

## Chat lines: minimizing the risks

The advent of chat lines and electronic mails has changed the way people meet and interact. More and more Internet users meet online and some move beyond virtual communication to have face-to-face encounters, which are sometimes satisfying (the number of people who marry someone met in chat is rising) while others are extremely disappointing or end up in dangerous situations.

Lack of certainty over the identity of chat rooms users should not be underestimated. Some people are attracted by the possibility of remaining anonymous during the chat, and sometimes give a fake identity, lying about their gender or age.

The internet allows you to experience what is like to be someone else without too much risk. The important thing, however, is to be aware of this situation and to remember that people can pretend to be whoever they want to be online.

In the anonymous atmosphere of the Internet, conversations can become intimate quickly, even with someone you have just met in a chat room. This may involve a certain amount of risk.

This does not mean you cannot talk with people you've just met (that after all is the best of chatting) or that you cannot widen your circle of friends avoiding face-to-face encounters with people you met online. Simply bear in mind that chat lines reflect the world in which they were created.

Chat rooms may include topics ranging from cultural issues, information, politics, love, art, solidarity as well as the possibility of making new friends. But it is also possible that you come into contact with predators such as porn dealers, con-men, terrorists, paedophiles, maniacs.

In chat rooms you can meet any type of persons. There you can find good people or crooks as if you were in a crowded street or in any other public place. When chatting online people tend to be less cautious than in the real world, showing less resistance to violating taboos.

As a matter of facts many adult and expert chat users have learned to be cautious while talking to someone they have never met face to face, which is generally sufficient not to have bad surprises.

If you want to meet up with an online friend choose a public and crowded location and ask someone to accompany you. As a general rule, this precaution is sufficient to avoid risks.

This rule doesn't apply to kids. Their curiosity and ingenuity make them more vulnerable when they are approached online by predators such as paedophiles. Therefore it is advisable to accompany children while surfing the Internet and to teach them to tell their parents about their web surfing experiences.

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