

**Title:** The Influence of the Internet on Behavior

**Age/Grade:** 9<sup>th</sup> grade

**Length:** 40 minutes

**In this lesson, students will:**

- Know how their behavior changes when they are online (as opposed to offline) and the potential increased risk that might present.
- Improve their understanding of the impact different actions online can have on themselves, their peers, and other digital citizens
- Build a skills bank of strategies to have for unsafe and stressful situations online.

**Overview:**

Online safety education often lacks specificity. Meaning, there's often a discussion around issues with students that fails to reflect the reality of their experiences, nor discussing the ways in which students are engaging with and reacting (or not reacting) to certain online scenarios, which can present in a number of unique, abstract ways. This lesson aims to address these voids by exploring youth online decision making and analyzing the challenging situations they might be presented with online. Students will be challenged to examine what they are comfortable with and what they might not be, and how each situation is unique to each person, each day, and each scenario.

**This lesson seeks to address to following questions:**

- How might students act differently while online?
- How do risks present themselves differently on various online platforms?
- What actions should students be taking online when presented with risks?
- What impacts do exposure to unsafe content have on students who see it?

**Materials:**

- Big Paper Boards w/ Pre-Written Phrases
- White board
- Writing utensil
- Blank piece of paper

## **Introduction: 1-Minute Prompt**

*5-minutes*

Begin the session by briefly explaining who we are and what our goals are going to be for the session. Outline the scheduling, some of the intentions of the programming, and our expectations of the students as well.

Then, we will hand out a sheet of paper and make sure all of the students have a writing utensil. Instruct them to write for one minute in response to the following prompt: *How would you describe your relationship with social media?*

Allow the students 1-minute to write their response, without much time for thought. We should only expect a couple of sentences or bullets given the time constraints.

Once the students have taken the minute to write their responses, ask for someone to share what they have written about their relationship with social media. After they share, ask if anyone else had a response that sounded similar to the one shared. After this, ask if anyone had a response that might be completely different to the first one that was shared. We can take this chance to also share what our relationships with social media are as well.

The purpose of this introduction is to (1) get students to reflect on their relationship with social media to set the stage for the remainder of the lesson, and (2) introduce the idea that everyone's online experience may be quite different.

## **Discussion on Online Disinhibition**

*5-8 minutes*

One of the greatest influences on our relationship with social media is something called "Online Disinhibition". Ask some of the students whether they know what this means. Does anyone have a guess about what it means?

This is when we should outline what online disinhibition is. First loosely define the phrase, but also be sure to link it back to some of the what was shared in the previous activity:

- We might be more comfortable being online because we can "escape" the reality of our day-to-day life.
- We might be exposed to more hostile and negative content and interactions online due to others being more toxically disinhibited online.

Ask the students whether this is something that they feel themselves or have experienced from their friends or peers online (whether it be from gaming, on SM, or just browsing online).

## **Discussion: Factors of Action (or Inaction)**


*5-10-minutes*

What are the factors that play into whether we step-in and act on online situations or not? Ask this question first and allow for any students to respond if they might be willing to. Be prepared for some students to not have enough information to make an informed response and they might be having a challenging time understanding the question. In this case, further explain the question by asking if it is (a) the type of risk (cyberbullying, unfactual information, hate speech, drama), (b) who it is that's involved (friend, classmate, someone you don't know), (c) how you are feeling that day, (d) the platform you are on that impacts whether they decide to get involved in online situations? Allow for those that are willing to share and allow for this to be a discussion about action and inaction online.

## **Activity: Situational Action and Inaction**

*15-20 minutes*

After having a brief conversation regarding the above question, now move into examples that might be presented to kids online to discuss what potential action might look like in certain situations.

1. Online bullying happening to someone you know.
  - You receive a screenshot of a Snapchat from someone you know (Person A). The picture was posted by someone you don't know too well, but the photo they sent around was of one of your best friends with the text “ imagine looking at yourself & seeing this & saying yeah i look good”. The person who sent it was trying to just let you know what was being said.
2. Self-Esteem and social media
  - a. On TikTok, an influencer you are following does a “what I eat in a day” video to get the “perfect body” they have. The video then proceeds to outline their extreme diet and exercise plan each day. You continue to check out related TikToks and see more tricks to get the “perfect body” on seemingly everyone you come across.
3. TikTok stating intent to commit some form of violence
  - You come across a video by a random creator, holding something that appears to be a gun, but the filter on the video makes it blurry. The video then pops up a video of a shopping mall you do not recognize. The TikTok then ends without words or text said/shown.
4. Teammate starting hurtful Instagram account
  - a. You receive a follow request from an account you don't recognize and a text from a teammate saying “accept that request and follow the account back”. You do as they request, accept the follow and request to follow the account back. It is almost

instantly accepted and you find out that the account's sole purpose is to make fun of one of your fellow teammates that you don't know very well.

## 5. FOMO

- a. You are on Instagram and one of your closest friends posts a Reel of them, and four of your other close friends, all hanging out at the lake, playing games, swimming, boating, having a great time. You check back in your texts and realize none of them mentioned doing this at any point.

These can be either projected using slides, verbally shared, or shown using some form of print-out for visual learners as well. The goals of this activity are to work through (1) what the factors are that influence whether youth act on risks, (2) what those actions are when they do act, and (3) why we should act when presented with risks in the online space. We should make clear that we understand that different situations call for different actions; furthermore, we understand that different circumstances can influence the types of decisions made (as likely referenced above).

Go through some of these one-by-one with the students and allow for discussion with each. We can also integrate movement into the activity, asking those who would do *something* in each situation to stand-up and ask those that likely wouldn't to remain seated. What are the factors that influence our decision to step-in? Why? What are the barriers standing between you and action? Here are things we think kids should consider when determining action and finding what they're comfortable with:

NOTE: All of these situations present unique risks and present different considerations between them, but we challenge everyone to consider an action on all of them.

1. Your friend is being bullied online - are you comfortable confronting the bully and telling them what they're doing is a problem? How are you going to help your friend? Or do you really just want to do nothing? Would this be different if it wasn't your best friend? Why would your reaction be different?
  - a. If you choose to stand up for your friend to the person that is doing the bullying, try and avoid hostility going the other direction. That plays into their hand and can compound the situation.
  - b. When reaching out to your friend, you should be sure to listen and offer help to them, but you don't have to try and take control of the situation. Cope with your friend, not necessarily for them.
2. The TikTok videos you are coming across are propping up the idea of there being a "perfect body". What impact does this have on us that come across it? Does seeing only one make a big deal? What about continually seeing the same perceived idea of "perfection" online over and over? And is this only something that girls deal with?
  - a. We have the top control of what we come across and interact with online, and fall into a continued loop of content that might promote self-esteem diminishing material.

- b. Input a discussion about algorithms and how interaction with one thing can lead to more of that same content.
  - c. You can select “not interested” on apps like Instagram.
  - d. Don’t be afraid to consult with friends or highlight the fact that what is promoted online is not typically real.
3. Are you taking this video as being an imminent threat in any way? Does the fact that you don’t know where the shopping mall is make a difference in your actions? How would you interpret this video?
  - a. If you see something like this, you should immediately identify this as a threat. You should report this to your local authorities as well. Attacks like this are often expressed out to people like this on social media. But recognizing this can be deemed as an imminent threat is critical.
  - b. You should also immediately report this on the app.
  - c. Don't be afraid to tell an adult about this as well and show them the video so that they can help get this information into the right hands.
  - d. Screenshot or video record the video and be sure to capture the handle/username.
4. You see this Instagram account and you are closer to the people who started it than the person that the account is hatefully attacking. Are you comfortable standing up to your friends? What does that conversation look like? How do you help your teammate that you don’t know very well?
  - a. You should absolutely stand-up to your teammate that started this account and discuss how wrong this is. You need to bring it to their attention how this can come across to people that see it and how hurtful it can be to the targeted teammate.
  - b. You might not be comfortable doing this but possibly taking screenshots of some of the posts and showing them to a coach or adult so that they can help take care of it could be another course of action.
  - c. You don't necessarily have to be the one to show this account to the targeted teammate, but you can still try and be an ally by connecting with them and getting to know them better. If this account is being created, it might be pushing other teammates away from that individual and they likely might be feeling quite isolated.
5. You come across a Reel of some of your closest friends hanging out together, posting about it, and you were not invited. What are some of the initial reactions you might have to this situation? Are we ready to instantly believe that this was a hostile decision to leave you out? What are we going to do ourselves after seeing this? What are the conversations we are going to have?
  - a. It is completely understandable that you would feel entirely left out and alone in this situation. This is more than just FOMO, but it’s possibly even the feeling of

betrayal. But we would caution you to not instantly think that these situations are hostile or with malicious intent.

- b. First, don't let this completely "shut you down", meaning wanting to remove yourself from everything, because what will happen is it will likely start to eat away at you and your mental health.
- c. Next, it is okay to reach out and let them know how you feel (even knowing their intent) but doing so with the intention of how can we reconcile this feeling of being left out - possibly discussing a chance to all get together soon.
- d. And for the friends who posted this - they didn't necessarily do anything wrong. Maybe they could have been considerate but not wrong. So what we suggest is just being cognizant of how people might react and not completely shutting down how others might feel if they come to you.

### **Conclusion: Discussion**

*2-3 minutes*

To conclude the session, encourage students to reflect on the importance of action (intervening when they can), even in cases where they are not the direct targets of cyberbullying, online hate, drama, and more. The internet allows for passive engagement with online content - meaning we only take in information (e.g., view, read, like, share, etc.) and don't always feel the need to step in, even when we know that what we are viewing or reading is harmful or untrue. We should always be considering what our roles in online situations are and how we can be an ally to those around us and even to those who we might not know. Whether it be cyberhate, cyberbullying, digital drama, or disinformation, there is a role each of us should play and consider how we can make our own and other's online lives safer.

Open the floor to any questions or parting thoughts.