



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 **Safe Online Talk for Elementary Students 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

REMIND 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



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

Common Sense Media is an independent, nonprofit resource that helps families and educators teach kids how to be safe and smart in today's 24/7 media world. Go to www.commonsensemedia.org for thousands of reviews and expert advice.