

Title: Social Media Threats

Age/Grade: 6th grade

Length: 60-70 minutes

In this lesson, students will:

- Be able to identify threats on social media of all forms
- Learn about the variety of threats that exist on platform students are already on.
- Know the proper reaction to threats posed to them online.

Overview:

In any given minute, there are: 500,000 tweets; 5 million views of a Youtube video; 60,000 Instagram posts; 4 million Facebook posts; and 50,000 snapchats sent. In short, social media is enormous. It makes up a considerable portion of all internet traffic. More specifically, 95% of teens have access to a smart phone and over 70% of teens are on social media according to the U.S. Health and Human Services. Given this, it is becoming more and more important for individuals to have an understanding of the threats that are all over the online verse. This lesson is meant to enhance understanding of threats and the proper reaction to these threats.

This lesson seeks to address to following questions:

- What are the threats are exists on social media?
- What are the behaviors on social media that can put me at-risk?
- How do threats present themselves on social media?
- What are strategies to remain safe when on social media?

Materials:

- 4 Case Studies

Checkpoints:

Introduction

Activity: Anonymity

Discussion: Debrief

Activity: Threats Online

Discussion: Review of cases

Activity: groupwork on proper actions to these threats

Discussion: Sharing Solutions

Closing

Introduction

3-5 minutes

An easy, effective way of starting this discussion is to get a sense of what everyone uses in terms of social media. You can ask the class and start a tally. Who uses: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat, Tumblr, and Reddit? Get a sense for what everyone is using and ask what everyone uses the most. You can also ask the students which of these they prefer and why?

Activity: Anonymity

10 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 allows me to be more confident in my opinions, thoughts, and actions.
- Social media has a negative impact on friendships and relationships more than a positive one.
- I have witnessed bullying on social media.
- I have witnessed hateful material and/or people on social media.
- I have been reached out to by someone I do not know.
- I have come across disinformation on social media.
- Social media is more of a benefit to me than a hinderance.

Discussion: Debrief

8-12 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 the activity. The students will often bring up something that they found relatively difficult to answer or that they notice one statement has everyone 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 to who answered to each. Where is

bullying most prevalent? Does it translate over into the offline world as well? What is disinformation and what is it often pertaining to (they might not know the difference between this and misinformation)? What role does social media play in things such as hateful speech and bullying? Why on social media and maybe not in-person?

These questions will typically bring you through this discussion and be a steady introduction into the next step of the lesson, which is the identification of threats on social media.

Activity: Social Media Threats

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
- Hate group propaganda
- Terrorist recruiter
- Sexual predator/groomer

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.

Discussion: Review of threats

10 minutes

Once the students have completed going through the social media threat cases, go through each group and ask them to briefly explain what is happening in their case. Each case is followed by a few questions and ask each group one of these questions to garner short discussion. The purpose of asking these questions is to ensure that the students are understanding the reality of these threats and some of the behaviors that can increase these threats.

Activity: Groupwork on proper actions to these threats

10 minutes

Once each of the threats have been discussed and gone over, ask the students to begin to think about countering these threats. Have the students return back into their groups and give them some time to discuss potential actions in protecting from these threats. These do not need to be

innovative, technological solutions, but ask them to think about what they should do if a threat is posed to them while on social media. What should your next step be? How can the proper reaction be multiplied to everyone?

Discussion: Sharing Solutions

8-10 minutes

Once the students have had some time to discuss a few potential solutions, have some of the students share some of these with the class. Make this discussion informal and allow the students to just yell out some of these solutions. What you are hoping to hear is for variety in potential answers. What you are looking to get across in this lesson is for the students to see that the threat does not *always* matter, but that threats on social media should be handled in much of the same way. Highlight the solutions of reporting, seeking the truth, and not feeding into the threat in any way.

Closing

3-5 minutes

To close the lesson, it is useful to reflect on what was discussed throughout the lesson and touch on some of the learning objectives. What behavior do we exhibit that might magnify a risk? The answers to this question should be quick because of the previous activity that highlights some of the positive behavior that can mitigate risks. As the students mentions some of these behaviors, highlight to them that some of these behaviors cannot not only put themselves in a risky situation on social media, but there are some cases that it can make them the risk themselves.

In ending the discussion at this point opens up the opportunity to have further lessons on online behavior more specifically – discussing the nuances of online disinhibition and risky decision making online.

Case Study: Social Media Threats

Carla is twelve years old. She works with her Dad at his hardware store once a week to help him out; she plays PUBG online three times a week when she is with her Mom, because her Dad does not let her play, so the Playstation needs to stay at her Mom's house. She often paints in her free time outside of school, especially when she is at her Dad's house. Carla has a few friends at school, but she seldom hangs out with them outside of school hours.

Carla has been dealing with the separation of her parents, ultimately leading to her suffering from depression and increased anxiety. Because of this, her self-confidence began to dwindle, and she continued to further herself from everyone in her class. In result of this, her classmates, while not knowing her situation, began to view her as "weird".

Although her confidence has lessened greatly, she feels far more comfortable online opposed to offline in school. She begins to post more online on a few different social media sites: Ask.fm, Reddit, and Facebook. Ask.fm and Reddit are anonymous sites, allowing her more freedom (as she saw it) into posting. However, she posted a photo onto Ask.fm, showing off scars she has from cutting herself and was met with aggressive comments: "Nobody would care if you died"; "Go drink bleach to clean the world of you"; "I would be happier dead than looking like you do".

This impacted Carla greatly. While she did not know these people online saying this, she thought that everyone must think this if these random people online do. Someone on Ask.fm recognized Carla and took the photo down and posted it on Facebook for their friends to see. Carla wanted the photo to be taken down, but she did not want to tell her parents about the fact that she has been posting on social media sites and talking with people she did not know. Everyone in her school, after seeing these photos, knew Carla was cutting herself and instantly started to be referred to as a "freak". When she got home that night, someone created a fake Facebook account and messaged her telling her that she shouldn't show up to school the next day because she is making a fool of herself being alive.

Carla would kill herself the next day.

1. What role does social media play in this case?
2. How does Facebook and Ask.fm change the interactions between Carla and these people?
3. Do you view cyberbullying as a *threat*?

Case Study: Social Media Threats

Flipping between Facebook and Twitter, Colton was catching up on friends, sports, celebrities, and world events. He does this nearly every night before going to bed, making up the majority of his screen time each day. As he continues to scroll, Colton comes across a series of posts from an old friend from middle school who has moved away and hasn't spoken to in a long time. This friend, named Richard, shared a video online called "Adolf Hitler: The greatest story never told!", with a quick post above the video reading, "This video is long (about 6 and a half hrs), but why is this not being taught in school? We only get one side of every story! Do your own research...teach yourself"

Colton, while not friends with Richard, was interested in exactly what he was talking about so he clicked the video and started to listen. Over the next week, he broke up the 6-plus hour "documentary" about Adolf Hitler until he finished at the end of the week. Colton began to talk about this documentary at school, referencing that the holocaust did not kill anything nearly close to 6 million Jews, and that Hitler's image seems to be changed over time and everyone might now know the entire story.

Once he completed, he revisited Richard's page to read more about what was being said. He was redirected to others that Richard promoted, reading blogs, looking at memes, and watching short videos all related to the original film he watched. These new pieces of information were all leading him to believe that Jews were the reason for this change in narrative, and that them and African Americans are threatening his culture. Colton, being raised a devout Christian, began to feel threatened due to his "culture being threatened" by these groups. He continued to fall down a rabbit hole of information that slowly was changing his perspective into society as a whole.

Over the next few months, Colton began to become more hostile at school, on the sport fields, and online toward people of color and members of other religious beliefs.

Colton was soon arrested for threatening someone on Twitter that he was going to assault them if they spoke to him at school the next day because of their race and sexual orientation.

1. What do you classify as the threat in this case? Is it the information? Richard? The ease of spreading information? Colton?
2. How would social media not being in this case have changed it? Would it have happened at all?
3. What impact can the information we read have on or behavior and thinking?

Case Study: Social Media Threats

In 2014, a group of high school girls in Colorado did not show up to school one day. One of the girls called the office to inform them that they were running late and would not be making it to school till later in the morning. This was not before they had already called their parents to ask why their daughters were not in school that day. After making a handful of phone calls, realizing about \$2,000 in cash, some of their daughters' clothes, and passports were gone, the parents contacted the FBI right away.

The three girls, ages 15, 16, and 17 were Americans, one of Sudanese decent, and two of Somali decent, were all good friends. The three girls have felt as though they are outsiders in their community. Growing up in a Denver suburb, they connected through religion and sympathized with one another's sense of loneliness.

The girl's have become more active on social media since moving into high school, communicating with each other, other Muslims that are not in Denver, and old friends that have moved away. However, one of the girls (the 17-year-old) met someone online that they did not know but he was very kind. The person communicated with her, until the oldest of the girls introduced him to the others. They spoke about religion, what is felt like to be marginalized in the America as a Muslim, and ways of becoming more involved in what they believe in.

The man they had been talking to online then started to talk about the struggle of Muslims overseas in Iraq and Syria. He explained that Muslims are being oppressed and that the United States was doing nothing to stop it, however they could become a key member of fighting that oppression. He told them that everyone fighting against these atrocities overseas had great moral and were doing everything possible to improve life in the Iraq and Syria, because nobody else cared about them.

After having these conversations for months, the girls began to look into ways of becoming involved in Syria. The girls then communicated with others about the fastest, easiest way of entering into Syria, the man they had been talking to bought their plane tickets, and they devised a plan to miss school and enter Syria by way of Germany.

The girls were later stopped in Germany and sent back to the United States. The man they were talking to was a member of ISIS and planned to sell them off as wives to fighters of the Islamic State.

1. How could this have been proactively stopped?
2. What role does social media play in this threat?
3. In what ways does social media connect us to others and outside information negatively?

Case Study: Social Media Threats

Emily is in high school. She has always been good in school; plays field hockey, swims, and runs track; and has a large crop of friends. As almost everyone does, Emily is active on social media and often enjoys exploring groups and discussion around the internet to interact with new and different people. One day, she began to communicate with a boy on Facebook who she quickly became fond of. She explained to him that she felt more mature than her fellow classmates and with school and sports, talking with him was a nice escape from everyone.

This boy's name is Carter. Carter is 18, three years older than the 15-year-old Emily and goes to school about an hour away in the neighboring state, Massachusetts. Carter and Emily became good friends quickly, but nothing more to start. Emily didn't talk about Carter much to her friends at school, but they DM'ed each other on Instagram frequently. On Instagram, Carter has been posting photos occasionally of himself with family, his pets, and him playing sports. They shared information freely about and with one another, and quickly became closer and closer over about 2-months. They discussed hobbies, school, interests, and much more. The friendship they established was become more intimate than those Emily had in school, and the time she spent DM'ing showed that.

As they began to get closer, Carter started to ask more and more about who knew of them talking about their friendship and connection. He starts to discuss how special she is to him, and how much he would like to expand their relationship. His language began to turn from friendship to relationship, confessing love for Emily. With this, he begins to be more explicit and sexual in his language and questioning to Emily. Because of how close they are and how he has made her feel, she answers and goes along with everything he is saying.

Carter then tells Emily that he will buy them a hotel so that they can meet. Even though Emily is unsure of this meeting, Carter explains that he loves her and that he wants to meet with her in-person so she agrees. She still does not tell anyone about this, but she makes sure she has her phone just in case. When she arrives, Carter does not look anything like his Instagram, and is in the low-30s. Emily tries to leave but Carter does not let her.

1. At what point of this case should the victim have raised red flags? What are the points of risk?
2. Why might putting all of your information online be a risk?
3. What are the proper actions to dealing with this risk before it gets to the end in this case?