

GRINDR HOLISTIC SECURITY GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

The LGBTIQ+ community is vibrant, strong, creative, and resilient—in large part because it has had to be. Across the globe, LGBTIQ+ people continue to experience discrimination, inequality, violence and abuse because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. In the face of these threats and challenges, our ever-resourceful queer community has turned to internet—and more specifically, social networks—for safer communication, networking, and mobilizing.

With users worldwide, Grindr has become a vital part of the community and has flourished as a unique place for queer people to connect. But while Grindr is intended as a safe space, it's features also have the potential to put users at risk.



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Safety is not merely the responsibility of users, and Grindr is continuously seeking to develop and improve its security features—not only to protect users, but also to provide them with critical safety information needed to ensure a safe experience.

As part of these ongoing efforts, Grindr for Equality has partnered with LGBTIQ+ and health activists and organizations around the world—as well as our users—on a Holistic Security Guide that encompasses multiple areas of user safety. Thanks to their invaluable feedback and advice, we’re now able to share this important information to help users enjoy their Grindr experience while staying safe.



This guide will follow the harm reduction approach, so everyone can continue using Grindr with raised awareness about how to reduce the harm that may come to us. Harm reduction is an approach from public health. It is designed to lessen the negative social and/or physical consequences associated with various human behaviors, while recognizing the inherent risk in some everyday activities.

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WHAT IS HOLISTIC SECURITY?

Holistic security is an approach that integrates digital security, personal safety, and self-care into traditional security management practices.

For our purposes we will breakdown the guide as follows:



DIGITAL SECURITY

Digital security refers to practices used to protect online users, devices, and data from unauthorized access or cyber-attacks. If you live someplace where being LGBTIQ+ puts you in danger, here are some important steps you can take to ensure your safety while using Grindr.

“It is little use to dig a well after the house has caught fire.”

~Indian proverb

Don't Post Pictures with Identifiable Features:

If you live in a place where having your identity shown on Grindr puts you at risk, there are many ways to use the app without putting yourself in danger.

- Don't show your face or any other identifiable feature, including tattoos, furniture, home decoration, or surrounding scenery.

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- Clear metadata when you take a photo. Cameras automatically add metadata when you take a photo. This hidden info can include location, date, time, and location of the photo. Even if a photo doesn't show your face or any other details that could expose your identity, a photo's metadata can still be used to learn a great deal of information about you. There are many apps that remove this data for you before sharing photos with strangers.
- If you are chatting with someone and would like to send a picture, consider blurring certain identifiable features to mask who you are. It can still be a nice and fun way to share pictures with people, without fully showing yourself. Remember, blurring doesn't always work because some software can reverse the blur feature. Try using a picture that represents you in a different way such as one related to your hobbies or personality.
- For more information on how to blur your pictures on Android phones, check the following link:

<https://guardianproject.info/apps/obscuracam>

For IOS users:

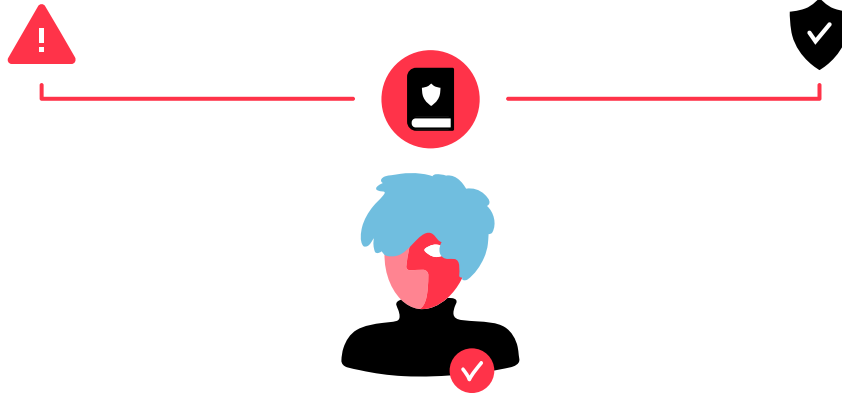
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/blur-photos-free-for-iphone-ipad-and-ipod-touch/id931207837?mt=8>

- When talking to people you don't know well, it's better to cover the camera on your smartphone, laptop, or tablet. For Android users you can do it digitally with the Camera Blocker app.



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Scenario 1



Julio is a 35-year-old who often dates people he meets online. He had always felt that the app was a fun and safe way to hook up with other men. One day, Julio sent some pictures with his workplace visible in the background to someone who turned out to be a blackmailer. This person blackmailed Julio for over a month, threatening to expose him to his colleagues at his work.

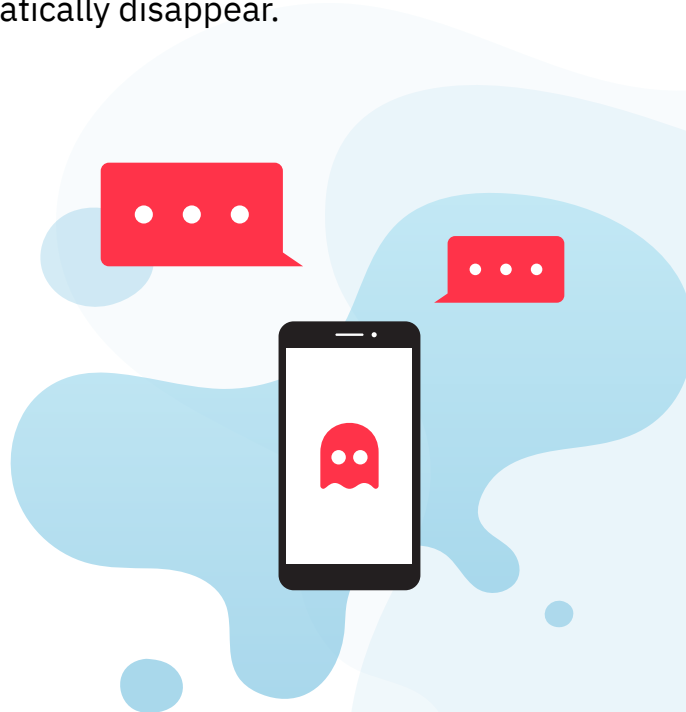
What could Julio have done differently?

Julio could have avoided showing his face in the pictures, and could have made sure that they didn't include other distinctive details, such as his workplace or anything else that could reveal his identity and potentially endanger his safety.

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Meet in A Safe Location:

Sharing your home address can be risky. Make sure you feel comfortable with someone prior to meeting. If you are ready to meet someone, try meeting at a place known to be friendly to LGBTQ+ people if there is one in your area. If you want to continue chatting outside of Grindr, consider using secure messaging apps that use end-to-end encryption. A few of these include: Wire, Signal, Jitsi, and Appear. Please note on Wire you don't need to register with your phone number, you can simply register with an email address if you want to. In Signal, you can set a time for the messages to be deleted. After a specified period of time your conversation will automatically disappear.



Don't Use Personal Info in Your Grindr Profile:

Do not specify your name, address, phone number, or any other info that could help identify you in your profile. Displaying your personal info on Grindr increases the risk of someone identifying your social media profiles.

Don't Connect Your Social Media Accounts:

Some apps allow or require you to login with another social media account. Connecting between different social media and communication tools can give someone ways of

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finding info about you. If that's the case, consider the following steps:

- Use a different name on Grindr than with other social media apps.
- Provide a different phone number and email address than you usually use.
- Don't connect or sign in through social media, if possible. If required, have a separate social media account just for logging in to social networking apps.
- Don't provide a phone number unless absolutely necessary.

Chat Sessions are Saved on Both Phones (Yours and Theirs):

Don't share any personal info, photos or videos that you wouldn't ordinarily share with strangers. In some countries this information can be used as legal evidence that could lead to imprisonment.

Avoid Browsing Online via Wi-Fi Hotspot:

Wi-Fi hotspots in public places such as airports, coffee shops, libraries, and hotels are convenient, but too often aren't secure. If there is no alternative option to using these insecure networks, and if there are no legal implications to do so, we recommend that you always use a virtual private network (VPN) on your phone. For more information about VPNs, check out the following links:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_private_network

<https://www.psiphon3.com>

<https://nordvpn.com>

<https://www.tunnelbear.com>



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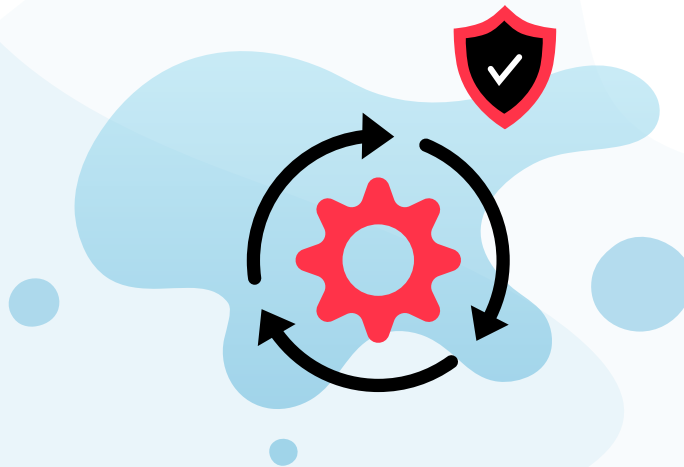
Always Update Your Phone's Software:

Software updates keep you safe from known security threats and will frequently provide new features and speed enhancements. Smartphone users running outdated software may be vulnerable to attackers gaining privileged control (known as “root access” in Android systems and “jailbreaking” in iOS systems) of their devices, allowing them to read the messages in your social networking apps. It is important to pay attention to updates from an official source, such as Google Play, F-droid, or The Apple App Store.

For more info on root access and jailbreaking check out:

[**https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rooting_\(Android\)**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rooting_(Android))

[**https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IOS_jailbreaking**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IOS_jailbreaking)



Enable Remote Wipe for Your Smartphone:

It's good to be able to remotely wipe your smartphone so that if your info, photos, etc. fall into the wrong hands you're able to clear it. If your phone is stolen, you want to make sure that any sensitive information on it can be easily wiped. For more info on how you can remotely wipe your phone, check the following links:

[**https://support.google.com/accounts/answer/6160491?hl=en**](https://support.google.com/accounts/answer/6160491?hl=en)

[**https://support.apple.com/kb/PH2701?locale=en_US**](https://support.apple.com/kb/PH2701?locale=en_US)

[**https://preyproject.com**](https://preyproject.com)

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Protect the Photos and Videos on Your Phone:

If you must carry sensitive pictures or videos on your phone, make sure they are securely stored. You can move them to private galleries on your phone or use online applications such as Photo Vault.

Secure Your Grindr App with A PIN:

Grindr users can configure their Grindr app to open to a “Enter Security PIN” screen where they must enter a 4-digit pin to start Grindr. You can also hide your app using the Discreet App Icon option, which disguises the Grindr icon as something more discreet like a camera or calculator app.

These features were developed for Grindr users in countries where being LGBTQ may put people in the most danger, like the countries where being gay is punishable by the death penalty. It is available to users in the rest of the world as part of Grindr Xtra and Unlimited.

Hide Distance in Your Grindr Profile:

Users can disable “Show Distance” in their profile and cascade. This may help if you live in a dangerous environment and do not want any unwanted people knowing where you are.

In some countries where being LGBTQ may put people in particular danger, the distance feature is already disabled for everyone.



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Hide from Explore Searches:

Grindr users can choose not to be found via “Explore” searches, which allow people who aren’t nearby to browse your area.

In some countries where being LGBTQ may put people in particular danger, profiles are already hidden from searches.

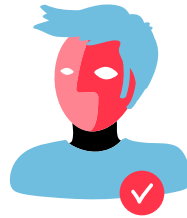


Block Profiles:

If you feel you are communicating with someone in Grindr who might jeopardize your safety, you can block them so that they cannot find or interact with you on the app.

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Scenario 2



Ahmed is 25 years old and lives with his family. He has a habit of handing over his phone to his mother, brother, or a curious friend to check things out. One day, Ahmed gave his phone to his sister to look at some family pictures. His sister accidentally saw his Grindr profile and his nudes in the photo gallery.

What could Ahmed have done differently?

Ahmed could have avoided handing his phone to others, but since he does this often and doesn't want to raise suspicions, he could lock Grindr with a pin code and change the app icon. Moreover, he could have locked all his private pictures and videos in a locked vault app. Finally, when shooting private videos, Ahmed could also begin by shooting a few seconds of his hand covering the lens. This will result in a completely black thumbnail in his media gallery, making it harder to immediately spot these videos.

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PERSONAL SAFETY

Personal Safety refers to the freedom from physical harm, as well as freedom from hostility, aggression, harassment, and loss of ability to control over one's body. When it comes to personal safety on social networks, it's important that you develop common sense responses to keep you safe. If you live in a place where being LGBTIQ+ puts you in danger, here are some important steps you can take to ensure your personal safety while using Grindr.

Do A Background Check on Your Date:

If you're talking to someone on Grindr and you decide to meet in real life, it's best to check them out via people who may know them or search for them on Google or social media.

Meet First in A Safe Public Space:

When meeting for the first time with people you don't know, it's best to meet in a public place. It's important to meet somewhere LGBTIQ+ friendly, or at least not known to be "unfriendly".



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Let A Friend Know Where You're Meeting:

It's always a good idea to have people know where you've gone. It is also best to have an emergency plan. For example, have a friend come meet you if you don't call them after a certain period. Also, when you meet someone for the first time, try not to carry too many personal items such as credit cards or cash. There are some useful applications that help you track your steps for your personal safety such as "Trusted Contacts" and "My Family Tracker".

Clear Phone When Meeting Strangers:

When you go to meet a date from the app, clear any sexual conversations, images, and videos. Don't save contact names in your phone that contain sexual identifications such as Top/Bottom/Hornet/Grindr or any other sexual description.

Avoid Excessive Alcohol and Drug Use:

If you go on a date with someone you don't know well, avoid drinking too much alcohol or using drugs. Don't agree to take any unknown drinks or substances. Drinking and using drugs may decrease your ability to identify a situation as potentially dangerous.



If You Get Arrested:

If you should get into a situation where you are arrested, do not confess or admit to anything. Even if they have proof, stay silent. Find out about organizations or groups in your area that provide direct legal services like an LGBTIQ+ organization or a more general human rights organization.

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SELF-CARE & WELL-BEING

Fear, anxiety, burnout, stress, and trauma have a negative impact on our health. It hinders our ability to think properly and make rational decisions about our safety and security. This is why self-care and well-being are a core part of our holistic security strategy. Self-care is taking care of our body, mind, and emotions, as well as paying attention to the environments surrounding our existence.

“Caring for myself is not an indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare.”

~Audre Lorde

As our appreciation of ourselves and our respect for our bodies and identities starts with the self and ends with the people we are dating, so here are some tips that can help your safety as well as your inner peace while dating.

Nurture Your Support Systems:

Always seek welcoming, supportive, and safe environments in your life—that can be a group of good friends and allies, supportive and kind partners, or even empathetic service providers.

Take Care of Your Mind and Body:

It’s important to take care of your mental and physical health. Always have open, healthy conversations with the people in your life about your mental, emotional, and physical needs. If you are dealing with a mental health condition, try not to let the stigma shape your perceptions about yourself. Remember, there is absolutely no shame in asking for help if needed.



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Take Care of Your Body:

It's important to take care of your body, which can help reduce feelings of anxiety and depression. Taking care of your body starts with watching your sleep, diet, exercise, etc. But as it's been said, "Everybody is different, and every body is different" so always remember there is no one way to take care of yourself and there is no single form for the perfect body. Learn the appropriate ways and means to take care of your body and set your own goals.



Take Care of Your Sexual Health:

Get tested regularly for HIV and other STIs. Do it at least three times per year, and always have conversations with the people you meet about your safety expectations. For more information about sexual health visit the Grindr Sexual Health Resource Center:

<https://grindr.me/sexualhealth>

Your Body Is Yours:

Don't let anyone make you feel that your sexuality is abnormal. Don't let anyone body shame you or tell you what you like isn't best for you. And don't let anyone pressure you into having sex if you do not wish to do so.

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Collective Community Support:

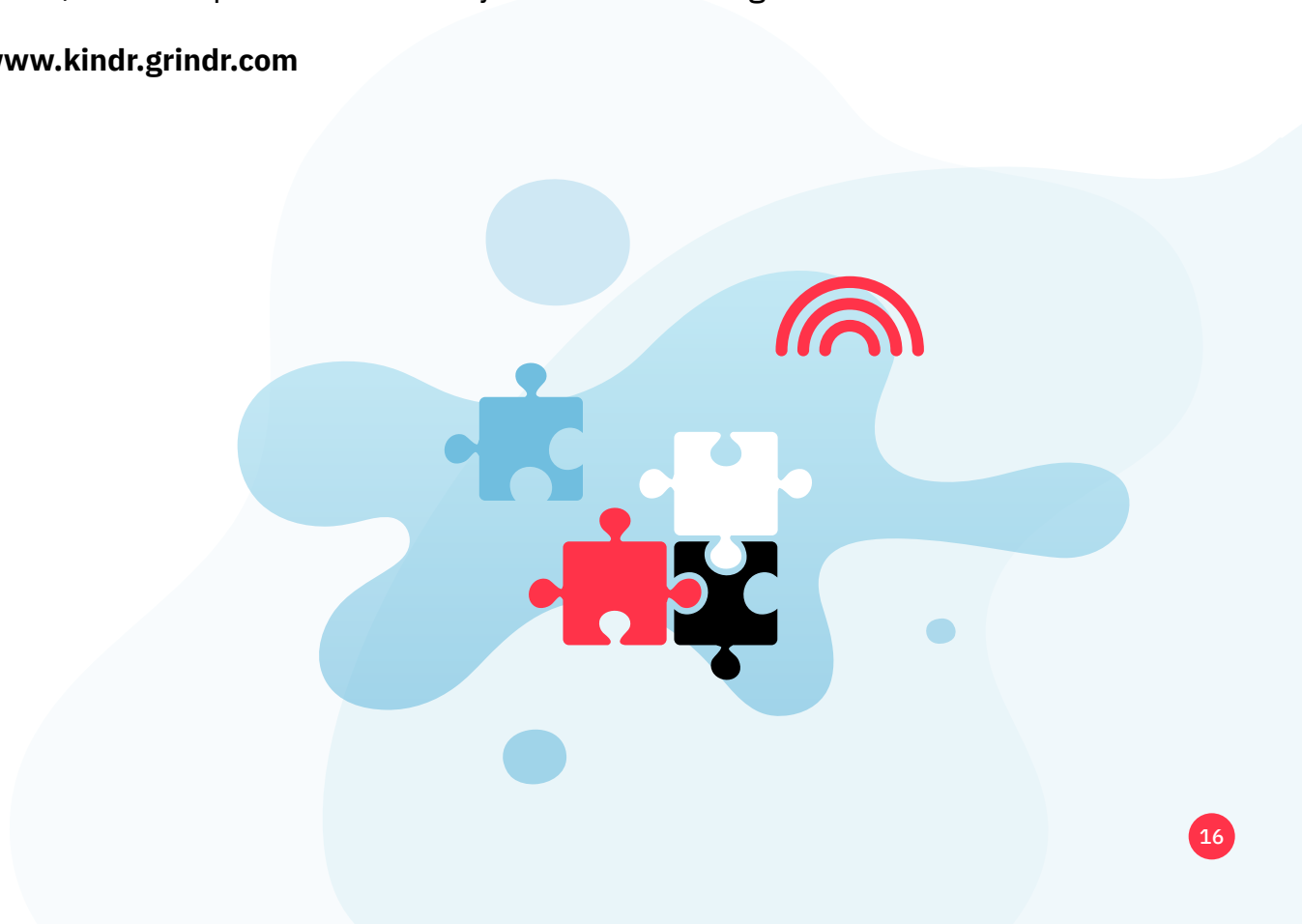
As queer global community, there is no reason for us to be hostile to each other, as the world can already be cruel to people like us. It is our duty to be there for one another when it feels like the world is failing us. Your queer friends sometimes become your chosen family, so let us make a promise today to be there for each other -- be nice, considerate and supportive in real life and online. Together we can build a world we all dream of, one that is free from discrimination, stigma, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia and any form of violence.

Our Differences Make Us Unique:

In the dating world we often forget that we are talking to human beings with different backgrounds, life experiences, identities, and choices. We must make the effort to treat people with respect, politeness, and kindness. We need to be more considerate to the differences that make us magnificently diverse and unique. Always ask if you don't know. Don't assume!

For more information on how together we can amplify the conversation and take steps towards a kinder, more respectful community visit the following link:

<https://www.kindr.grindr.com>



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Scenario 3



Shirin is a 29-year-old transgender woman and a courageous activist in her country. Shirin was talking with someone she had known online for a while, but she stopped when she noticed that he wasn't respecting her identity and he wasn't treating her as a woman. He kept asking for certain things in their sexual relationship that she did not like. A few days later, Shirin received a message on her Facebook from him with a link. After she opened the link, she noticed that there were threatening messages that began to arrive on her personal email. The messages were aggressive and non-stop. She became very stressed. She felt her safety was compromised and her privacy was violated because she never shared her Facebook profile or her personal email address with this person.

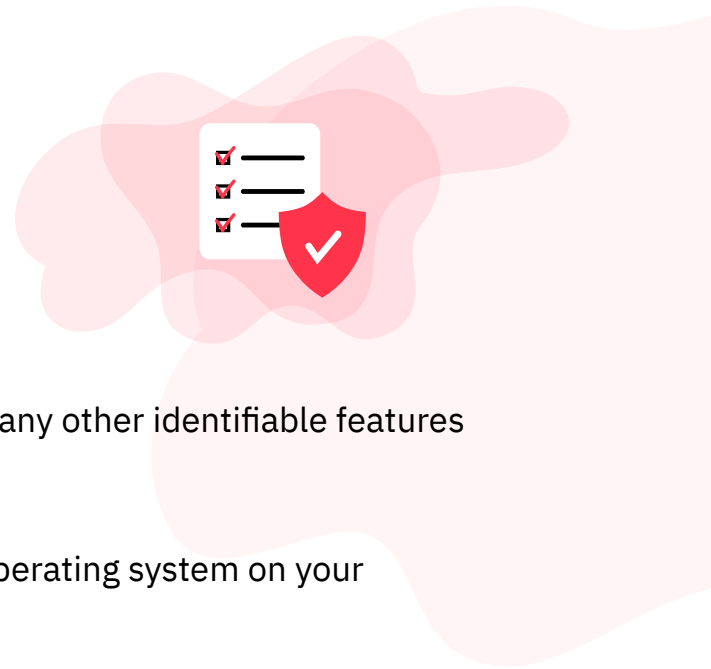
What could Shirin have done differently?

Shirin could have shared less personal information with this person, which probably led him to her Facebook and her personal email address. By sharing this information, she gave her attacker the means to stalk her outside the app. Now she needs to change her passwords. She could also talk to a digital security expert, who would be able to make sure no tracking software or malware had been downloaded on her phone.

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ASSESSMENT TOOL

Below you will find a series of questions that will allow you to understand your level of holistic security. The purpose of these questions is to help you reflect on your own thoughts about your safety. It's also designed to help you question whether you're ensuring the highest level of protection in your dating experiences and daily life as a queer person.



Digital Security Checklist:

- Do you share pictures showing your face or any other identifiable features with strangers?
- Do you regularly update the software and operating system on your phone?
- Are your sensitive images and videos securely locked inside an encrypted file or app?
- Does your phone have up-to-date anti-virus and anti-malware installed?
- Do you delete metadata from images before sharing with others?
- Do you use public Wi-Fi in hotels, airports, or cafes without connecting through a VPN?
- Do you use a PIN code for Grindr?
- Do you use a password, pattern, or fingerprint for your mobile lock screen?

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Personal Safety Checklist:

- Do you usually vet people you talk to or date on Grindr?
- When you go on a date, do you tell your trusted friends where you are?
- Do you always make sure to meet strangers in public places before you bring them home?
- Do you clear your phone of sexual chats and sensitive images before you go on a date?
- Do you have knowledge of your legal rights if you're arrested?

Self-Care Checklist:

- Are you aware of your physical, emotional, and psychological needs?
- Do you know how to set boundaries?
- Do you find it easy to support yourself and believe you're worthy of care?

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- Do you maintain dietary habits that keep you healthy, happy, and comfortable with your body?
- Do you know what your strengths are and do you know how to incorporate them into your life and work relationships?
- Do you get medical care when necessary and for prevention?
- Do you have people in your life you can talk to about important things?
- Do you practice self-love and give yourself positive affirmations and praise?



G4E is continually looking for ways to be of service to the LGBTQ community. If you'd like to learn more about G4E or have questions please contact us at equality@grindr.com.