
Some Guidelines

There are many interactive forums on the Internet, including chat sites and online communities. We need to address the critical question of how Muslim men and women should conduct themselves when they come into contact with one another while participating in these forums. Muslim men and women when interacting with one another on the Internet should observe the following guidelines:

1. Never display photographs under any circumstances.

To start with, photographs are simply not necessary. The written word is more than sufficient. We must also appreciate how photographs can become a great opportunity for Satan to tempt people and make their foul deeds seem fair to them. Some people might consider such caution misplaced. However, those who understand how people are seduced and tempted and who have experience in dealing with these problems, know that nothing is far-fetched. Moreover, some people who have a sickness in their hearts manage to deceive themselves and others that something which is completely wrong is instead something that is good and that is motivated by the sincerest and noblest intentions.

2. Use typing and avoid audible means of communication.

If, for some reason, using audible media becomes necessary, then we must adhere to Allah's command: "Be not too complaisant of speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease should be moved with desire; but speak a speech that is just." [Sûrah al-Ahzâb:32] This verse was revealed concerning the wives of the Prophet (peace be upon him). If this was the case for them, we can appreciate how much more it must apply to us. Moreover, that was during the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) while we are living in the age of permissiveness and promiscuity.

3. Maintain a serious tone and focus in conversation.

We must not get involved in talking at length about things that are unnecessary and unjustified. In truth, many people get a thrill out of merely speaking with the opposite sex, regardless of what the subject might be. Some men just like to hear a pretty voice. Likewise, since women are indeed the full sisters of men, they also find pleasure in speaking with men. Our tone should be serious. We should avoid all that is superfluous and frivolous.

4. Remain vigilant at all times.

Those who we meet on the Internet are, for the most part, apparitions. Men come online posturing as women and women often misrepresent themselves as men. Then, there are so many things we do not know about the other person. What is his ideology? What is his background? What country is he from? What is his line of work? What are his real intentions? All of these things are unknown.

I wish to call the attention of our honoured sisters to the dangers that experience has shown us to be ever present in these situations. Many young women are quick to believe what others tell them and are very susceptible to sweet words. Such people are easy victims for the predator who lays out his trap. One moment, he is a sincere advisor, another the victim crying out for someone to save him, then he is the lonely man looking for someone with whom to share the rest of his life, the next moment he is the sick man looking for a cure...

5. Muslim women who work with the Internet should keep in close contact with one another.

They need to develop strong channels of communication so they can lend a degree of support to each other in this important and possibly dangerous field of endeavour. They need to cooperate closely and share their experiences and expertise. A person standing alone is weak, but standing with others she is strong. Allah says: "By time! Surely the human being is at loss. Except for those who have faith and do righteous deeds and exhort one another to truth and exhort one another to patience." [Sûrah al-`Asr]

Abû Mulaykah al-Dârimî narrates: "It was the practice among the Prophet's Companions, that if two of them met, they would not depart from one another without one of them reading Sûrah al-`Asr to the other. Then one of them would greet the other with peace." I also advise our Muslim sisters to focus most of their attention and their efforts on calling other women to Islam and enjoining them to righteousness. They should use this valuable medium to assist and serve their sisters and to reform them. This should be done indirectly, subtly, and with wisdom. Too direct an approach, when giving advice, often causes the other party to become angry, confrontational, and obstinate. This is because the person giving advice comes off as seeming high-handed and arrogant, while the one being advised feels shamed and belittled. Therefore, be gentle in your choice of words, good-natured, attentive, and forbearing. This makes the receiving party more conducive to receiving your advice and less likely to spurn it.