With more people being home due to social distancing, watching videos on YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, and more means that we can access fun as well as informational content like never before. While video content on these platforms can open doors to new information and resources, survivors of violence should be aware of the related risks that come with watching videos in these spaces.

Here are some considerations for survivors around watching, interacting with, or sharing videos.

1. **Delete browsing history.**

Web browsers on computers and mobile devices often store and save information about the sites you’ve visited and the videos you have watched. If you think your computer, tablet, or phone is being monitored, be thoughtful about deleting your browsing history because it can reveal the sites you visit and may identify what you have viewed. Periodically delete history, cookies, temporary Internet files, saved forms, and passwords from your web browser. Note, if deleting all files and/or browser history consider only deleting the site or file you don’t want discovered if safe.

You may also consider using browsers and search engines that are built with privacy in mind. Privacy forward browsers that do not track your activities, and work to keep other third parties like advertisers from tracking your activities include Firefox, Epic, Tor, and Brave, and privacy forward search engines include Startpage, DuckDuck, and Swisscows.

2. **Use private browsing, when safe.**

When searching for videos, or looking at videos that you want to keep private, you may also want to consider using an Incognito/In-Private Browser. Private browser windows keep history and cookies from being stored once the window is closed. Any accounts you are logged into in the regular browser window will not be logged into in the private window.
Using these private browsing options can limit what data is tracked and stored. It is important to note that the websites you visit may still be visible if you don’t close the window once you are done viewing. Visit our handout on Internet Browsing Privacy Tips to learn more. Use our Online Privacy and Safety Tips for more information.

3. Log out of accounts.

Some video-focused social media platforms give you the option of creating an account. Accounts you create or are logged into often store information on videos you have searched for and viewed. The platforms will often make suggestions about future videos you may want to watch based on that history. If you want to keep that information out of your account so that others can’t access it, or prevent someone else who uses your account from seeing potentially private information about you, you can view videos without logging into your account. Likewise, these accounts, such as YouTube or TikTok may be linked to other accounts on your phone such as your Google or iTunes account. This could lead to private information being shared and backed up in other accounts.

4. Beware of the comments.

Many times, video sharing services such as TikTok, YouTube, or Vimeo may allow users to post comments under videos. If you choose to share a comment for a video, viewers may view or access your username and profile. If you have concerns about this, be mindful of what videos you comment on. While many times comments can be empowering, some users will use comments to troll, attack and harass others. Take caution when posting comments, and learn about the site's policies for reporting harassing behavior.

5. Consider using a safer device.

If you think that someone is monitoring your computer, tablet, or mobile device, try using a different device or using a different browser that the person hasn’t had physical or remote access to in the past, and doesn’t have access to now (like a computer at a library or a friend’s phone). This can be one option for video viewing that cannot be monitored by that person.
6. Check privacy and account settings.

Every platform has privacy and account settings that give users the ability to lock down their accounts to viewers, limit the types of videos that are shown, and provide ways to increase password or account security. Some platforms offer many different options for securing and ensuring privacy settings are fully engaged while others offer limited options for security. When using YouTube, Vimeo, or any other video sharing site, ensure that your settings are secured to your desired level, and check these settings frequently. If you don’t know how to find these settings, use a search engine to search for the account, privacy, or security settings on your desired platform.

7. Trust your instincts.

Abusers, stalkers, and perpetrators are often very determined to maintain control over their victims, and technology is one of many tools they use to do this. If it seems like the person knows too much about you, they could be getting that information from a variety of sources, like monitoring your devices, accessing your online accounts, tracking your location, or gathering information about you online.

For more strategies and tips on online accounts, browsing safely, and using the internet, the Tech Safety Blog has helpful information for survivors around technology use.
We update our materials frequently. Please visit TechSafety.org for the latest version of this and other materials.