

**Title:** Virtual Invisibility

**Age/Grade:** 9-12 (4<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> grade)

**Length:** 45-50 minutes

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**In this lesson, students will:**

- Understand the reality of *invisibility* in the real world.
- Have an understanding that the internet causes us to behave differently.
- Be able to identify changes in our everyday behavior when we are *invisible*.

**Overview**

While being invisible is impossible, there are certainly simulations that mirror this in the real world. This lesson's focus on the impact of a computer screen is meant to do just that. When we step into the online world, it is not uncommon for our behavior to change – whether positively or negatively, this is called online disinhibition. While this won't be delved into much in this lesson specific, the concept is the main focus – why and how do we act different on the internet? Do we realize the role that invisibility plays on our thinking? While it might be a normal process, is it a positive one? All of these questions and more are to be discussed in this introduction to online disinhibition.

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

- Where are you *invisible* in the real world?
- What is different about my actions online versus offline?
- How can I identify the difference between my behavior online and offline?
- What is the impact of the internet on my behavior?
- What can this impact regarding mine and other's wellbeing?

**Materials:**

- Notepads & writing utensils

**Checkpoint:**

- Introduction: Role Playing
- Discussion: Role of invisibility
- Activity: Turn & Talk
- Discussion: Invisibility in the real world
- Lecture: Impact of false comfort online
- Closing: Review

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## Introduction

*5-8 minutes*

Ask the students to get into the mindset of being invisible. For an entire week, they will not be seen, and nobody will know that they are invisible. If there are any questions, make clear nobody knows they are invisible, and nobody will really know what they do when they are invisible. For the younger aged students, this is a great introduction into the concept of the day. The older the students are, there typically will be less engagement, making this great as an introduction into this idea.

Ask the students to write down some of the things they would do if they were invisible. Give them time to write a handful of these down. Once the students have written down a short list of things they would do when invisible, ask them to circle the ones they would do if they weren't invisible.

## Discussion: Role of invisibility

*10-15 minutes*

Once the students have completed this intro activity, ask them to share some of their activities that are not circled. In some cases, the students have trouble self-reflecting or sharing their answers in this activity, making it important that you are prepared with potential answers yourself. At times, if you write some of your answers on the board to begin with, it can lead the students to loosen up a little bit to share. After getting a few answers on the board, ask the students to share what they circled. Place these on the board, broken up by a line between the two brief lists – making clear that there is a discrepancy between the two.

Once these have been shared, ask the simple question of *why* do we think there is a change in behavior when we are invisible? The answer is simple, that being invisible causes us to loosen up and act more freely because nobody knows the more *risky* or *taboo* things we would do. How does invisibility change our behavior? You can easily refer back to the list to show the change between the two groups of activities.

## Activity: Turn & Talk

*3-5 minutes*

Ask the students to turn to a partner to brainstorm where we might be invisible in life? How often are we invisible? This can be brief. Give the students time to think about this and mention they can write some of these down to share.

Once the students have discussed briefly with a fellow student, bring the class back together to share what they brainstormed. What you want to get the students to say is *the internet*. Depending on the group, some students will share this quickly, while others will struggle to get there, however if there

is a discussion prior to the lesson about online behavior it is a safe bet that the students will say the internet, online, or something related relatively quickly.

Once the students say the internet, ask them to explain why this might be? You aren't *literally* invisible, but in what ways might we be such?

### **Discussion: Invisibility in the real world**

*10 minutes*

How does the internet supply us with the *invisibility cloak*? Ask the students about how our behavior in the introduction of the lesson can be compared to our behavior on the internet? In what ways does our behavior change when we are on the internet?

What you are looking to achieve in this discussion is to uncover how students act differently online versus offline. What is the impact of digital invisibility on our behavior? Is this a positive change? Or is it a negative one?

Online disinhibition is the effect of loosening up, feeling less restrained and being able to express oneself more openly due to a feeling of anonymity or invisibility. While you do not need to say or define this explicitly, you can mention that the change of behavior online is a common, and almost *normal* effect. However, the discussion should lead to how this directly impacts the decisions and behavior exhibited.

### **Lecture: Impact of false comfort online**

*10 minutes*

For this part of the lesson, it is a brief lecture about how this sense of invisibility can give a false sense of comfort online. The realities of taking risks online does not mean the offline world can go unharmed. For the sake of discussion, you can discuss briefly about some real-life cases about people who exhibited disinhibitive behavior online and how it impacted their lives in the real-world:

- Someone cyberbullying online people they did not know, leading someone to charge them with harassment.
- A man jokingly made bomb threats online about a school that was on the other side of the country. The police traced the threat back to his computer and he was sent to jail for 2 years.
- Girl starts a website that is meant to make fun of people in their school. The school finds out who started it and she was expelled from school and struggled to get into college.

These are just three, brief examples of the impacts the decisions we make online can have offline. What the internet does is offer us the opportunity to take a risk and walk away from the computer; to have a conversation with someone and be “meaner” to them because you cannot see their face or reaction. The internet is easy to give us the feeling of security and separation. However, this is not the case and this *loosening up* can lead to a negative impact on your real, offline life.

## **Closing: Review**

*3-5 minutes*

In closing this lesson, it should be a more cut-and-dry review since it is an introduction lesson. Ask the students what they learned in this lesson? In what ways does our behavior change online? Can it change in a positive way (the answer to this is yes – for example, some people are more apt to complimenting or sending happy birthday wishes to people on Facebook). How can this be addressed properly?