Being Smart, Staying Safe Online

A Lesson Plan from Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Curriculum

Fostering respect and responsibility through age-appropriate sexuality education.

TARGET GRADE: Grade 6, 7, 8

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Laptop or desktop computer with computer access
- LCD projector and screen
- Take Three Student Handout – one per student
- Take Three Handout – Teacher Version
- Internet: Traffic Light Student Handout – one per student
- Internet Traffic Light: Handout – Teacher Version
- Safe Online Talk Teacher Backgrounder
- Half-size sheets of paper, three for every student
- Green, yellow, and red markers or colored pencils, one set for each group of four to five students
- Whiteboard and markers
- Speakers to project sound from videos
- Homework- Staying Safe Online — one per student

ADVANCE PREPARATION FOR LESSON:

- Download the Safety Video Vignettes: Safe Online Talk www.commonsense.org/education/lesson/safe-online-talk-6-8 preview the video, and be prepared to play it for the class
- Reach out to the school's IT person to make sure the above website is unblocked for use in class
- Review the Take Three Handout - Teacher Version
- Review the Internet Traffic Light Handout - Teacher Version
- Read the Safe Online Talk Teacher Backgrounder

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Describe positive aspects of online talking and messaging. [Knowledge]
2. Identify examples of flirting and chatting that can be inappropriate or risky. [Knowledge]
3. Demonstrate an understanding of how to deal with uncomfortable situations when communicating online. [Knowledge, Skill]

A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE:

Language is really important and we've intentionally been very careful about our language throughout this curriculum. You may notice language throughout the curriculum that seems less familiar - using the pronoun "they" instead of "her" or "him", using gender neutral names in scenarios and role-plays and referring to "someone with a vulva" vs. a girl or woman. This is intended to make the curriculum inclusive of all genders and gender identities. You will need to determine for yourself how much and how often you can do this in your own school and classroom, and should make adjustments accordingly.

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PROCEDURE:

STEP 1: Ask students to raise their hand if they have ever heard the saying, "Don't talk to strangers." Ask, "How might this 'rule' change when we communicate online?" Probe for the fact that while the Internet allows people to keep in touch or hang out with friends they already know offline, it also allows people who don't know each other to interact, debate, share, and collaborate. Explain that the Internet gives students a wide range of opportunities to connect with or learn from people who may not be in their circle of close friends — whether through games, social network sites, blogs, instant messaging, forums, and so on. And while this can be great, connecting with people online occasionally can carry risks. Therefore, it is important to know how to deal with inappropriate situations if they arise. *(3 minutes)*

STEP 2: Distribute the Take Three Student Handout, and explain to students that they are going to watch a video of three teens sharing their experiences about connecting with people online. Ask students to pay attention to the positives and the negatives that each of the three teens mentions in the film. Play the video, "Perspectives on Chatting Safely Online" (https://www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/lesson/safe-online-talk-6-8). Once the video is over, ask the students to complete the Take Three Student Handout with a partner. Tell them they will have about 5 minutes in which to complete their sheets. As they are working, draw a table on the white board that looks like this, leaving enough space between the three young people's names:

	Positives	**Negatives**
Randy (Social Networking)		
Aseal (Gaming)		
Renee (Texting/Video chatting)		

(10 minutes)

STEP 3: After about five minutes, ask students to share the positives and negatives Randy, Aseal and Renee talk about in the video. Fill in the information on the board as it is contributed by the students.

Ask, "What advice did they share in the video that connected for you?" After a few responses, ask, "Would you add any advice of your own?"

Remind them of Renee talking about getting a "gut feeling" when she felt something was wrong online. Ask, "Have you ever had that kind of gut feeling, whether online or in real life? What does that feel like?" After a few students have responded say, "That gut feeling is there for a reason – it's kind of like an internal warning system. If something doesn't feel quite right, chances are it isn't. So it's important to pay attention and at least get out of the

situation that's making us feel that way to have the chance to think about what was making us feel that way and why." *(12 minutes)*

STEP 4: Point out that Randy and Aseal used the word "harass" in the video to describe awkward or annoying interactions with strangers online. For example, Aseal says he was harassed when during a game someone he didn't know said some mean things about him. Explain that online flirting can sometimes be a less obvious form of harassment.

Ask, "How would you handle someone walking up to you on the street and making crude or sexual comments? (Students should respond that they would walk away, and call for help if they felt threatened.) Ask "How would you handle someone trying to flirt with you on the street?" (Students may respond that it depends on whether they know the person or not. They may also say it depends on whether the person is someone their own age or much older.)

Explain to students that the same kinds of situations can happen when they are online. Say, "Sometimes it's obvious that what a person is saying online is wrong and even harmful. Other times people may flirt online, and so warning signs are not always so obvious." Discuss with students how flirting is normal among middle school students. When flirting is done face to face, it might feel comfortable. However, it quickly can become uncomfortable online, even when it's with other people that they may know. This is because people sometimes say things online to one another that they might not say if they were face to face.

Explain to students that when they are talking online with people they don't know in person, flirting and other sexual talk is risky behavior. There are times when flirting can lead to an ongoing relationship with a stranger that seems deep and personal. But this is tricky, because some people online don't actually have teens' best interests in mind. Say, "One thing that teens think is flirting, but may actually be risky is sending naked images or videos of yourself, pressuring someone to send naked images or videos, or forwarding images of someone else. This is often called sexting. In Washington, when a person under 18 send a sexually explicit image of another person under 18, it is considered a crime. This does not include pictures of onself, or selfies. If the person in the image is over 13, there are less strict penalties, such as paying a fine, meeting with a counselor, or do community service. If the person in the photo is under 13, there are very strict penalties."

If the person they're communicating with online says anything inappropriate or sexual, and especially if that person is older than they are, students should stop talking right away and then tell a friend or trusted adult about it.

(7 minutes)

STEP 5: Distribute the Internet Traffic Light Student Handout. Review the Internet Safety Tips on the handout with them aloud. Tell students to keep these rules in mind during the activity you are about to do.

Arrange students in groups of four or five. Distribute three sheets of paper for each student and one set of green, yellow, and red markers or pencils for each group. Follow the instructions on the Internet Traffic Light Student Handout – Teacher Version to guide students through the group activity and class discussion.

Process by using the following questions:

- What are some of the positive things and what are some of the negative things about connecting with people online? (Probe for: The Internet gives you the opportunity to connect with people your age that aren't in your close friend group; with the Internet, you can work together with people in an online game or virtual world; dealing with online harassment can be a pitfall when connecting with strangers online.)

- In what online situations should you get a "gut feeling" that tells you that you may be at risk? (Probe for: When people you know only online flirt with you or talk about sex; when someone you don't know wants you to send them a picture, to meet you alone, or asks you to keep your conversation a secret.)

- What are some rules for staying safe when talking and messaging online? (Don't reply to any questions that make you uncomfortable; tell a friend or trusted adult when someone bothers you online; avoid flirting or using sexual language online, especially with people you and your friends do not know in person; never plan a face-to-face meeting with someone you met online without taking along a parent or guardian.)
  (15 minutes)

STEP 6: Explain the homework assignment, where they will take the most important points they learned from today's class relating to being safe online that they think other students at school need to know and create a poster representing them. Tell them they can work with another student if they wish, or on their own. Determine how long you want to give them and provide a due date for that. Speak with your school about posting the homework assignments in the hallway, or keeping them in your classroom but having students from other classes visit to see what your class did. (*3 minutes)*

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

The processing of the video clips and the homework assignment will demonstrate to the teacher whether the first and second learning objectives have been achieved. The stop light activity will fulfill the third learning objective.

HOMEWORK:

Have students watch the video, "Being Safe Online" available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MB5VDIebMd8 as a review of today's lesson. Then, have them create "Stay Safe Online!" posters to teach other students about the pros and cons about online communication. Suggest they refer to their Internet Traffic Light Student Handout, and include one or more of the tips in their posters.

Note: *This lesson originally appeared as "Safe Online Talk" in DIGITAL LITERACY AND CITIZENSHIP IN A CONNECTED CULTURE by CommonSense Media, 2012, www.commonsense.org*

Homework: Staying Safe Online

Name: _____ Date: _____

Instructions: Watch the video, “Being Safe Online” available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MB5VDIebMd8 as a review of today’s lesson. Then, create “Stay Safe Online!” posters to teach other students about the pros and cons about online communication. You can refer to their Internet Traffic Light Student Handout, and include one or more of the tips in your poster

Take Three

STUDENT HANDOUT grades 6-8

Name(s) _____ Class _____ Date _____

Directions

When connecting with people online, the Internet opens up many opportunities. However, online communication also has its pitfalls. Fill out the chart below to show the positive and negative online experiences that Randy, Aseal, and Renee describe in the video.

Name	Opportunities (potential positives)	Pitfalls (potential negatives)
Randy *Social network sites (Facebook)*		
Aseal *Gaming*		
Renee *Texting and video chatting (Skype)*		

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Take Three

TEACHER VERSION

grades 6-8

Directions

When connecting with people online, the Internet opens up many opportunities. However, online communication also has its pitfalls. Fill out the chart below to show the positive and negative online experiences that Randy, Aseal, and Renee describe in the video.

Name	Opportunities (potential positives)	Pitfalls (potential negatives)
Randy *Social network sites (Facebook)*	• Developing closer connections with classmates • Establishing connections to people you wouldn't have connected to otherwise	• Dealing with random or suspicious friend requests • Dealing with obnoxious and persistent contact (for example, handling repeated friend requests from strangers) • Not knowing who people online really are, or how they might react during communication
Aseal *Gaming*	• Hanging out with people you already know in an online setting • Interacting with new people from around the world • Developing a better understanding of other cultures from afar (Aseal says gaming helps him get "out of [his] social box" and "see" other places around the world. He talks to people from Qatar, England, and elsewhere)	• Dealing with vulgar language and "trash talking" • Feeling harassed by people you don't really know
Renee *Texting and video chatting (Skype)*	• Communicating more easily with friends when you aren't with them • Getting to know people better • Seeing what people's interests are	• Receiving random friend requests • Connecting too easily with new people, without thinking twice • Engaging in conversations that may seem okay at first, but then become uncomfortable or awkward • Dealing with requests for private or personal information from people you don't know

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Internet Traffic Light

TEACHER VERSION grades 6-8

Teacher Instructions

After arranging the class into groups of four or five and distributing the **Internet Traffic Light Student Handout**, guide students through the Internet Safety Tips below. These tips also appear on their handouts.

Internet Safety Tips

If you develop a friendship with someone online, be sure to ask yourself the following questions:

- *Has this person asked me to keep any information secret?*
- *Has this person flirted with me, or asked me about anything sexual?*
- *Has this person asked me about anything private?*
- *Have I felt pressured by this person to do anything?*
- *Do I feel true to myself – sticking to my values – when I talk to this person?*

If someone starts chatting with you about inappropriate topics or asks you to send a picture of yourself, end the conversation immediately. And never plan a face-to-face meeting with someone you met online without taking a parent or guardian along.

DISCUSS the idea that just as drivers need rules when they're on the road, students need rules when they're online. Drivers also need traffic lights to tell them when they need to stop, and when it's safe to proceed. Because the Internet has no traffic lights, students need to develop their own internal traffic lights. These will tell them when it's safe to proceed, and when they should come to a stop.

TELL students to begin the activity by reading the directions on their handouts (see below).

Directions

When people drive, they should know the rules of the road. Traffic lights tell them when it's safe to move forward, and when they need to stop.

1. Take three sheets of paper and draw a circle on each one. Color your circle "lights" green, yellow, and red.
2. With your group, read through each of the following stories. Use the Internet Traffic Light descriptions on the next page to help you decide whether it is a green, yellow, or red light situation. When you have made your choice, take one of your lights and place it face down in front of you.
3. Wait until all group members have made their choices, and then flip your papers over. Discuss the choices you made, and decide as a group which one is best.
4. After each story, write down the choice your group made and why.

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Internet Traffic Light

STUDENT HANDOUT grades 6-8

Stop! Too dangerous to proceed.	The person you are talking to is clearly acting inappropriately, and the conversation needs to end.
Slow down, be cautious – and be prepared to stop.	Something about this conversation makes you feel uncomfortable. You're alert for any signs of inappropriate or suspicious behavior.
Coast is clear (but look both ways!)	You feel safe and enjoy interacting with this person online. But you also remember that all conversations can take unexpected turns, so you're prepared to put the brakes on if you need to. You have not provided any private information.

Abby's Story

Abby is 14. Yesterday was her friend Ivan's bar mitzvah, and Abby chatted with some of his relatives at the party. Today, Abby logs on to the social networking site MyFace and sees a friend request from Ivan's uncle. She doesn't know him very well, but they did chat a little bit about school at the dessert buffet.

What light do you think Abby should choose in this situation? Explain your choice.

_____

_____

Vince's Story

Vince is 12 and loves playing EscapeGo – a fantasy combat MMORPG (massive multiplayer online role-playing game). When he first started playing, another avatar was nice to him and helped him learn the ways of the game. Since then they've been good friends online, completing quests together and protecting each other during combat. Once, one of their teammates asked them how old they were during a quest. "Enough small talk, dude. Nobody cares, just play the game," Vince's friend said in response.

What light do you think Vince should choose in this situation? Explain your choice.

_____

_____

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Internet Traffic Light

Keyanna's Story

Keyanna is 13 and she often plays Whatville, a virtual world for middle school kids like herself. One day, another avatar throws a heart her way. Keyanna knows that throwing hearts is a common way to flirt on Whatville. She also knows he's not a newbie, because it takes someone with a lot experience to design the kind of appearance that his avatar has.

What light do you think Keyanna should choose in this situation? Explain your choice.

_____

_____

Catherine's Story, Part 1

Catherine, who is 15, logs on to a chat room for teenagers. Her screen name is CathyKisses15. A guy called MikeyMike99 said hi to her a few days ago, and they've talked every day since. He's really easy to chat with, and she likes venting to him about things that annoy her at school and at home. She hasn't told him anything too personal yet. "U seem so mature. Ur 15 right? I'm 20," MikeyMike99 says.

What light do you think Catherine should choose in this situation? Explain your choice.

_____

_____

Catherine's Story, Part 2

Catherine is back online with MikeyMike99, and they've been talking for about a week now. He's starting to flirt with her, and she's flattered because he seems pretty mature. After all, Catherine's not really into any of the guys at her school, so she likes flirting with Mike online. She's pretty good at it too. And yeah, he said something that might have been kind of sexual once or twice. Today he writes, "Can I show u a pic?" Before she types a response, he says again: "Keep this private ok? I like u, Cat. I hope u like me 2."

Now what light do you think Catherine should choose? Explain your choice.

_____

_____

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Internet Traffic Light

TEACHER VERSION

Stop! Too dangerous to proceed.	The person you are talking to is clearly acting inappropriately, and the conversation needs to end.
Slow down, be cautious – and be prepared to stop.	Something about this conversation makes you feel uncomfortable. You're alert for any signs of inappropriate or suspicious behavior.
Coast is clear (but look both ways!)	You feel safe and enjoy interacting with this person online. But you also remember that all conversations can take unexpected turns, so you're prepared to put the brakes on if you need to. You have not provided any private information.

ALLOW students 10 to 15 minutes to complete the activity. Then reassemble the class.

DISCUSS each story, inviting students to explain the choices their groups made. Although the students should think critically about their choices, it is important for them to understand that there sometimes are truly correct answers, especially when it comes to "red light" and "yellow light" situations. You may also use the following material to guide class discussion:

Abby's Story

Abby is 14. Yesterday was her friend Ivan's bar mitzvah, and Abby chatted with some of his relatives at the party. Today, Abby logs on to the social networking site MyFace and sees a friend request from Ivan's uncle. She doesn't know him very well, but they did chat a little bit about school at the dessert buffet.

Discussion: YELLOW – SLOW DOWN, BE CAUTIOUS. Abby should think twice about this one. The best thing she can do is ask her parents what they think about the situation. If they think it's fine, Abby should also let Ivan know and ask for his permission. If everyone gives her the thumbs up – and she feels comfortable being the uncle's friend on MyFace – then it's probably all right to accept his request. Abby should consider putting him on a limited profile setting so that he can't see her personal information or tagged photos. She should also check out their mutual friends.

Additional Questions: *What if Ivan's aunt asked to be Abby's friend on MyFace instead? Would the situation feel different? Why or why not? Do you have adult friends on Facebook or MySpace? If so, what made you decide to let them be your online friend?*

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Internet Traffic Light

Vince's Story

Vince is 12 and loves playing EscapeGo – a fantasy combat MMORPG (massive multiplayer online role-playing game). When he first started playing, another avatar was nice to him and helped him learn the ways of the game. Since then they've been good friends online, completing quests together and protecting each other during combat. Once, one of their teammates asked them how old they were during a quest. "Enough small talk, dude. Nobody cares, just play the game," Vince's friend said in response.

Discussion: GREEN – COAST IS CLEAR (BUT LOOK BOTH WAYS!) It sounds like Vince's friend has his mind set on EscapeGo and not much else. This is a good sign. It's exciting to be able to collaborate and strategize with other players in real time, too – that's the beauty of MMORPGs. Vince should still be aware that he's interacting with strangers online, and that it's never a good idea to reveal private information in these kinds of settings.

Additional Questions: *What if Vince's friend asked him how old he was later on? What if he wanted to meet Vince in person to talk about gaming?*

Keyanna's Story

Keyanna is 13 and she often plays Whatville, a virtual world for middle school kids like herself. One day, another avatar throws a heart her way. Keyanna knows that throwing hearts is a common way to flirt on Whatville. She also knows he's not a newbie, because it takes someone with a lot experience to design the kind of appearance that his avatar has.

Discussion: GREEN – COAST IS CLEAR (BUT LOOK BOTH WAYS!) Flirting online can be fun, as long as it's in a safe setting. And it's a popular thing to do in tween/teen virtual worlds like Whyville and Habbo Hotel. Keyanna can choose to throw a heart back or not – it's her decision. It's also a good sign that the other avatar doesn't look like a newbie. It takes a lot of time, energy, and youth-to-youth knowledge to make a trendy-looking avatar on Whatville. However, you can't always judge a book by its cover. If Keyanna starts feeling uncomfortable in any way, she should stop contact with this avatar immediately.

Additional Questions: *What if the male avatar started interacting with Keyanna in Whatville and no one else? Do you think that's a warning sign?*

Catherine's Story, Part 1

Catherine, who is 15, logs on to a chat room for teenagers. Her screen name is CathyKisses15. A guy called MikeyMike99 said hi to her a few days ago, and they've talked every day since. He's really easy to chat with, and she likes venting to him about things that annoy her at school and at home. She hasn't told him anything too personal yet. "U seem so mature. Ur 15 right? I'm 20," MikeyMike99 says.

Discussion: YELLOW – SLOW DOWN, BE CAUTIOUS. And definitely consider coming to a complete

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stop. Catherine should be aware that her screen name makes her a potential target for inappropriate contact in the chat room: it's flirty, indicates her age, and even says her name. It's good that Catherine hasn't divulged too much personal information to MikeyMike99. That said, she should be cautious about treating him as her confidant. Some people (older teens or young adults, more commonly) develop inappropriate relationships with younger teens online over time, establishing feelings of trust and affection at first in order to make their advances seem more normal.

Additional Questions: *Catherine insists she hasn't told MikeyMike99 anything too personal. From your perspective, what does that mean?*

Catherine's Story, Part 2

Catherine is back online with MikeyMike99, and they've been talking for about a week now. He's starting to flirt with her, and she's flattered because he seems pretty mature. After all, Catherine's not really into any of the guys at her school, so she likes flirting with Mike online. She's pretty good at it too. And yeah, he said something that might have been kind of sexual once or twice. Today he writes, "Can I show u a pic?" Before she types a response, he says again: "Keep this private ok? I like u, Cat. I hope u like me 2."

Discussion: RED – STOP! TOO DANGEROUS TO PROCEED. Catherine has found herself in a sticky situation, whether she knows it or not. Talking sexually with people online is risky, especially if you know that person is older. There's a good change that MikeyMike99's picture is inappropriate, and Catherine should feel uncomfortable that he is asking her to keep something private. Even though she's gone too far already, the power is still in her hands. Catherine should stop talking with Mike entirely. Even if it's a little embarrassing, she should talk to friend or parent about what happened, too.

Additional Questions: *What are some ways in which MikeyMike99 tries to make Catherine feel comfortable?* (He uses a nickname (Cat) affectionately; he also appears to make himself vulnerable by telling her that he likes her, hopes she likes him too.)

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Safe Online Talk

The term "online predator" often conjures up the image of a creepy older man at a computer screen waiting to lure an unsuspecting child. The media reinforces this depiction, which is problematic because it does not fit with the kinds of risky relationships that are more common for teens. In reality, when online sexual solicitation does occur, it's more likely to be between two teens, or between a teen and a young adult.

The following background information serves to clear up these misconceptions, providing information for teachers about the myths and realities of online sexual solicitation, as well as guidance on how to approach this sensitive topic.

Thinking Beyond "Online Predators"

Many adults fear that teens use the Internet to connect with strangers. In reality, most teens use the Internet to keep in touch with people they already know offline, or to explore topics that interest them. Studies show that it is most often teens who are psychologically or socially vulnerable that tend to take more risks online (Subrahmanyam and Šmahel, 2011; Ybarra et al., 2007). These at-risk teens might seek reassurance, friendship, or acceptance through relationships that they develop online. Given the disconnect between the "online predator" myth and
the more realistic types of solicitation outlined above, it is important to strike the right tone when discussing the issue with teens.

We recommend that adults avoid fear-based messages with teens, as research indicates that teens are less responsive to this approach (Lanning, 2010). Teens are not likely to buy into the idea that they should avoid all contact with anyone they do not know online. After all, it is nearly impossible to connect with others online without talking to some people who are strangers. Rather than telling teens to never talk with strangers, it is more effective to have conversations about why certain online relationships are risky, and about how to avoid them.

The Truth About Risky Online Relationships

The information below is meant to clear up misconceptions about the common risks that kids face when they meet people online. It is based on research from the Crimes Against Children Research Center, the Internet Safety Technical Task Force, and Internet Solutions for Kids, Inc.

1. **Teens, not children, are most likely to receive online sexual solicitations.**
   Online solicitors rarely target younger kids. This happens more frequently to younger teens (ages 14 to 17). People who solicit online are often upfront about their intentions. They may ask teens to talk about sex, to give out personal sexual information, to send sexy photos online, or to meet offline for a possible sexual encounter.

2. **A teen is more likely to be solicited online by another teen or a young adult.**
   Contrary to popular belief, teens are more likely to be solicited online by similarly aged peers. It is true, however, that a very high majority of sexual solicitations online come from boys or men. Guiding teens to think more generally about avoiding risky online relationships, rather than telling them to fear predators, prepares them for the wider breadth of situations they may have to deal with online – not only the extreme cases.

3. **The "predator-prey" label gives the wrong impression.**
   There is a range of behaviors that are not made clear by the predator-prey label. The behaviors can range from

"not as risky" to "very risky," as reflected in the chart below:

Not As Risky Very Risky	• Receive inappropriate spam through email and immediately send it to their junk mail • Accept a friend request online from a stranger and receive a sexually explicit online message thereafter, or joke around on a virtual world site and flirt with other avatars • Seek companionship or friendship on an online chat room, and develop an ongoing, risky relationship with a stranger

In the most extreme cases of online solicitation – those involving older adults and teens – targets are usually aware of their solicitor's true age and intentions. For the small percentage of teens who find themselves in this kind of situation, simply warning them against "unwanted contact" is not an effective strategy because they have likely grown to be comfortable with, and perhaps even dependent upon, their solicitor. Instead, we need to help teens understand why it is risky to flirt with people they meet online, how to recognize warning signs, and more broadly, why romantic relationships between teens and adults are unhealthy.

What Should Teens Know if Online Strangers Contact Them?

The term "grooming" is sometimes used to describe the process of an older adult coaxing a young person into sexual situations. For cases involving children, grooming may involve befriending the child, showing interest in his or her hobbies, exposing the child to sexually explicit material, and manipulating a child into a sexual encounter (Lanning, 2010).

The term is less commonly used for cases between teens, or between a teen and a young adult. Research also shows that teens who flirt and engage in online sexual talk with strangers – especially in chat rooms – are more likely to be solicited for sex (Ybarra et al., 2007).

The number one thing for teens to remember is that they should avoid flirting with or regularly talking to online strangers or online acquaintances, especially – but not only – if the person they are chatting with is older than they are.

Teens should also reflect on these questions if they communicate with someone they meet online:

- **Has this person asked to keep anything about our relationship a secret?**
- **Has this person hinted at or asked about anything sexual?**
- **Have I felt pressured or manipulated by this person?**
- **Do I feel true to myself – sticking to my values – when I communicate with this person?**

If teens feel uncomfortable during a conversation with an online stranger, they should:

- **Change it up.** If something feels like it might be getting risky, it probably is. But if teens are not sure, they should try changing the subject, making a joke, or saying they want to talk about something else. If they still feel pressured or uncomfortable, they need to take further action.
- **Log off or quit.** Teens need to remember that at any time they can just stop typing and log off if a conversation gets uncomfortable online. They can also take action to block or report another user, or create a new account – whether for email, IM, or virtual world – to avoid contact with that person again.
- **Know that it's okay to feel embarrassed or confused.** It's not always easy to make sense of situations that make teens uncomfortable online. Nor is it easy for them to ask for help if they feel embarrassed about what they've experienced. They should know these feelings are normal.
- **Talk to a friend or trusted adult.** Teens should know that it's okay to reach out. Even if they feel they can handle a tricky situation alone, it's always a good idea for teens to turn to friends, parents, teachers, coaches,

and counselors for support.

Teaching Strategies for Sensitive Topics

Provide Supportive Resources

Young teens may react to conversations about risky relationships in different ways. Consider concluding the lesson by mentioning a few resources available to students at your school, such as guidance counseling, health services, and talking to other teachers. These resources may help kids practice safe behavior online long after your lesson on **Safe Online Talk** is over.

You may wish to share the following Web resource with teens:

- That's Not Cool (www.thatsnotcool.com)

Talking to Parents

Send home the **Safe Online Talk Family Tip Sheet.**

Research

- The Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University. *Enhancing Child Safety & Online Technologies: Final Report of the Internet Safety Technical Task Force*. 2008.
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