

Blind dating is never risk-free, especially when some aspect of a person's life exists that can cause negative reactions, or when an aspect of their life means that they might be potential prey to predators. When meeting a person for the first time, you will be completely unaware of any history of confusion, instability or biases they may have. First impressions are never enough, and the greater the risk, the more secure the safety net is needed.

One habit that can minimize the risk is known as the "silent alarm" (sometimes also called the "safecall"). There are several variations of this procedure... you can settle on what feels most comfortable.

For your first meeting, it's best to insist on a public place. A restaurant or a mall coffee shop is ideal. Never agree to meet a stranger in a private place such as a hotel room or home. Make sure that your transportation to and from your first meeting is under your control -- don't rely on your date for a ride home. And don't let someone know your home address until you're comfortable with them first. If prior discussion indicates a mutual plan of going someplace later for more private fun (which might include your place or theirs), agree on the location in advance, and have the address to this location. If this location changes unexpectedly, this may be a warning sign to get out or call for help.

A "silent alarm" is a situation in which you tell a trusted friend where you are going, and when you expect to be back; you also

give him or her any information that you may have about the person you will be seeing and the place you will be going. You arrange with that friend to call at a prearranged time, no matter what the events of the evening bring. If you don't check in, your friend is to call the local authorities immediately, with any information they have. It's also a good idea to prearrange with this friend to have a code word or phrase that you might include during your phone conversation, in the event that you are forced to make the call under duress, and need to indicate that you need help, without arousing suspicion from a person threatening you.

Helpful points:

- If you have your date's phone number, try to arrange to call it first, to verify that it is correct.
- Inform your friend beforehand what your plans for the evening are: time, place, etc. If anything changes, let them know during a check-in call.
- Don't use your date's phone or cell, in order to help avoid the call being traced later, thereby potentially putting your friend in danger. Cell phones add a certain element of potential danger to your friends, so depending on the level of risk, you may want to consider this.
- This isn't just a first-time procedure, but can be maintained (perhaps relaxed gradually) for as long as you remain uncertain about someone.
- This **is most useful as a deterrent**. If your date knows that you need to check in with a friend, they'll know that if they harm you, this will alert someone else. The point is that he (or she) knows that there will be some accountability if anything goes bad. Some dates may be offended by this, but most should understand that it is sound advice for blind dating.

If your friend needs to call police, they should stick to referring to the encounter as a date. They should not disclose any information that might negatively bias the dispatcher (i.e. if you are a member of a racial group or transsexual, or if any money is being exchanged).

In addition, never let your drink out of your sight. If it is being poured in a private setting by someone you've recently met, be sure you've observed the pouring of the drink. Date rape drugs are a serious risk.

If you hadn't planned on anything sexual but are suddenly directed that way by someone you've just met, your best bet is to get out of that situation at that time, and assess how this person reacts. A non-predatory person is much more apt to understand and respect the word no, and reasons not to jump into anything too fast. For beyond first dates, be wary of:

- Attempts to isolate you from people. This can include pressure to move in right away or move somewhere inconvenient for others to visit, or wanting to prevent people from knowing where you are.
- Attempts to make you dependent upon them financially or emotionally (i.e. trying to turn you against your friends).
- Controlling behaviour which restricts where you go or who you talk to.

There is often more to safe sex than condoms (but don't forget those, either!). The greater the risk, the more you may want to do to prepare yourself.