

# **Kansas Legal Services**

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## **Privacy and Safety on Facebook for Survivors of Abuse**

The **National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV)** and **Facebook** have teamed up to offer tips for survivors of abuse so that you can still use Facebook but maintain safety and control over your information. This guide is aimed at helping survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking with how to use Facebook in a way that ensures that they stay connected with friends and family, but control their safety and privacy to help prevent misuse by abusers, stalkers, and perpetrators to stalk and harass.

### **The first line of defense: Manage Who Sees Your Content**

In general, every friend you add may be able to see what you post, and depending on your privacy settings, your friends' friends may be able to see what you post as well. For some survivors, refusing to be friends with their abuser or even blocking them may not be possible and could escalate dangerous and controlling behavior by the abuser. The following are ways to manage what you share and with whom.

#### **Select your audience**

When you share information on Facebook, you can select the audience that sees that content. You have the option of sharing it with the Public, Friends, Only Me, or Custom—which gives you the most control over how you want to share a post. By creating lists of certain friends you can quickly limit the audience for any post or photo. These audience selector options can be found as part of individual posts, photo albums, and also on your basic information under the About section, however keep in mind that there are a few things that will always be public (learn more on what will always be public in the next section). You can use the “View As” feature to see what is visible to the public and friends by clicking the privacy shortcuts icon on the right hand side of your Facebook profile.

## **Be cautious when accepting new friends**

Facebook is based on real names and authentic identities, where people represent who they are in the real world. Unfortunately, some abusive individuals use clever tactics to gain access to a victim's information. If you receive a friend request from someone you thought you were already friends with, ask them if they created a new profile. In some instances, abusive individuals maliciously create accounts impersonating a friend of the person they want to connect with.

## **Teach your kids**

Some teens may believe that having many "friends" is a status and popularity symbol. Talk about privacy and safety with your children and why they should be hesitant to accept friend requests from people they don't know.

## **Discuss privacy**

Maintaining your privacy isn't always just up to you since friends may post content about you or tag you. Although you can manage whether those things show up on your Timeline (as seen in the next section), friends' posts or photos will show up on their Timeline, regardless of your own settings. Since survivors of abuse may have friends who are Facebook friends with the abuser, this can be concerning.

- Uncheck the box that allows friends of those tagged to see content. You can find this in the custom privacy option under the audience selector.
- Use the tag review tool to know when you are being tagged and by whom (learn more about this feature in the next section).
- Discuss your privacy preferences with friends and family.
- Find out if your workplace, places you volunteer, or agencies within the community that you participate in post information about staff, volunteers, or events and ask for your information to be kept private.

## **take back control: Review Your Privacy Settings**

### **Who can see what you share?**

You can choose who sees your Facebook activity either by setting a default setting under "Privacy Settings"/ "Who can see my stuff," or by selecting your audience when you make an individual post. Anytime you select an audience in either place, it is remembered and set as your default for the next post you make. In other words, if you set something "Public" or to "Friends," that will be the audience for your next post unless you change it.

You can block an individual friend from seeing a particular post or limit your post to only be viewable by selected friends through the use of lists, as explained in the previous section. You can also limit the audiences for past posts if you weren't using privacy settings previously. Take note that you control the privacy of your own information, but if you post something on someone else's Timeline, who can see what you posted will be dictated by their privacy settings.

### **Who can find you?**

If you are following Facebook's Terms of Service and using your real name on your profile, then anyone can look you up and find your profile by name. How much of your information they can

see will depend on what privacy settings you are using. You can also control who, if anyone, can search for your profile by your email or phone number.

You can manage those options under your Privacy Settings page or the About page (hover over content to see and edit setting). The About section also allows you to limit who can see your other personal information. You can also choose to allow or not allow search engines to directly link to your Timeline. If this selection is “off” when someone searches your name in a search engine, such as Google or Bing, or on people-finder sites, your Facebook profile will not come up.

This option is important for survivors who want to minimize the amount of information that comes up when someone does an online search for them. It is important to note, however, that if you post content as “Public,” that content could still show up in a search engine.

In addition to turning this setting to “off,” you can limit who can view past and future posts through the audience selector. Depending on what you share and your privacy settings, you could be found in real life.

For survivors, location privacy can be critical to maintaining safety. If you send Facebook messages through your cell phone make sure to turn off the location sharing feature, otherwise the person receiving the message can see your actual, physical location, complete with a map.

### **How to control being tagged?**

Tagging is another function within Facebook that may allow others to find your Timeline. Using your privacy settings, you can choose to approve all tags before they appear on your Timeline, limit the audience of posts that you are tagged in, and turn off the “tag suggestions” feature.

You can also remove tags of yourself, although removing a tag or not approving a tag does not remove the post or photo from Facebook. Those options only allow you to control what shows up on your own Timeline. If you are concerned about your privacy, you can use Facebook’s social reporting tool to ask the individuals to remove the photos or posts. If something posted is harmful to you and violates Facebook’s community standards, you can report it to Facebook.

You can also discuss harmful and harassing content with law enforcement.

### **What are others saying about you?**

Although you can’t control what others say about you on their own Timeline and elsewhere on Facebook, you can control what they say about you on your own Timeline. Under Timeline and Tagging, you can control who can post on your Timeline and who can see your Timeline.

### **By default: what will always be public**

Although Facebook gives you many options to expand your privacy, some information will always be available if someone comes across your Timeline. This information includes your name, current profile photo, current cover photo, networks you belong to, gender, username and user ID. Survivors may want to strategize about what information to share, use a generic profile or cover photo, or determine whether they want to be a part of any network in order to maintain their privacy. Liking or commenting on public posts: Note that posts or photos that are on other people’s profiles or organization’s pages take on the privacy settings they set for that item. In

other words, if someone else's photo is set to public (anyone can see it) and if you like it or make a comment, your comment and the fact that you liked it will also be public.

The Privacy Basics Tool is designed to give people complete control over their information and experience within Facebook. Use this to easily control your privacy [facebook.org/basics](https://www.facebook.org/basics)

## **the second line of defense: Security Settings & Notifications**

Security settings control who has access to your account. This can be very important for survivors. Some abusers will try to access the survivor's account by guessing the password. Using the security settings, you can ensure that someone else cannot log into your account. Some settings that are important for survivors are the following:

### **Security questions**

Most of the security questions are standard personal questions that the abusive person may know the answer to or be able to guess. It's not necessary to answer these questions honestly. You can be strategic with your answers, using a word or phrase that only you will remember, so that the abuser can't reset your password by guessing the answer.

### **Login notifications**

You can be notified, either by email or text message, if someone tries to access your account from a computer or device that you haven't used before.

### **Login approvals**

If you are logging into your account from a different web browser or device, you must have a security code to access your account.

### **Recognized devices**

You can manage the devices that are allowed to have access to your account and be notified if an unknown device tries to access your account. This is particularly helpful for a survivor who may have wanted to access their account from their partner's device, but now no longer wants that device to have access.

### **Active sessions**

This is important to note because it shows sessions that are currently active or logged on. You may have active sessions if you've accessed your account or are using an app and forgot to log off. This also will show if someone else might have accessed your account. In that case, you can choose to 'End Activity,' which will block that device from continuing to access your account.

### **Notifications**

Facebook allows you to be notified of a variety of activities, including when someone asks to be your friend, tags you, or comments on something you posted. Go through each of these notifications and determine when you want to be notified. You can select to be notified by email, on Facebook, or text messaging.

## **the third line of defense: BE SAFE**

Abusers, stalkers and perpetrators misuse a variety of online spaces to harass victims. Misuse of Facebook includes: threatening or harassing someone through posts or private messages; posting information or pictures without the person's consent in order to cause harm or distress; obtaining a victim's password and accessing the account without permission; or impersonating the victim.

Although these tactics of abuse are not acceptable, they may not violate Facebook's Terms of Service and, individually, may or may not be illegal. Because of that, it is important for survivors to know what their options are and what recourses are available when someone is harassing them through Facebook.

### **Tools Within Facebook:**

Unfriending or Blocking a person are two options within Facebook for addressing someone who is bothering you.

- **Unfriending:** When you unfriend someone, it means that activities (pictures, updates, posts) that you set to the "Friends" audience will no longer be seen by that person. Additionally, their activities will not show up on your News Feed. However, they will still be able to see whatever is public on your profile, including any activities you post with a "Public" audience, posts made by mutual friends to your Timeline, and any comments that you post on a mutual friend's Timeline. They can also re-request you as a friend.
- **Blocking:** When you block a person, they will not be able to view your Timeline activity, message or tag you, or send you another friend request (blocking automatically unfriends the person). You will also not be able to see their activity. They will still be able to see your public information and activity within apps or groups.

Use your judgment and instincts when considering the timing of these options. Since stalkers and abusers use monitoring and threats to maintain power and control over victims, when a survivor limits access, abusers sometimes find other methods of control or escalate dangerous behavior, including increased threats and even assault.

Ending a relationship or contact with an abusive person can be dangerous for many survivors so it is important to plan for safety and talk to a trained victim advocate. If you are concerned about what the person might do if you were to cut off contact, call your local domestic violence program or police for more information and help.

To learn more about domestic violence programs and to find an advocate near you, contact **Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence (KCSDV)** or the National Domestic Violence hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE(7233)

Reporting a person, post or picture to Facebook is a step that you can take if you feel that what is being posted or how the person is using the site is harmful. This can be done from your Timeline, from a message someone sent you, or on your News Feed. You can report posts on your Timeline, posts that you were tagged in, or private messages. You can also report a photo, with

or without a tag of you. For quick instructions on how to report certain types of content, visit: [www.facebook.com/report](https://www.facebook.com/report)

For more general information about how to report something to Facebook, visit: <https://www.facebook.com/help/reportviolation>. When using the reporting option, you also have the choice of communicating with the person who posted the content to ask them to remove or edit the content and to inform another trusted person of the content you are concerned about. If the content violates Facebook's Terms of Service, it may be removed.

Facebook also has Community Standards and will remove content if it contains violence or threats, bullying or harassment, hate speech, sexual violence and exploitation, or impersonation. Visit this link: <https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards> for a full list of Facebook's Community Standards and more information on how they define harassment and threats.

It's important to note that if a survivor is interested in preserving evidence of any harassment, threats, or other behaviors on Facebook, they should take a screenshot of the activity or use the DYI tool to save it before submitting a report requesting for it to be taken down. Once removed, the content will not be accessible again.

**A booklet** with all of this information is attached, if you want to download it.

**If you need legal assistance, please call 1-800-723-6953 or apply online here.**

 [NNEDV FB Guide for Survivors.pdf](#)

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<http://www.kansaslegalservices.org/node/2244/privacy-and-safety-facebook-survivors-abuse>

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