

# How to Protect Your Privacy on Facebook: A Step-by-Step Guide

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When you sign up as a user of Facebook, the default settings allow all other Facebook users to find you in searches. However, only those you have confirmed as friends or who share a network with you have access to your full profile. By default, your name and thumbnail profile picture can also be found on public search engines. Facebook has selected these settings based on what it believes most users want, but you can always change them to restrict access to your information, as you see fit. Therefore, you can change the default settings to restrict access to your profile. Under the current setting, only your friends, their friends, and the people on your networks can see your profile. If you download Facebook Platform third-party applications into your profile, some of your information may be shared (see section on “**Applications**” below). It is important to explore these default settings, to adjust the privacy settings to those with which you are comfortable.

**It's easy to change the default settings.** Once you sign in, click on “**Settings**” at the top of the screen toward the right, (just to the left of the Search bar), and then choose “**Privacy Settings**” from the drop-down menu. The Privacy menu has four categories in which you can determine the degree of privacy you would like. You can click on each heading to access the page on which you can make your changes. Privacy settings can be customized to exclude or include specific friends or lists of friends. Remember to click on “**Save Changes**” before exiting the page. (**Note: Review your privacy settings if you change regional networks.** The settings will change back to the default: all members of that network will be able to see your full profile. It is important to be aware of this, and adjust your privacy settings if this is not what you want. It is a wise practice to check your privacy settings whenever you add anything or make changes to your profile.)

**Profile:** This page contains two tabs, each with numerous individual controls for who can see aspects of your profile. On the Basic tab are controls for your entire profile, and individual features of your profile: Basic Information (which includes Gender, Birthday, Hometown, Political and Religious Views, and Relationship Status), Personal Information (which includes your Interests, Activities, Favorites and your About Me section), photos and videos tagged of you, status updates, friends, wall, education and work information. On the Contact Information tab, you can tailor permissions for IM Screen Name, Mobile Phone, Phone, Current Address, Website and Email Address (if in fact you provided these details for your profile).

- To limit viewing of Profile information to only your Facebook friends, select “**Only Friends**” in each drop-down menu. If you wish to limit viewing to certain segregated lists of friends that you can set up on your main Friends page, or just to individual friends, or to exclude certain individuals and networks, choose “**Customize**” in the drop-down menus and adjust the settings accordingly.

**Search:** You can control which Facebook users can find you in searches and what appears in your search listing within the site; you can prevent yourself from being suggested as a prospective friend to other Facebook users in the “**People You May Know**” feature; you can also control whether you are searchable by anyone on public search engines. Within Facebook, you can restrict which networks have access to your profile in searches and what actions people can take with your search results, such as contacting you or adding you as a friend.

- To be searchable within Facebook **only** by your Facebook friends, select “**Only Friends**” in the Search Visibility drop-down menu and leave the first set of checkboxes below the drop-down menu (the ones starting with “In addition...”) blank.
- “**Only Friends**” also works to prevent your being presented as a prospective friend to other Facebook users. If you are available in Search to someone (for example, “Friends of Friends,” “My Networks and Friends of Friends,” or “Everyone”) you may appear in their “**People You May Know**” section. You will also not be presented as a potential friend to anyone you have “x-ed out” of “**People You May Know.**”
- To avoid being searchable on public search engines (Yahoo, Google, etc.), if you have selected “**Everyone**” in the Search Visibility drop-down menu, simply uncheck the box next to “**Create a public search listing for me.**” Unchecking this box also makes basic information about you (your name, networks, profile picture and friend list) unavailable to Facebook Platform applications.

**News Feed and Wall:** This page has two tabs. On the “**Actions within Facebook**” tab, you can control what activities result in stories showing up automatically on your Wall and your friends’ News Feeds.

- “Uncheck” any actions that you do not want your friends to know about automatically, such as when you make a comment on a posted item or add a friend.

On the “**Social Ads**” tab, you can opt out of your information (and photos) being used for ads targeted at your friends by choosing “**No One**” in the drop-down menu.

**Applications:** You can place *some* controls on the information available to applications on your account, including those built using the Facebook Platform. Third-party applications, however, may have their own privacy policies and user controls that prevail over your Facebook settings. As stated in Facebook’s Terms of Use,

these **applications are used at your own risk**. You can learn more about applications by reading the **“Overview”** tab in this section.

- Under the **“Settings”** tab, you can set controls for any applications installed by your friends, and a general opt-out from any information being shared through the Facebook Platform. For maximum privacy protection, you can check off **“Do not share any information about me through the Facebook API.”** Please note that this option will automatically switch off if you download **any** third-party applications or use your Facebook log-on and password to sign up on an external website with Facebook Connect. **In other words, downloading applications means that information about you may be shared in ways you cannot control.**
- This page lists any applications you have blocked, and is where you can unblock them. You can also keep track of friends whose application invitations you ignore on this page.
- The **“Beacon Websites”** checkbox lets you opt out of having certain external websites post stories to your Wall and your friends’ News Feeds about your activities on those sites. You can essentially opt-out by going to the **“Settings”** tab on the Applications privacy page and under **“Beacon Websites”** check the box **“Don’t allow Beacon website to post stories to my profile”**. Checking this box will ensure that no Beacon site ever publishes a story to your profile.
- To view a summary and to change your own Application permissions, click on the **“Applications”** button in the bottom-left corner of any of your Facebook pages, then click on **“Edit”** in the pop-up window. In the chart displayed, each application has its own **“Edit Settings”** option available. This brings up a selection of choices about permissions to publish stories on your Wall about your activities on the application or Facebook Connect external website. For maximum privacy, select **“Never publish any stories from...”**

**In addition**, the Privacy Overview page offers the option of blocking specific people from viewing your profile. Under **“Settings”** from any Facebook page choose **“Privacy”** from the drop-down menu to access the **“Block People”** prompt.

**Elsewhere on Facebook**, you can control who can see notes you have written and photos you have posted, and manage the visibility of your online status.

- Within **“Notes”**, click on either the **“My Notes”** or **“Notes About Me”** tab and click on the **“Edit Notes Privacy”** link under the Notes Settings heading on the right side of the page. The drop-down menu has the same options as those for Profile components explained above. You can also establish settings for who can comment on and subscribe to your notes.
- Within **“Photos”**, click on **“Album Privacy”** to adjust drop-down menus for each album, in the same manner as the Profile components explained above.

- To adjust your online status setting, click inside the small Chat box that contains a silhouetted head and shoulders in the bottom right corner of your Profile page. A small pop-up menu will appear including a row with a statement of your online status. You can click to appear offline (represented by a red dot) even if you are online. If your status is shown as online (green dot), your friends who investigate this feature can discover that you are online. This feature is intended to facilitate chat.

### To report an impostor profile on Facebook:

- From any Facebook page, go to the Privacy Help Page in the Help Center. One way to get to the Privacy Help Page is to click on the “**Help**” or “**Privacy**” link in the bottom right-hand corner. In the Privacy Questions and Answers, Abuse section, click on “**I need to report an impostor profile**”. To complete the email form, the following information is requested: your contact email address; URL of the profile you would like to report; the full name of the person you would like to report; Networks the profile belongs to; the email address listed for the profile; and a description of the issue.
- You can also get to a general Contact Us form by clicking on “**Help**”, then “**Security**”, then “**How Do I Report Abuse**”, and finally “**My Question is Not Listed**”. Complete the email form, specifying that you are reporting an impostor profile.

## Additional IPC Resources



### ***When Online Gets Out of Line – Privacy: Make an Informed Online Choice***

This brochure encourages university, college and high school students to carefully consider their privacy options.



### ***Be a Player: Take Control of Your Privacy on Facebook***

In this video, Commissioner Cavoukian discusses privacy and security issues with regards to online social networking.