

Operation250 Lesson Plan Series

Title: Online Risks & Staying Safe from Them

Age/Grade: 7th-8th grade

Length: 35-40 minutes

In this lesson, students will:

- Be able to identify the risky behaviors online
- Know the differences between positive and negative behaviors online
- Be able to define, generally, online disinhibition
- Be able to identify disinhibited behavior online
- Be able to identify risks and hazard on the internet
- Understand the differences between online and offline environments

Overview:

If you put 100 7th-8th graders into a room, some estimations suggest about 95 of them have access to a smart phone. From age 13-17, about 72% of youth use Instagram, 69% use Snapchat, and 32% use Twitter. In 2020, 37.2% of TikTok's users are between the age of 10-19 – that's 37.3% of 800 million users. Simply put, youth are on social media and many of them are on social media A LOT. That might not be a surprise, however social media and risky, unsafe online behavior have a relationship that is important to be familiar with. Whether it is the student themselves being more unsafe online, being vulnerable to other things that are threatening, or someone being willing to be more threatening to others online – teaching about these threats and risks is become more and more important in today's digital age. This lesson delves into online risks and the psychological inductions that can cause higher risk taking and poor decision making.

This lesson seeks to address to following questions:

- What are the risky behaviors we exhibit or are presented to us online?
- What is online disinhibition?
- What role does online disinhibition play in our behavior?
- What are proper courses of action to remain safe of risks and hazards?

Materials:

- 4 Case Studies

Checkpoints:

Activity: Anonymity

Discussion: Debrief

Activity: Threats Online

Discussion: Review of Threats & Points of Risk

Closing

Activity: Anonymity

5 minutes

Ask the students to put their heads down on their desk and to close their eyes. Explain to them that you are going to say a series of statements for them to listen to. When they hear the statement, they are to raise their hands, still with their heads down and eyes closed, if they agree with the statement. As you make the statements, keep a tally of the hands that raise for each. You are going to discuss this next step. The statements are as followed:

- Social media makes me feel better about myself.
- Social media has a negative impact on friendships and relationships more than a positive one.
- I have witnessed bullying over texting or some form of social media communication.
- I have witness something hateful online before.
- It is easier to tell someone I like them or love them online than offline for the first time.
- I feel like I can tell *my opinion* more comfortably online.
- I am more comfortable googling something weird, taboo, and potentially dangerous than asking someone like my parents or a teacher about it.

Discussion: Debrief

8-10 minutes

Once the students have raised their heads, ask them to look at the numbers on the board and digest the results of them raising their hands. Make clear to them that they do not need to suggest what they raised their hands for. The discussion that is to follow is very dependent on the outcome of the previous activity, however a very safe way to start the discussion is by opening the floor to comments or questions about what they see for results on the board. The students will often bring up something that they found relatively difficult to answer or that they notice one statement has everybody or nobody raise their hands for.

While the dependence of the activity makes it difficult to prepare for, it can be largely useful to focus on the concepts of each statement, rather than the specifics of how people answered. It is most likely that the students' behavior more comfortably online than they do offline. Ask if they are surprised by this and what they think it means? Do we feel more comfortable online?

Bring the students to the idea of online disinhibition through this discussion more generally. What you want the students to identify is that we all tend to be more comfortable online and the potential

risks that can come from this. Ask the students if there can come any risks of this? What are they? Cyberbullying? Talking to people online that we might not be too comfortable with otherwise? Reading/watching something we wouldn't tell anyone about? Once the students begin to grasp at the fact that they are taking more chances and maybe being a little more deviant online, talk about online disinhibition and the process they undergo. Do you think you'd be able to identify a risk even when you're disinhibited?

Ask the students what defines a risk online? Is their own behavior a risk? What are some risks that our own behavior can cause? What are risks that our behavior can put us into? This is where the next activity leads in.

Activity: Threats Online

10 minutes

Break the students up amongst 4 groups. These might be groups of 2, they might be groups of 5, however having 4 groups for this activity is best for optimizing the threats and situations that they students are able to tackle. Handout a case study to each of the groups. Each case study for the 4 groups highlights its own threat on social media. They are:

- Cyberbullying
- Cyberhate on YouTube
- Grooming
- Invisibility

There is a wide range of these threats mentioned here, and that is to give the widest variety of understanding to the students about the potential threats that exist on the platforms they are using each and every day. These cases have been built by Operation250 and are not real cases, but rather mimic or reflect the key elements to cases that have happened to individuals not too dissimilar in age to these students.

Explain to the students to work amongst their groups to identify: 1. Online risks, 2. Unsafe decisions that the youth made, 3. Would this have happened offline? 4. Where should the person have stopped and what should the proper action have been?

Discussion: Review of threats & Points of risk

10 minutes

Once the students have completed going through the cases, go to each group and ask them to briefly explain what is happening in their case and to answer the four questions they were tasked to answer. As the students are going through each case, write some of the answers on the board for the class to be able to reflect on and refer to. As they go throughout the case, be sure to have the teacher copy of each case to look at with the teacher questions noted throughout the cases. Ask the students these questions throughout to ensure they are identifying the takeaways you are aiming for

them to identify. Once all of the groups have finished, complete this step of the lesson by asking them what the similarities are between the examples – even though some of them are highly unsafe and extreme examples, and the others are more mundane and – possibly – views as less risky. You want the students to recognize that similar behaviors can create many different outcomes and risks, many of which might be considered not dangerous, while they can also present to be highly unsafe.

Closing

3-5 minutes

With the completion of the previous activity, bring the students back together for a closing. Begin the discussion by asking if anyone's feelings about the internet have changed and in what ways? You want to make sure that the students recognize that the internet is a positive thing, and that we can act more positively online than we would offline as well. Use the example of telling someone you *like* that you like them over text instead of telling them in person. This is call benign disinhibition, and it is entirely normal.

Now briefly refer back to the notes you wrote on the board from the activity and ask them to write down one difference between these examples and what happens in real life. It is okay if you just ask this as a discussion question, however you want them to understand the difference between online and offline environments and the changes we can undergo. Again, make clear that the environments are different and that is a natural and expected truth – however you want them to be able to identify these differences outright.

To close, mention the importance of being aware online and refer back to some of the proper courses of action mentioned in the previous activity. You want the students to understand that being aware is one thing, but taking action is immensely important. What are some potential rules they can set for themselves in order to remain safe from themselves and others? Close on this question and tie up any questions or comments made by the students.

Case Study

Ethan is in 9th grade at a medium-sized high school outside of Albany, New York. Ethan is active in the school, being part of both the student council and the school band. He has a big group of friends who are all part of the different clubs and sports teams and they often all get together whether being at the bowling alley or online gaming.

While Ethan and his friends were bowling one day, they were sharing the things they had heard about their classmates, conversations they were having with their girlfriends, and joking about how bad some of the sports teams were in the school. Ethan thought it would be cool if there was a way for all of them to share this together in one place online so that they don't have to wait weeks between hangouts.

Is this a risk?

Ethan that night decided to start a new Instagram page that was meant to be private between him and his friends. He shared the login with all of his friends, and everyone had the opportunity to post news, comments, conversations, memes, and pictures onto the page.

While this started as a harmless place for everyone to post inside jokes, it started to become more hostile. More people started to follow the private page but were not allowed to post. Ethan and his friends started to post content that was directed at specific classmates. iMessage conversations, screenshotted snapchats, and people's photos started to get shared on the page with the intent of making fun of those people.

The boys then started to do weekly rankings of "hot" and "not" lists; they would post photos of the sports team's scoreboards after losses making fun of the players; they'd also post any photos that were DM'd to the account that they found funny.

Soon enough, while private, the account's following grew and it was not as "secretive" and "exclusive" as Ethan thought it was going to be. After one of the followers was bullied in a photo, the student decided to share the account with their parents and the school. The next day at school, Ethan was brought into the office by the Principal and Dean of Students and his parents were there. He admitted to being the one that started the account and they went through each picture to see who was involved in sending them, which he told.

Not only was everyone involved kicked off of all teams and clubs they were apart of, but they were all suspended from school as well. It was also brought to their attention that their account was named as a big reason that multiple students have either changed schools or have stopped coming because of the backlash they caused for sharing private information.

Teacher Notes

Highlighted sections are the risks or example of poor online behavior. Would this have happened offline? Probably not to the magnitude that it did online. It is not okay to say and do the things they were doing online, offline, however the online element magnified it all. This should never have happened in the first place. Ethan should have never started the account and those who saw it should have stepped in to stop it before someone finally did.

Case Study

Make sure the students know this is fine.

Wesley is an avid gamer. Whenever he is home, he is either playing PUBG, watching YouTube videos about how to get better at the game, or watching Twitch streams of some of the best in the world play. While his parents don't love that he is playing all day, they are happy that he is passionate about something and they feel it is keeping him out of trouble.

He has a few friends at school, and they are all equally passionate about gaming. His friends Dontae and Kaleb are part of his squad whenever they play PUBG online and they spend hours attempting to get better. On occasions they will let others play on their squad but never more than just for a game or two.

Is this a risk?

After a long run of poor play, Wesley signed off and turned on YouTube to try and see what he could learn from some of the channels that he follows. He started with a couple of channels that he trusted and then started to follow a rabbit hole of other content generators about playing PUBG and the community that surrounds it.

After clicking on just a few suggested videos, he was watching content that was less game oriented and more specific to gaming culture and those who are holding it down. The first video he watched pegged all women as being oppressive of men and what they are interested in doing. It discussed how women don't want men to game because if men did, that men would realize that it makes them happier and women would no longer be needed in a man's life. This video interested Wesley and he followed the page because he found it convincing.

The next videos he started was on the same YouTube channel but with a different YouTuber. This person talks about the race wars aligned within gaming culture. The YouTuber outlined how all black people were intruding on "white culture", gaming being part of that culture. Wesley finished the video and he turned it off for the night, but he continued to think about it. Every night for the next few weeks, he started to play less and less with his friends and kept watching the videos to learn more.

After a while of watching, Wesley started to act out toward his friend Dontae, who is black. He started to question why he was playing games with him and asking, "are you trying to be white?" This hostility continued, as he started to act out toward the girls in his class and his own mother as well whenever she suggested he stop playing games. Wesley quickly lost many of his friends and looked into starting his own YouTube channel with the hopes of achieving what he had been watching.

Teacher Notes

Yellow highlighted sections are the risks or example of unsafe decisions and risky online behavior. There are multiple decisions and points of risk in this case. Wesley is falling down a rabbit hole and believing everything that he is watching and listening to. This would not be happening offline, as the YouTube algorithm is a big factor in leading him to that content, and his own behavior kept him from pulling himself out of it. He should have stopped watching the videos, asked a trusted adult about them, and report the channels.

Case Study

Is this risky? Talking with people online can have many benefits, but the way we talk to them is what determines the risk.

A group of 12-14 year old boys, who were school friends, often played PUBG on Xbox Live. Along with the 12-14 year olds, they met another person named "Archie." Archie claimed to be in his early twenties and was a self-proclaimed 'programming wiz' who worked for the U.S. government. He met the boys through Xbox and quickly became friends with them. The boys were very fond of Archie and they admired him as he often gave them advice on friends, school, and how they could improve their gaming.

With time, Archie became very close to the boys, especially one boy named Colin. Colin was 13 years old when he met Archie and looked up to him greatly as he one day also wanted to become a computer programmer and design websites. Colin was a very active, outgoing, and popular individual who loved to play soccer and was a leader in his middle school's junior military program.

Soon, Archie and Colin started to become closer to each other and they spent less time gaming with the rest of the group. Archie told Colin that he was more advanced than the others and could benefit from being taught how to work with computers by Archie. Their friendship began to grow, and Colin was only spending time and speaking with Archie when he was online. Archie was a professional programmer and told Colin that he wanted him to start a new website about their gaming.

Archie told Colin that they needed to communicate about the new website offline as well, so he sent him a private phone. Colin used this new phone as his primary way of contacting Archie and was not worried about the relationship because he had known Archie for so long (almost a year at this point). Eventually, Archie told Colin that they had to meet in person so they could start working together on the website. Archie told Colin that he would send an Uber to him after school and that he would be back home before his parents got back home at 7PM.

When Colin arrived at Archie's apartment, Archie was around the age he claimed, 19, but his name was Graham, and the rest of the meeting did not go at all how he described it would earlier. In the end, Archie ended up killing Colin that day once he arrived. The police later discovered through their investigation that this was Archie's intention from the beginning when he met the boys through the online gaming group.

Teacher Notes

Yellow highlighted sections are the risks or example of unsafe decisions and risky online behavior. I might take out this end paragraph and have you ask the students what they think the potential outcomes could be and once they suggest harm against Colin, you can tell them the actual outcome. You can go risk-by-risk in this case and talk about how each one goes one step further than the other. The online aspect of it all allowed for Colin and Archie to become close quickly and for there to be a sense of comfort with talking to a stranger regularly. Where do the students believe Colin should have stopped and what should be the correct action?

Case Study

Ava and her teammates have one of the best basketball teams in the county. They have been playing together for almost 10-years and are trying to win the first division championship in girls' basketball that their school has ever won. With the league coming down to one of the final games of the season, the girls were getting together for a team dinner before their big game.

Ava and a small group of her teammates decided that they wanted to see if they could mess with their competition before the game in case it could give them some sort of competitive advantage. Some of the girls had the phone numbers of the rival team and they began to devise their plan. They decided that the only one who text them was Ava because they wouldn't recognize her phone number. **With this level of invisibility, Ava and the girls began to text the rival team's captain.**

After sending a few texts claiming to know secrets about this person and trying to get her to admit to wrongdoings, they thought they would try to do things over a couple different social medias to mess with the other girls on the rival team as well. **Some of the girls got together and started a new Snapchat account and they friended some of the girls from the other team. After the request was accepted, the girls started to send messages to some of the other girls on the rival team claiming to be with their boyfriends or asking for pictures that they then could make fun of.**

Ava, after getting one of the girls to say something negative about one of her teammates, took a screenshot of the messages and shared those with her friends that were snapchatting. The messages then were sent around to everyone with the hope that the team would turn on each other and play poorly the next day. Ava and her teammates felt like they had done enough and decided to stop for the night.

Throughout the next day at school, the girls were getting ready for their big game. Not too long after lunch, Ava was called into her coach's office, who is also an English teacher at the school. When she arrived, the Principal, Athletic Director, and Dean of Students were sitting waiting. They explained to her that she is suspended for the game that day because of what she had done. When the rival team got to school that morning, they were able to figure out who the number was that texted their team the night before. They also traced the snapchat back to her phone number as well. She was asked if anyone else was involved and while she did not say they were, the team ended up losing that night and eventually never winning the division. Weeks later the truth about everyone being involved began to come out and some of the girl's college basketball scholarships were taken away.

Teacher Notes

Yellow highlighted sections are the risks or example of unsafe decisions and risky online behavior. This without question would not have been possible without the internet and wouldn't have happened offline. None of the girls should have been part of this scheme and should have stepped in to reflect on the impact of their behavior.

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