

Using the internet safely

fact sheet

Tips for women and young people whose safety is at risk.

The internet can help

Many people find the internet a useful source of information and support. This includes people who may experience violence from a partner or other family member.

For example, you can find information online about your legal rights and options, and what services are available.

Many people find it useful to read about other people's experiences of violence, and what has helped them. You can contact many support services confidentially via email.

Email is also a good way to keep in touch with friends or family, especially if you may be moving addresses a lot. It can even be a way to store information electronically. For example, you can scan important documents and email them to a private Yahoo email account (see below).

Safety matters

However, it is important to learn how to use the internet safely, especially if you are living with a person who may use violence against you. Remember, family violence is not just physical. It can also include emotional or verbal abuse, threatening you, or anything else that makes you feel unsafe.

Sometimes people who use violence can be very controlling, for example trying to check up on or control what you do, who you see or where you go. You may not want them to be able to find out which websites you have visited, or to read emails you have sent, especially if they relate to family violence.

This fact sheet covers a number of issues related to safer internet use. We have tried to keep the language simple, but some sections are a bit technical, especially for people without much computer experience.

At the end is a glossary of the terms used. There are also people that can help, including family violence support workers like those at Women's Health West.

GENERAL SAFETY

TIP 1 Check information from the internet carefully

There is a lot of information online, not all of it is relevant or reliable. Good websites should provide the name and contacts for whoever provided the content. It's also important to remember that Australian, even Victorian websites will probably be more relevant, especially when it comes to things like the law, or what services are available.

Before you make any decisions based on online information, it's a good idea to check it with a support worker, such as a family violence worker, community legal service worker, solicitor, counsellor or other service.

TIP 2 Find a safe place to use a computer

Sometimes the easiest way to keep your internet use private is to use a computer which is not at home. For example, you might use a friend's computer, or one at work or school. All libraries provide free internet access, as do many community centres and neighbourhood houses. Internet cafes can also be reasonably cheap and accessible. You can find out about your local libraries and community centres from your council, or go to the Australian Library Gateway at www.nla.gov.au/apps/libraries. Click on 'map search', then on 'Melbourne'.

TIP 3 Save emails that may help you in court

If a person who is using or has used violence against you makes unwanted or threatening contact via email, it may be useful to keep this as evidence should you apply for an intervention order. This is a court order which requires that person to stay away from you. If the emails are distressing, start a new email account for emailing others, and perhaps forward the unwanted emails to your previous inbox to police or your case worker.

PHONE (03) 9689 9588
EMAIL info@whwest.org.au
FAX (03) 9689 3861
WEB www.whwest.org.au
317-319 Barkly Street
Footscray VIC 3011



women's health west

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EMAIL SAFETY

TIP 4 Protect your email privacy

If you have internet access at home, the company providing it (e.g. Telstra BigPond or Optus) will probably have provided you with an email account. Take care if you use this email address to write any emails that you would not want anyone else to have access to.

If you do use this email address, be sure you delete any private email you write from both the "sent" and "deleted" boxes – a short cut is to hold down the 'shift' key as you delete. However, keep in mind that even if you delete your emails, copies are often kept with the internet provider, and deleted emails may be able to be recovered from your computer by an expert.

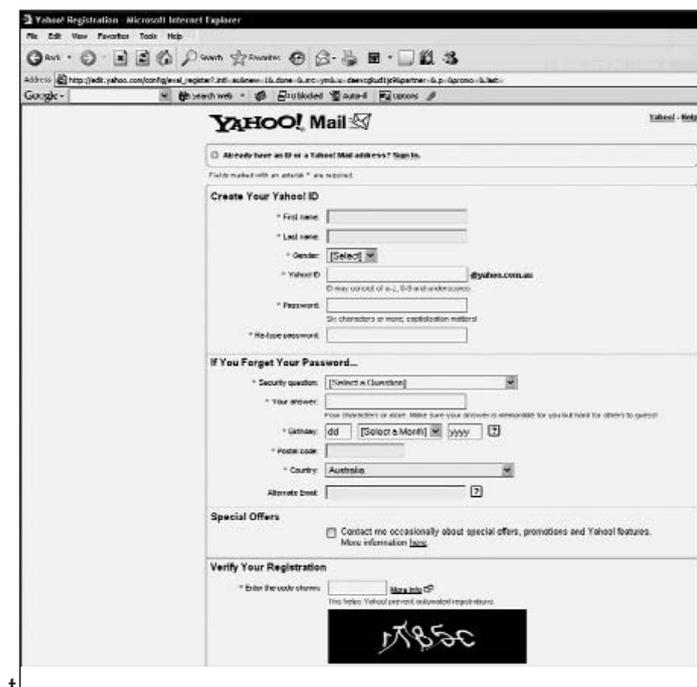
TIP 5 Set up a private email address

A safer option may be to set up a free email account, for example through yahoo or hotmail, which no one else knows about. Then you can read and send emails from any computer with internet access.

There are a number of free email websites available. Read their terms of use to make sure they meet your needs. Yahoo is good because it allows you to store a large number of emails and attachments, and requires a password to view emails.

Setting up a Yahoo email address is easy. Go to yahoo.com.au, click on "Mail" then "Sign Up Now" and follow the prompts. If you have trouble, ask for help from a computer class teacher at your neighbourhood centre, a librarian at your local library or your social or family violence support worker.

The sign up page looks like this:



TIP 6 Make sure you always sign out completely

When you are finished sending your emails from a free email account like Yahoo or Hotmail, make sure that you always sign out completely, especially if you are using the home computer.

Click "sign out" at the top of the screen, then click where circled below. Then, even if someone uses the "back" button on the internet browser, or tries to use the computer's "history" or "cache" (see glossary), they won't be able to read your emails.

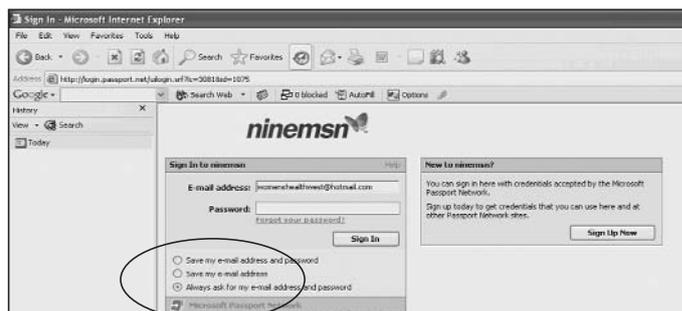


TIP 7 Protect your password

Always choose an email provider that requires a password, like Yahoo or Hotmail. Choose a password that would be hard to guess, and be careful to protect it, especially if you are using your home computer. Make sure your password is not stored anywhere on the hard drive, and make sure there is NO TICK in the box 'Remember my ID on this computer' – see below.



If you are using Hotmail, make sure you select 'Always ask for my email address and password', so your password is not automatically stored on your computer.



SAFE SURFING

There are many websites that can help people experiencing family violence. Some are listed at the end of this sheet, and many more are linked to the Women's Health West website at www.whwest.org.au.

The main safety issue with internet surfing is that all "browsers" – the computer program you use to surf – automatically store information about the websites you have visited on your computer in a variety of ways. This enables someone using that computer to find out what websites you have been visiting, either deliberately or by accident.

Understanding safe surfing requires you to understand a bit about how the internet works. We have tried to make the following tips as simple as possible, however it may help to refer to the glossary at the end.

TIP 8 Use a different browser

The simplest way to protect your surfing privacy is to use a different computer – at a library, work, community centre or friend's house. Another fairly simple way, if you're using the home computer, is to use a different browser. Your computer will probably be set up to automatically use a particular browser; the most frequently-used is Internet Explorer (IE).

There are many other browsers available. Most you can download free at websites like www.mozilla.com, www.opera.com or www.netscape.com. It may be a good idea to save the new browser program in a hidden folder somewhere on your computer. The only disadvantage is that will be a bit more hassle to open it – you will have find it again through Windows or your desktop and double-click to open it.

TIP 9 Erase your tracks

To understand how to "erase your tracks" – that is, remove any way for someone to find out what internet sites you have visited – you need to understand how these "tracks" are recorded. When you visit a webpage, it is recorded in three different places on your computer:

1. **The browser's cache:** In order to speed your online viewing, your browser stores copies of every page you visit in a "cache" on your hard drive.

When you revisit a page, your computer may display this version instead of reloading the page. In Internet Explorer, the cache is in a folder called "Temporary Internet Files".

2. **The browser's history:** Your browser stores the URLs (also known as the "address", for example Women's Health West's address is www.whwest.org.au) of all websites you have recently visited.

When a page is displayed, your browser uses this list to determine whether links on that page should be displayed in the normal link colour (usually blue) or the "visited link" colour (often purple). Visited links are links to websites you have recently visited.

3. **The browser's typed URLs:** This is a list of addresses that you have manually typed into the drop-down box on the location bar. An item from this list will "bump" off the end after you have typed 15 to 20 other URLs in that browser.

You can completely clear any of these lists temporarily. How you do it depends on your browser. Below are links to instructions for how to do this in some common browsers.

If your browser is not listed, go to its homepage and search on "privacy" or "clear cache".

- ♦ Internet Explorer: www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/using/howto/customizing/clearcache.msp
- ♦ Opera: www.opera.com/support/tutorials/security/privacy/index.dml
- ♦ AOL: members.aol.com/webstlouis/purge.html
- ♦ Mozilla: www.mozilla.org/support/firefox/options#privacy
- ♦ Netscape: help.netscape.com/kb/consumer/19960627-14.html

For more information on how browsers work, go to www.learnthenet.com/english/html/12browser.htm

TIP 10 Things to remember when erasing your tracks

- ♦ Do it regularly: Remember that the cache, history and typed URL lists will begin to grow again as soon as you start visiting more websites.
- ♦ Your computer will slow down: Visited links will no longer be a different colour; you won't be able to use the drop-down list to revisit pages; and pages you revisit will take longer to load once their cached versions have been removed.
- ♦ "Cookies" will also be removed: removing the cache also means removing "cookies" – log-in passwords, preference information or other data previously entered into a website.

This may have a noticeable effect for other users of the computer. For example, another user may have registered for an online newspaper or chat group. Every time the cache is erased, they may notice that they need to re-enter their password.

It is possible to remove individual items rather than a whole list, but this is quite complex. Search your browser's website if you feel this may help you.

TIP 11 Internet privacy software may be useful

There are a number of "anti-tracks" or programs available, which allow you to automatically erase your cache and history from many popular browsers, as well as erasing data from many other programs such as email.

You can find links to such programs at www.tucows.com – search on "internet privacy". All cost money to download, but some allow a free trial period.

Remember that using such a program will affect how the computer operates for everyone who uses it, not just you. Remember also that you may want to hide the program file somewhere.

GLOSSARY

Internet: A vast network of computers, known as "servers", which store and transmit the information available to you via the world wide web, as well as email, newsgroups, bulletin boards etc.

Internet provider: The company that connects you to the internet, often providing your email and access to the world wide web.

World wide web: A vast network of information also called "the web", or "w3", mostly websites, that you can access via the internet and view on your computer.

Webpage: A single page on the web.

Website: A collection of webpages published by an organisation or individual, that you click between via headings or "links" in the form of text or graphics.

Browser: A program that allows you to "browse" or "surf" websites on the World Wide Web.

Search engines: Websites that let you search the World Wide Web, such as www.google.com, www.yahoo.com or www.ninemsn.com. The tips provided on how to search can help you find what you need much more quickly.

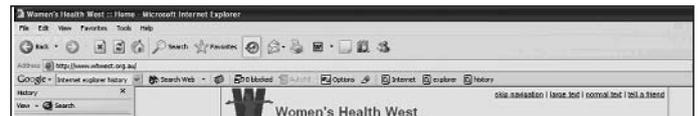
Cache: Copies of the webpages you visit, stored by your browser on your computer. When you revisit a page, the browser may display the version from your hard drive instead of taking more time to reload the page from the internet.

History: A record of the URLs of webpages you have recently visited, stored by your browser. Your browser uses this list to determine whether each link on a webpage should be displayed in the normal link colour or the "visited link" colour.

URL (Universal Resource Locator): The address of a webpage or website. For example, the URL of Women's Health West website is www.whwest.org.au

Location Bar: A drop-down box near the top of your browser showing the URL of the webpage you are viewing. Typing a URL in the location bar and clicking return will take you to that webpage.

Clicking the arrow button at the right of the location bar box produces a pull-down menu displaying the most recently-typed URLs.

**USEFUL WEBSITES**

These websites may be useful for women and young people, including those affected by family violence. You can find links to many more from the Women's Health West website links section at www.whwest.org.au/links.php

Women's Health West Family Violence information: www.whwest.org.au/famviolence.php

Domestic Violence Incest and Resource Centre: www.dvirc.org.au

When Love Hurts: online guide to healthy relationships and violence, for young women: dvirc.org.au/whenlove

Bursting the Bubble: information for young people affected by family violence: www.burstingthebubble.com

Same-sex family violence information: ssdv.acon.org.au

Support and information for same-sex attracted young people: www.mogenic.com or www.minus18.org

Family Planning Victoria: information about sexual health including services: www.fpv.org.au

Centre Against Sexual Assault: www.rwh.org.au/casa

Search for rental housing: www.realestate.com.au

Centrelink: www.centrelink.gov.au

Victoria Legal Aid: www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Kids Help Line: www.kidshelp.com.au

No To Violence: organisation helping men to change violent behaviour, including helpline: www.ntv.net.au

Women's Safety After Separation: wsas.here.ws

Family Court of Australia: www.familycourt.gov.au

Births, Deaths and Marriages (to change a name): www.dvc.vic.gov.au/bdm.htm