



If I post my family tree online, can my identity be stolen?

A If you're smart about it, creating an online family tree won't invite cybercriminals to your door. To protect you and your family's privacy, it's a good idea to omit or partially hide family tree information about the living (including yourself) when posting your genealogy online. Most genealogy software programs offer this option when you export a GEDCOM file or web page. In Family Tree Maker, for example, after you choose File>Export and select a file format, you get the option to Privatize Living

People. If you check this box, no facts about anyone alive will be exported, and their first names will be changed to "Living."

Of course, you should never post your Social Security number online. You might think twice, too, about posting your birth date, which can help identity thieves pretend to be you. It's likely, however, that your birth date is already "out there" somewhere from public records, and could easily be found using searches such as those on <www.stevemorse.org>.

The other tidbit of potential interest to identity thieves is your mother's maiden name. Rather than hide this information—potentially crippling the usefulness of your online tree—make your security questions with financial institutions more difficult to guess. Experts suggest choosing security questions that would be impossible for a stranger to know, such as the location of your first date with your spouse or the last name of your fifth grade teacher. To learn more about preventing identity theft, see <www.onguardonline.gov>.