people laugh, or will they turn me down straight away?”

Emily Yates, @EmilyRYates

Let's face it, the sex and relationships game is a tough one to play as it is, and an impairment can often make the chances of finding a sane and sexy Mr or Mrs Right a bit harder. Although this is true in some cases, there's a few ways in which we at Enhance the UK think that you can be knowledgeable, confident and have fun when dating with a disability.



Disclosure

Enhance the UK's Love Lounge is one of the only forums of its kind to honestly answer all those nitty gritty things you wanted to ask about disability, sex and relationships, and a question we often see is, when online dating, should the disability be disclosed immediately? It might be subtly done in a profile picture, or brought up as a 'warning message' before the flirting even gets off the ground. It might not be mentioned (or seen) until you meet your date for the first time. Either way, the important point that we want to get across is that, ultimately, it is your choice.



We think that, like most things, a 'happy medium' can be hit here. Whilst we wouldn't recommend that you leave it till the last minute to turn up to meet your date for them to discover you are in a wheelchair and the restaurant they've booked is inaccessible, we also think that disclosing too early can make any impairment look like more of an obstacle than it ever needs to be.

Always think of it like this: if you stumbled across a profile on a dating site of a gorgeous guy who really sparked your interest, you'd want him to be funny, smart, and say something that grabbed my attention for all the right reasons, right? What you wouldn't want him to blurt out is 'Before we begin this hot conversation, I'm deaf and you won't find that sexy...will you?' Bit of a mood killer for anyone!

Funnily enough, disability can often filter out the people you wouldn't want to date anyway; if someone is rude to you or loses interest because you use crutches, for example, they're not worth your time. Simple!

Disability = Knowledge

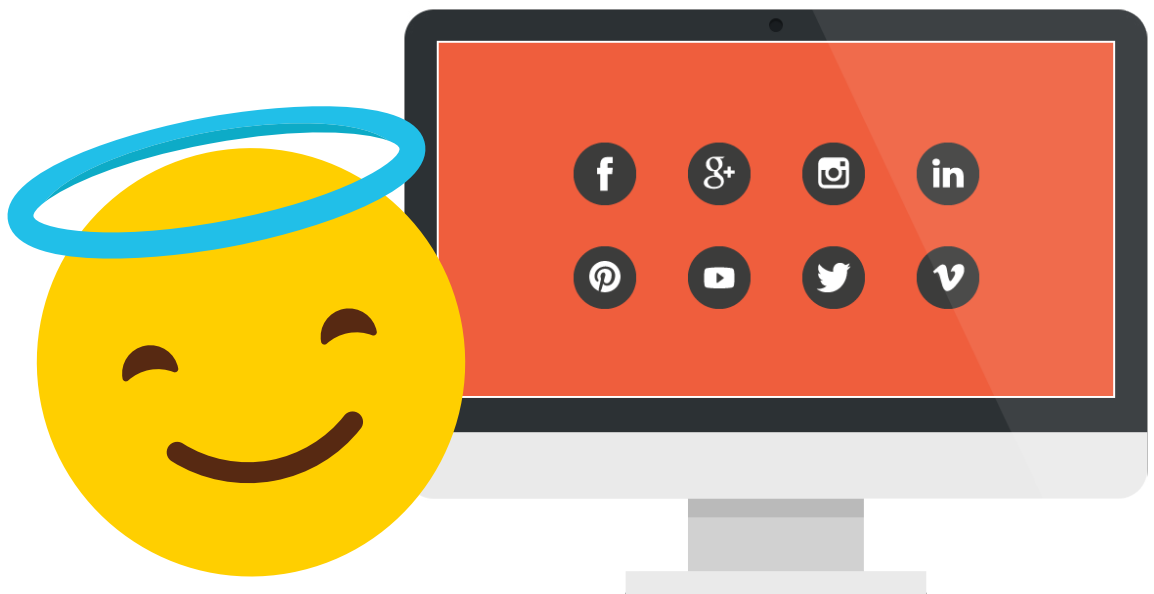
This next bit is for when you're on the date. You've used your filter to find a nice guy/girl with plenty of potential, spoken about your disability and been met with nods and smiles (result!) and you've got a drink, talked about the weather and your favourite colours... what should you say next?!! We're great believers that those of us with impairments have enough crazy, hilarious, awkward and tragic stories to last us a lifetime, so get using your experience and show that person how interesting, smart, funny and gorgeous you really are. Everyone loves someone who doesn't take life too seriously and can see beauty in even the toughest times. If anyone can do that, it's you.

Happy dating, go get 'em, tiger.



Staying Safe Online: Top Tips

- Be careful about sharing any personal details online. Once they are on the internet, you have lost all control over them and cannot decide who sees them.
- Sexting (sending sexy texts): Think before you press 'send'. Would you be happy for all of your class, your family or your partner's friends, to see what you're about to send? Even if you are happy in your relationship now and trust the person you are texting, things can change. Could you still trust them to keep those messages private if you broke up?
- Once you send a photo, video or message, it is out there forever and you have no control over where it goes. Just remember that!
- Online relationships are so popular now, they really should not be treated any differently than face-to-face ones. Don't let anyone push you into doing things you don't want to, whether that's sending nude photos or meeting up in a place you don't know.
- Remember: one thing that is different about dating online is that, really, that person you are talking to could be ANYONE. Have fun, but use your common sense, and don't give out any personal details that could put you in danger.



If you have a disability: There are people online called Devotees, who will be sexually attracted to you because of your disability. Whilst devotees can be lovely, and make very caring partners, some can also behave inappropriately online, and pester people with disabilities for medical details, photos and videos. Again, remember that you are totally within your rights to stop any communication with someone you are not comfortable around.

Extra support

Feel free to contact Mik or Emily at The Love Lounge:

www.enhancetheuk.org/enhance/the-love-lounge

These guides are part of Enhance the UK's **#UndressingDisability** campaign: Sex Ed for Teenagers. Show your support by following us on Twitter and Instagram! **@EnhancetheUK**

