



Essential Question: What's the difference between Internet friends and real-life, face-to-face pals?

Learning Overview and Objectives

Overview: Students learn that the Internet is a great place to develop rewarding online relationships. But they also learn to be cautious and to never reveal private information to a person they know only online without asking their parent or a trusted adult for permission.

Students discuss the difference between online and real-life friendships, explore an online chat scenario, and complete and sign a checklist for safe online chatting.

objectives

Students will:

- Compare and contrast online friends and real-life, face-to-face pals
- Understand that private information should not be given to anyone online without the permission of a trusted adult
- Learn how to respond if an online friend asks them personal questions

Materials and Preparation

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Materials

- **The Right Answer Student Handout**
- **Chatting Safety Checklist Student Handout**
- Chalkboard or white board

Preparation

- Copy **The Right Answer Student Handout**, one for every student
- Copy the **Chatting Safety Checklist Student Handout**, one for every student

Parent Resources

- Send parents the **Talking Safely Online Parent Tip Sheet**

Key Vocabulary

- **Uncomfortable:** Anxious; uneasy
- **Monitor (noun):** Someone who closely observes and controls a situation, like a referee
- **Monitor (verb):** To observe closely



teaching plans

Introduce

INVITE students to share their experiences chatting online, instant messaging, and posting on message boards. Explain that sometimes kids might chat online with people they have never met face to face.

CHALLENGE students to explain the differences between messaging with friends they know from school and people they have never met face to face.

EXPLAIN that kids sometimes have what seems to be a close relationship with an online friend, but they cannot possibly know a person online as well as they know a face-to-face friend.

ASK *Can you ever really know if an online-only friend is male or female?*

ASK *Can you know for sure how old an online-only friend is?*

EXPLAIN that the answer is NO – you can't know for sure. So kids should talk to online friends with caution, and not reveal personal information that could put them in danger in any way. Never give online-only friends private information about yourself, such as your address or phone number, without first asking permission from a parent or guardian.

Teach 1: You're in Charge

DISTRIBUTE *The Right Answer Student Handout.*

HAVE students read the scenario about Sita and CJcool11 and then answer the handout questions individually. Note that they will refer back to this handout in Teach 4.

Teach 2: Friends and Strangers

ASK *Why may it be easier to share school problems with an online friend than a real-life, face-to-face pal?* (It may be easier because online-only friends are not from school, so they might be able to see both sides of an issue, and they don't have to worry about what the other kids in school will think.)

REMIND students that they can't know for sure that an online friend is really a kid or someone they can trust. Make sure they know it's easy to hide your real identity when you're online.

ASK *Have you ever pretended to be someone you are not? If so, when?* (Answers may include Halloween, school plays, jokes.)

EXPLAIN to students that online friends might sometimes pretend too. They might not really be who you think they are. That's why it's important to never share private information about yourself with online friends without asking your parent or guardian first. You wouldn't give private information to a stranger without asking, and it's important to treat online friends the same way. (If students ask why, you can explain: *There are criminals who trick people into giving out private information about others. Then they use that private information to pretend to be them. They might even pretend to be them in order to steal their money. This is called identity theft. Giving out certain pieces of information to strangers can also let them know where you are located. This could be dangerous.*)



NOTE: The latest research indicates that pre-adolescent children are generally not the targets of online predators, and that the news media-driven idea that predators piece together private identity information to abduct a child is not supported. In this lesson we discuss the safety risks associated with giving out our personal information online, but we also address the risk of identity theft. It is never too early for children to learn about identity theft. Children are often targeted because they usually have clean credit histories and their parents are unlikely to be alert for signs that someone is using their child's identity. Children who learn about identity theft can also help protect their parents' identities online.

Teach 3: Stay Safe

ASK *What's private information?* (Answers may include address, phone number, passwords, etc.)

EXPLAIN that private information includes (write the following on the board):

- full name
- street address
- name of school
- school address
- email address
- phone numbers
- passwords
- calling card number
- mother's maiden name
- parent's place of work
- photos in which you can be recognized

REMINDE students that if an online friend asks for any of that information, they should tell a trusted adult.

DISCUSS with students that the best way to talk safely to online friends is on a website that's just for kids. Most of these sites have adult monitors that check the chat and messaging. A monitor is like a referee at a game. Monitors keep track of the chat to make sure that everyone keeps the chat on topic, uses good manners, and stays safe.

Teach 4: Check it Out

DISTRIBUTE the **Chatting Safety Checklist Student Handout**.

HAVE students read, discuss, complete, and sign the checklist.

HAVE students revisit their responses to **The Right Answer Student Handout**.

ASK *Would you change your advice to Sita? If so, how?*

DISCUSS possible answers with students. Point out that Sita and CJcool11 are online friends, not real-life, face-to-face pals. It is okay to talk with online friends. You can have very good talks with them, and share ideas and



Talking Safely Online

feelings that you might not share with friends at school. But you should never share private information about yourself without first asking your parent or a trusted adult, and you shouldn't answer questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

EXPLAIN that when Sita's online friend asks her "Where is your school?" she could answer, "I'd rather not say," or "That's private. Let's not go there." Point out that Sita doesn't have to answer at all. She can just log out of the messaging service or website, or block the person who is asking the questions.

REMIND kids that when people persist in asking any question that makes them feel uncomfortable, they can ask a trusted adult to help them report these people to the website owners.

Wrap Up and Assess

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives.

ASK

- *How are online friends and real-life, face-to-face friends different?* (Even when you share personal thoughts with an online friend, this person is as much a stranger as someone you meet on the street for the first time. You know face-to-face friends much better. Just seeing them in school or around your neighborhood gives you a lot of information about them.)
- *What should you do when an online friend asks for private information?* (Never give out private information without first asking the permission of a parent or guardian.)

REVIEW with students that they can have rewarding chats with online friends, but they should be as careful with online friends as they are with real-life strangers.



Extension Activity

Have kids find kid-friendly websites that have monitors in their chat areas. Ask them to visit three of these websites and observe the chatting that is occurring. Ask them to reflect on whether anyone is revealing personal information. They should report back to the class and think about ways websites could teach kids not to reveal this information.

Alignment with Standards – National Educational Technology Standards for Students® 2007

(Source: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007)

2. Communication and Collaboration

- b. communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats

5. Digital Citizenship

- a. advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology



Chatting Safety Checklist

Name _____

Class _____

Date _____

You're ready to chat or talk with others online when you can check that each statement about you is true.

- My parents say it's okay for me to chat and message online.
- I will only chat and message on kids' websites that have monitors – people who review what is being said.
- I will check in with a trusted adult before replying to, clicking on a link from, or IMing someone who is not a face-to-face friend.
- I will pick chat and messaging screen names that do not include private identity information.
- I know what kinds of information are private.
- I will not give out private information when talking online.
- I will not answer questions that make me uncomfortable.
- I will leave the site and tell a trusted adult if someone bothers me online.
- I will never meet someone in person who I first met online without bringing a parent or guardian with me.

Signature _____

Date _____

Use Common Sense!

Remember not to share these types of private information:

- Full name
- Street address
- Name of school
- School address
- Email address
- Phone numbers
- Passwords
- Cell phone number
- Mother's maiden name
- Parent's place of work
- Photos in which you can be recognized



The Right Answer

Name _____

Class _____

Date _____

Sita likes to visit a website where kids can post messages about school, their favorite TV shows, and current events. She really likes the kid who uses the screen name CJcool11. When Sita shares a problem she has at school, CJcool11 always has good ideas for handling the problem. Even though she has never met CJcool11 in person, Sita thinks of CJcool11 as a friend.

One day, while messaging, CJcool11 and Sita compare their two schools.

Sita types, “My school principal is so strict. We have to walk through the halls in straight lines!”

CJcool11 answers, “My school isn’t so strict. What’s the name of your school?”

This question gives Sita a bad feeling. Sita feels uncomfortable about giving that information to CJcool11.

She types back, “Uh, my school’s name is too hard to spell.”

CJcool11 types, “So where is your school?”

Why do you think Sita gets a bad feeling when CJcool11 asks for the name of her school?

What should Sita answer?

What makes this answer a good one?

Use Common Sense!

If things get creepy or uncomfortable when you’re chatting online, take action.

- Log out of the website or messaging service
- Tell a parent or trusted adult
- Ignore the person, or block that person from chatting with you



Lesson Assessment

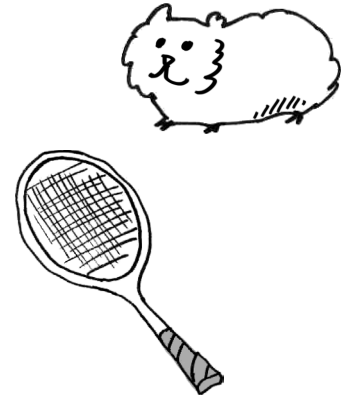
Name _____

Class _____

Date _____

1. You should never tell online friends or online strangers private information without the permission of a trusted adult. Circle the examples of private information below.

- a) Your full name
- b) Sports you like
- c) Your email address
- d) Your street address
- e) The name of your pet
- f) The place you went on vacation



2. Sally is talking with Steven62, her online friend. Steven62 asks, “Is Sally your real name? What’s your last name?” Sally feels uncomfortable. She:

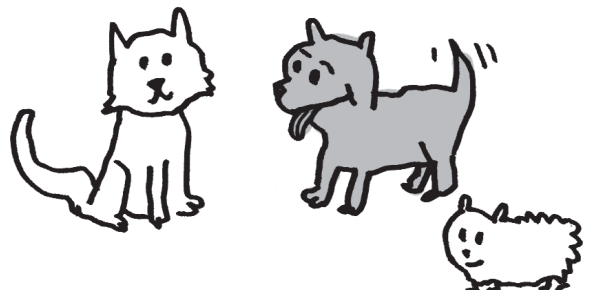
- a) Should tell Steven62 the truth
- b) Should lie and say her real name is Susie Roberts
- c) Should not tell her name, and she should go tell a trusted adult
- d) Should tell Steven62 her real name only if he tells her his real name



3. Read the scenario below and then choose the best answer.

True or False: Lila has an online friend name Clara. Clara asks what Lila’s favorite animal is. She also asks what her favorite color is. Lila shouldn’t answer Clara because this is private information.

- a) True
- b) False





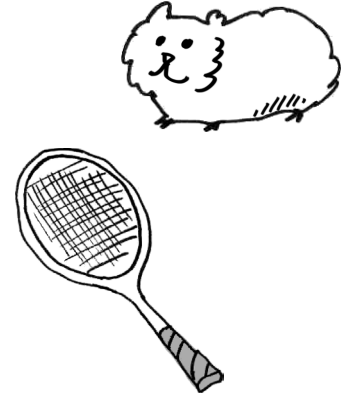
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- a) Your full name
- b) Sports you like
- c) Your email address
- d) Your street address
- e) The name of your pet
- f) The place you went on vacation

Answer feedback

The correct answers are **a**, **c**, and **d**. Your full name, your email address, and your street address are all examples of private information. You should never tell these things to online friends or online strangers without the permission of a trusted adult.



2. Sally is talking with Steven62, her online friend. Steven62 asks, “Is Sally your real name? What’s your last name?” Sally feels uncomfortable. She:

- a) Should tell Steven62 the truth
- b) Should lie and say her real name is Susie Roberts
- c) Should not tell her name, and she should go tell a trusted adult
- d) Should tell Steven62 her real name only if he tells her his real name

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **c**. Sally should not tell her real name, and she should then tell a trusted adult. Never ignore your feelings when something makes you feel uncomfortable. It’s probably a sign that something is wrong.



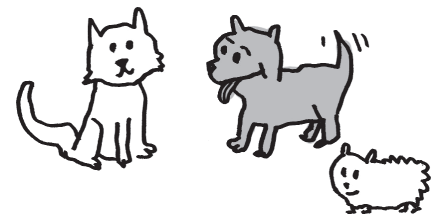
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True or False: Lila has an online friend name Clara. Clara asks what Lila’s favorite animal is. She also asks what her favorite color is. Lila shouldn’t answer Clara because this is private information.

- a) True
- b) False

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **b. False**. You should always talk to online friends with caution, but it’s okay to share some information with an online friend. Your favorite animal and favorite color is not private information.





Common Sense on Talking Safely Online

Some Facts

- Nearly three out of four parents of kids ages 2 to 17 who use the Internet at home say they know “a lot” about what their kids are doing online (National Survey, Kaiser Family Foundation, 2007)
- Most online sexual solicitations occur between teens and other teens or young adults, not between older adults and children (Internet Safety Technical Task Force, 2009)
- 40 percent of children ages 6 to 14 said they would like to see more involvement from their parents when they are using technology (Learning in the Family Report, 2009)

What’s the Issue?

Kids love connecting with others online. Most young people talk online with their friends and family only. However, as a parent, you might be concerned that a stranger with bad intentions could contact your child. The media encourage parents to beware of “online predators,” but experts have found the common fear of sex offenders hiding behind fake identities online to lure children is overblown.

Parents and teachers who focus too heavily on “predator” prevention may overlook a broader, more common issue facing children online: inappropriate online talk. You should be aware that children of all ages may find themselves in awkward or uncomfortable situations with others online – whether it be friends, acquaintances, or strangers. For example, kids in virtual worlds may test the boundaries of chat filters and experiment with adult topics or perhaps even mean-spirited language. Help kids understand that inappropriate online talk – such as discussing private topics with people you and they don’t know in person – is never okay. By stressing this, you can help them avoid a wide range of unwanted contact, or help them handle it if it does occur.

Why It Matters

Teaching your child to recognize when they feel uncomfortable or manipulated online is crucial to keeping your child safe. With young children, it is best if you are present when they are online. At this age, you may even choose to block your kids from talking online, or create rules for them to follow about whom they can talk to. For older elementary school children, you may choose to give them more freedom after first discussing how to avoid risky online talk.

common sense says

Spend time with your child online. The best way to understand what your kids are doing online is to spend some time with them while they are visiting their favorite sites. Have them explain what they like about these sites, and what they don’t. If the site allows for online messaging, have them show you how it works.



Common Sense on Talking Safely Online

Set guidelines. Help your kids understand that they should:

- Never share their names, schools, ages, phone numbers, or addresses online
- Never send pictures to people they don't know
- Keep passwords private (except to parents)

Block, ignore, or leave. Most kids know to brush off unwanted or inappropriate contact. So encourage kids to recognize any conversation that makes them feel uncomfortable and then promptly end it.

Talk to your kids about peer pressure. Young people who develop risky online relationships may have a hard time knowing when a friendship becomes unhealthy. Discuss with your child why it's not okay for people to pressure or manipulate others, and how to recognize when something is unsettling or doesn't feel quite right.

Be supportive. If something creepy, inappropriate, or upsetting does happen online, kids need to know that they won't get into trouble if they confide in you. It's not always easy for children to ask for help when they feel embarrassed or confused. So let them know you want them to feel free to talk, and that you are there to support them no matter what.