



Risky Online Relationships

Essential Question: How can you tell when an online relationship is risky?

Learning Overview and Objectives

Overview: Students first talk about common impressions of “stranger danger.” They learn why the term “online predator” is misleading, and how to identify more realistic forms of inappropriate contact. Students then discuss a story about a teen’s risky online relationship, and draw conclusions about how to stay safe online.

objectives

Students will:

- Compare and contrast stereotypes and realities when it comes to Internet “stranger danger”
- Learn guidelines for determining safe online relationships, especially with strangers or casual acquaintances
- Brainstorm ways to help teens avoid risky online behavior

Materials and Preparation

Estimated time: 60 minutes

Materials

- **Risky Online Relationships Teacher Backgrounder**
- **Sheyna’s Situation Student Handout**
- **Sheyna’s Situation Student Handout – Teacher Version**

Preparation

- Read the **Risky Online Relationships Teacher Backgrounder**
- Preview the **Sheyna’s Situation Student Handout – Teacher Version**
- Copy or download the **Sheyna’s Situation Student Handout**, one per student

Parent Resources

- **Risky Online Relationships Parent Tip Sheet**

Key Vocabulary

- **Online Predator:** A commonly used term for someone who uses the Internet to develop inappropriate relationships with kids or teens
- **Stereotype:** A popular belief about a group of people, based on assumptions that are often false
- **Risky:** Potentially harmful to one’s emotional or physical well-being
- **Manipulate:** Trying to influence somebody to do something they might not otherwise do, for one’s own benefit



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teaching plans

Introduce (5 minutes)

(Note: Research suggests that lessons on Internet safety should not shy away from honest conversations about teen risk-taking, relationships, and sexuality. As such, this lesson deals with issues that may be difficult for both teachers and students to discuss openly. Please refer to the **Risky Online Relationships Teacher Background** for extra information on the content of this lesson, as well as tips for teaching sensitive topics.)

INTRODUCE the idea that the Internet thrives because people want to share with, learn from, and respond to others online. Point out that there are many different types of online interactions between people who don't know each other in an offline setting. These interactions are sometimes positive, and at other times they can make us feel uncomfortable.

ASK *What are some examples of positive interactions between strangers online?*

Sample responses:

- Selling your own products or possessions online
- Responding to internship or job opportunities online
- Leaving comments on other people's blogs, even if you don't know them personally
- Playing games or interacting in virtual worlds with people you don't know offline

ASK *What are some examples of uncomfortable interactions between strangers online?*

Sample responses:

- Dealing with awkward friend requests from people you don't know well
- Receiving mean or creepy comments from strangers
- Getting spam or junk mail
- Seeing IMs from unknown screen names

POINT OUT that there are many different kinds of online encounters with strangers that may make us feel uncomfortable. Some are harmless and easy to laugh off or forget about. Other encounters might affect us, or our friends, more seriously.

Teach 1: The Myths and Realities of “Online Predators” (10 minutes)

EXPLAIN that people often use the term “online predator” to describe one of the most serious kinds of situations with a stranger online.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **online predator**. Encourage students to break down the term into its parts, and think about the meaning of each word. (A predator is an animal that hunts and eats other animals; therefore an online predator would be someone who uses the Internet to lure and trap others into dangerous situations.)

EXPLAIN that many people worry about online predators, but their impressions do not always match up with reality. This is because news stories tend to cover the most extreme predator cases. They also often present these cases in ways that make people fearful of specific stereotypes.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary word **stereotype**.

ASK *What are some common stereotypes of online predators?*



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Sample responses:

- Online predators are creepy old men
- They are interested in sexual things with little kids
- They pretend to be kids online and convince other kids to do things that they don't want to do
- They try to gain kids' trust and lure them offline to kidnap them

Differentiated Instruction

Turn this discussion into a “chalk talk” activity to appeal to visual learners, kinesthetic learners, and ELL learners. Clear enough space on the board for all students to write at once. Provide chalk or markers for as many students as possible, and invite them to write any phrases, words, or even drawings that they associate with the term “online predator.” Give students five minutes to create a word web on the board in silence, encouraging them to draw arrows between each other's writing. Use this visual brainstorm as a springboard for class discussion.

SHARE the following facts that debunk the online predator stereotype:

1. Teens are more likely to receive requests to talk about sexual things online from other teens or from young adults (ages 18 to 25) than they are from older adults.
2. The small percentage of adults that does seek out relationships with teens online are usually up-front about their age, and about their sexual interests.
3. Teens who develop an ongoing online connection with someone they don't know, or who are willing to talk about sexual things online, are more likely to find themselves in a risky online relationship.
4. Risky online relationships don't always involve total strangers; sometimes they involve people teens have initially met offline.

ASK students if any of these facts surprise them, given what they have heard about online predators.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary word **risky**, and have volunteers suggest what the word might mean in this context. (Guide students to consider how flirty conversations online may seem exciting or flattering, but that they also have the potential to be upsetting or feel abusive. They should know that people may in fact say or do things online that they would not in person. Students should also know that they may feel used, uncomfortable, or violated while chatting with people online – whether it's with someone their own age or older.)

ENCOURAGE students to discuss how focusing on the online predator stereotype might make it harder to recognize other forms of risky online relationships. (Given that news stories emphasize that kids should beware of older adults who might try to take advantage of them, teens may think nothing of chatting with someone closer to their age – especially if that person is charming and flattering. In fact, it is important for teens to know that people closer to their age are more likely to coax them into uncomfortable situations online, or ask them to talk about inappropriate things.)

Teach 2: Sheyna's Situation (25 minutes)

ASK students what the word “manipulate” means to them.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **manipulate**, drawing connections to student responses if possible.

ASK *Why might it be tricky for people to recognize when they are being manipulated, especially online?* (Some people try to manipulate you by pretending to be your friend, or making you feel understood and valued.)



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Manipulation involves telling you things you want to hear, and gradually winning your trust before trying to control you.)

EXPLAIN to students that they are going to read and analyze a story about a teen’s risky online relationship. This story will challenge them to think beyond online predator stereotypes. They should pay attention to how the relationship develops, and be on the lookout for anything that seems like manipulation.

DIVIDE students into pairs or groups of three.

DISTRIBUTE the **Sheyna’s Situation Student Handout**, one for each student. Give students 15 minutes to read the story and answer the questions on the handout in their groups.

INVITE groups to take turns sharing their answers to the questions on the handout. (Refer to the **Sheyna’s Situation Student Handout – Teacher Version** for sample answers.) Have all groups share their answers to the final question, which is about what advice they would give to Sheyna if they were her friend.

ASK *Based on our answers to these questions, we’ve pointed out that this relationship is risky. Why does it matter? What’s at stake for Sheyna? What about Nick?* (Encourage students to think about the emotional and legal issues that may arise when younger people develop romantic, or sexual, relationships online with older people, or even with people their own age. In this case, Sheyna may eventually feel embarrassed, upset, or used. Also, Nick - a young adult - is sending sexually explicit message to a 14-year-old. This is illegal in most states.)

HAVE students expand their advice to Sheyna into a general set of principles for teens to follow in avoiding risky online relationships. You may want to write these tips on the board, or project them for students to see. Be sure to include the following points:

- **Change it up.** If something feels like it might be getting risky, it probably is. But if you’re not sure, try changing the subject, making a joke, or saying you want to talk about something else. If you still feel pressured by or uncomfortable with the situation, you need to take further action.
- **Log off or quit.** You need to remember that at any time you can just stop typing and log off if a conversation gets uncomfortable online. You can also take action to block or report another user, or create a new account – whether for email, IM, or a 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 you uncomfortable online. Nor is it easy to ask for help if you feel embarrassed about what you’ve experienced. These feelings are normal, and it’s okay to talk about them.
- **Talk to a friend or trusted adult.** Don’t be afraid to reach out. Even if you feel you can handle a tricky situation alone, it’s always a good idea to turn to friends, parents, teachers, coaches, and counselors for support.

Wrap Up and Assess (5 minutes)

ASK *Why is the term “online predator” misleading? What is the reality when it comes to risky online relationships?* (Students should be aware of the stereotype that there are creepy older men lurking on the Internet, looking for kids. These kinds of online predators do exist, but they are not that common. Teens themselves and young adults are more likely than older adults to ask teens about sexual things online. Also, the small percentage of adults that are actually interested in developing relationships with teens online are usually up-front about their age and about their inappropriate intentions.)



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ASK *How can you avoid getting involved in risky online relationships?* (Students should be wary of any online relationship with strangers or acquaintances who are older than they are. They should avoid flirting online with people they don't know face to face – whether it's a joke or whether it's serious – and be aware of people trying to manipulate them. If anything makes them feel uncomfortable, they should take action to stop it. They should also tell a trusted adult if they or their friends are in danger.)



Extension Activity

Have students consider the fairy tale “Little Red Riding Hood” as a warning to children against dangerous adult strangers. (A full version of the story can be found at <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/grimm/redcap.html>). Students can work individually or in pairs to answer the following questions:

- What are the benefits and drawbacks of telling “stranger danger” stories to kids?
- How might the story of “Little Red Riding Hood” fuel, or encourage, stereotypes of online predators?



Students can also research the history of “Little Red Riding Hood” online to discover how the story has changed over time and across different cultures.



Homework



Students can play the online game “Nude-e-Calls” from the website That's Not Cool (http://www.thatsnotcool.com/Games_NudeECalls.aspx) in order to evaluate different responses to requests for sexting (sex texting). Remind students that it's also possible to do risky things online with teens their own age, including people they know and even people they are dating. (You may wish to preview this game in advance to determine whether the content is appropriate for your students.)

Invite students to imagine that the conversations in the game are happening in an online chat, and between two people who met online. Have them write a new message (three to five sentences) that would appear to players after they finished the game. The message should communicate to players why it's especially risky to flirt with strangers online. Students should also remember that they are writing for a teen audience.

Alignment with Standards – National Educational Technology Standards for Students® 2007

(Source: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007)

4. Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

- a. identify and define authentic problems and significant questions for investigation
- c. collect and analyze data to identify solutions and/or make informed decisions
- d. use multiple processes and diverse perspectives to explore alternative solutions

5. Digital Citizenship

- a. advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology
- b. exhibit a positive attitude toward using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity



Risky Online Relationships

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.



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2. 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:

<p>Not As Risky</p>  <p>Very Risky</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
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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.



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- **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

Setting Ground Rules

It can be very difficult to talk to teens about risky online relationships. Creating a safe space for open discussion is particularly important for lessons that deal with sensitive topics. Consider doing an activity with your class that builds trust among them, and then spend five to ten minutes with them developing some ground rules before teaching the **Risky Online Relationships** lesson. Invite students to suggest some discussion guidelines for themselves. Encourage them to consider the following:

- **Active Listening.** Show your classmates that you not only hear what they have to say, but that you also care.
- **Confidentiality.** Agree not to share personally identifying information from the group discussion with people outside the class.
- **Step Up, Step Back.** Be self-aware of your class participation, and make sure that everyone has an opportunity to share his or her opinions.
- **Respect.** Strive to be non-judgmental and open minded regarding different points of view.
- **Use "I" Statements.** Own one's statements and avoid using generalizing comments with "we," "they," or "you," which can communicate blame.

Provide Supportive Resources

Teens may react to conversations about emotional manipulation and 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 **Risky Online Relationships** is over.

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

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

Talking to Parents

Send parents the **Risky Online Relationships Parent Tip Sheet**

The following parent tips and websites may also be helpful:

- **Digital Relationships Parent Tip Sheet – High School**



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- **Internet Safety Parent Tip Sheet – High School**

- Internet Solutions for Kids, Inc. (www.is4k.com)
- Scarleteen (http://www.scarleteen.com/for_parents). Note: When it comes to talking about relationships, sexuality, and intimacy with their teens, parents can take many different approaches. Though this website may not be right for all families, some parents may find it a helpful online resource about sexual health and healthy relationships to share with their teens.

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.
- Lanning, K. “Child Molesters: A Behavioral Analysis.” 2010. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- McBride, N. “‘Stranger-Danger’ Warnings Not Effective at Keeping Kids Safer.” 2011. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. www.missingkids.com.
- Subrahmanyam, K. and Šmahel, D. *Digital Youth: The Role of Media in Development*. 2011. Springer, New York.
- Ybarra, M. L., Espelage, D. L., and Mitchell, K. J. “The Co-occurrence of Internet Harassment and Unwanted Sexual Solicitation Victimization and Perpetration: Associations with Psychosocial Indicators.” *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Health (2007). 41, pp. S31-S41.



Sheyna's Situation

Name(s)

Class

Date

Directions

Read the story below. Then follow the directions on the next page.

Sheyna's first year of high school is off to a rough start. She was a CIT (counselor in training) at a day camp this summer and loved every minute of it. But now Sheyna misses camp and feels like she can't relate to her school friends anymore.

Every evening, Sheyna IMs (instant messages) Nick, the assistant director of her camp. He just graduated from college and lives a few hours away from her. Nick and Sheyna didn't know each other that well, but they exchanged screen names at the end of the summer. Sheyna talks to Nick about how much she misses camp and why she's frustrated with her friends. Nick is funny, flirty, and great at giving advice. "Those girls sound so immature," he tells her. "You might as well be in college. Seriously. You act way cooler than any 14-year-old I know."

A few weeks after school starts, Nick starts flirting with Sheyna more obviously:

kNicksFan93 did you know i thought about you at camp all the time?
i like couldn't take my eyes off you

sheybey101 :) why didn't you say anything!?

kNicksFan93 lol u were a CIT

kNicksFan93 ...and i want to make sure u will still be a CIT next summer....
so we can't tell anyone about this...

sheybey101 ummm i better be a CIT next summer! jk. (but seriously.)

kNicksFan93 parents freak out about this kind of stuff

kNicksFan93 u don't want me to lose my job, right?

sheybey101 of course not!

kNicksFan93 that's my girl. so glad that we can trust each other.

sheybey101:



Sheyna's Situation

Nick then asks Sheyna to send him some pictures of her in her bathing suit at camp. Sheyna is flattered, but it makes her feel a little uncomfortable. She decides to send the pictures anyway. Nick always talks about how mature she seems, and she doesn't want to make him think otherwise.

One day after soccer practice, Sheyna's best friend, Grace, asks to borrow her phone. Without trying to snoop, Grace sees a few sexts (sexually explicit text messages) between Sheyna and Nick. Grace doesn't know much about Nick, which is strange because she and Sheyna usually tell each other about their crushes. Grace decides to ask Sheyna about her relationship with Nick.

Directions

Based on the story you just read, answer the following questions as if you were Sheyna. Write your responses in the spaces provided.

1. How did you meet Nick, and how often do you talk to him?

2. Is Nick older than you? By how much?

3. Has Nick ever asked you to keep your relationship secret? In what way?



Sheyna's Situation

4. Have you ever felt uncomfortable with anything that Nick has asked you to do?

Now answer the following questions as if you were Grace, not Sheyna.

1. Does it seem like Nick is manipulating Sheyna? Why or why not?

2. Why might this be a sensitive issue for Sheyna?

3. What advice would you give Sheyna about her relationship with Nick?



Sheyna's Situation

Directions

Read the story below. Then follow the directions on the next page.

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A few weeks after school starts, Nick starts flirting with Sheyna more obviously:

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so we can't tell anyone about this...

sheybey101 ummm i better be a CIT next summer! jk. (but seriously.)

kNicksFan93 parents freak out about this kind of stuff

kNicksFan93 u don't want me to lose my job, right?

sheybey101 of course not!

kNicksFan93 that's my girl. so glad that we can trust each other.

sheybey101:



Sheyna's Situation

Nick then asks Sheyna to send him some pictures of her in her bathing suit at camp. Sheyna is flattered, but it makes her feel a little uncomfortable. She decides to send the pictures anyway. Nick always talks about how mature she seems, and she doesn't want to make him think otherwise.

One day after soccer practice, Sheyna's best friend, Grace, asks to borrow her phone. Without trying to snoop, Grace sees a few sexts (sexually explicit text messages) between Sheyna and Nick. Grace doesn't know much about Nick, which is strange because she and Sheyna usually tell each other about their crushes. Grace decides to ask Sheyna about her relationship with Nick.

Directions

Based on the story you just read, answer the following questions as if you were Sheyna. Write your responses in the spaces provided.

1. How did you meet Nick, and how often do you talk to him?

Sheyna met Nick when she was working as a CIT at camp. He was the assistant director. They didn't really know each other at camp, but they exchanged screen names at the end of the summer. They've developed a relationship through instant messaging, and they talk every night.

2. Is Nick older than you? By how much?

Nick just graduated college and Sheyna is a freshman in high school. Nick is probably seven or eight years older.

3. Has Nick ever asked you to keep your relationship secret? In what way?

Nick tells Sheyna they can't tell anyone about their relationship because parents freak out about "this kind of stuff," meaning their age difference and/or their job difference at camp. He also tells Sheyna that he's glad he can trust her.

4. Have you ever felt uncomfortable with anything that Nick has asked you to do?

Nick asked Sheyna to send a picture of herself in her bathing suit at camp, which made her feel kind of uncomfortable. Nick has also been sexting Sheyna (sending sexual text messages to her). Guide students to discuss what would happen if Sheyna did not admit to Grace that she felt uncomfortable. Would that change this situation?



Sheyna's Situation

Now answer the following questions as if you were Grace, not Sheyna.

1. Does it seem like Nick is manipulating Sheyna? Why or why not?

Students may have mixed responses, but they should ultimately recognize that Nick is being manipulative. He says things like “you don’t want me to lose my job, do you?” and tells Sheyna that she’s more mature than most girls her age. Sheyna might think that Nick is just flirting with her. But it seems like Nick has more influence in this relationship than Sheyna does, and he’s guiding it to be both sexual and secret. Nick also asked Sheyna to send him sexy pictures, which is risky. We don’t know what will happen to those photos, and even if nothing does, Sheyna was uncomfortable with the request.

2. Why might this be a sensitive issue for Sheyna?

Guide students to recognize that Sheyna misses camp a lot and doesn’t feel like she can relate to her friends at school anymore. She likes talking to Nick about camp, and she vents to him about her friend issues. Nick flirts with Sheyna, too. She’s flattered that someone older thinks she’s mature and attractive.

3. What advice would you give Sheyna about her relationship with Nick?

Sheyna needs to know that her online relationship with Nick is risky, and if she continues it she could be in danger. Sheyna misses camp and is having a tough time with friends at school, and it’s important to be sensitive to that. But to stay safe, Sheyna needs to realize that Nick appears to be manipulating her, and she should cut off their relationship before it goes any further. Friends who are concerned about Sheyna’s situation should also remember that they can, and should, seek help from a trusted adult if they think Sheyna is taking dangerous risks.



Lesson Assessment

Name

Class

Date

1. True or false: Most people who ask teens to talk about sexual things online are older adults.

- a) True
- b) False

2. Mimi just signed up for online chat. How can she avoid getting into risky online chat situations? Read the following choices and then select the best answer.

- a) Avoid chat during evening and night
- b) Tell others she meets online that she is older than she actually is
- c) Avoid flirting with people online
- d) Tell others she meets online that she is already in a relationship

3. Dana is chatting with someone she only knows online. She starts to feel uncomfortable about what they're talking about. Which actions could Dana take to make the situation better? Circle all that apply.

- a) Stop talking to the person altogether
- b) Ask a friend to talk to the person and pretend to be her
- c) Don't do anything
- d) Log off of chat for a while
- e) Keep talking with the person anyway
- f) Change the subject
- g) Block the user name



Lesson Assessment

1. True or false: Most people who ask teens to talk about sexual things online are older adults.

- a) True
- b) False**

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **b**, False. It's more typical that teens receive requests to talk about sexual things online from other teens or from young adults than from older adults.

2. Mimi just signed up for online chat. How can she avoid getting into risky online chat situations? Read the following choices and then select the best answer.

- a) Avoid chat during evening and night
- b) Tell others she meets online that she is older than she actually is
- c) Avoid flirting with people online**
- d) Tell others she meets online that she is already in a relationship

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **c**. People who flirt online, especially with strangers, are more likely to deal with unwanted or risky contact.

3. Dana is chatting with someone she only knows online. She starts to feel uncomfortable about what they're talking about. Which actions could Dana take to make the situation better? Circle all that apply.

- a) Stop talking to the person altogether**
- b) Ask a friend to talk to the person and pretend to be her
- c) Don't do anything
- d) Log off of chat for a while**
- e) Keep talking with the person anyway
- f) Change the subject**
- g) Block the user name**

Answer feedback

The correct answers are **a**, **d**, **f**, and **g**. If you feel uncomfortable while chatting online, you can try to take the conversation in a new direction. If that doesn't work, you can always stop typing and log off of chat, or block that person.



Common Sense on Risky Online Relationships

Some Facts

- Of the 13 percent of kids ages 10 to 17 who receive unwanted solicitations online, most ignore the messages or leave the site (Crimes Against Children Research Center, 2006).
- Teens are more likely to be solicited in a chat room or through instant messaging than on a social network site (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2008).
- Most online sexual solicitors of teens are other teens, not adults (Internet Safety Technical Task Force, 2008).
- Ten percent of teens have admitted to feeling uncomfortable or scared because of an interaction with a stranger online (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2007).

What's the Issue?

“Online predatory behavior,” as it is commonly known, is when adults contact kids or teens over the Internet in an attempt to “groom” them for inappropriate sexual relationships. Many experts, however, have found that the more realistic threat for teens online is actually “online sexual solicitation.” This means encouraging someone to talk about sex, give personal sexual information, or send sexual photos or video. (It does not always mean asking for sex.) For instance, teens might receive inappropriate requests or messages from strangers or acquaintances. However, contrary to popular belief:

- Teens (ages 13 to 17) are more at risk for online solicitations than “tweens” or children
- The majority of online solicitations come from teens themselves, or from young adults (ages 18 to 25)
- Adults that solicit teens are usually up-front about their true age and intentions (Subrahmanyam and Smahel, 2011).

Why It Matters

When teens are led astray about what to look out for online, they can find themselves in unhealthy situations without realizing it. The allure of these kinds of relationships is not surprising, particularly for teens who are already vulnerable. Solicitors can provide teens with a boost of self-esteem with compliments and attention. And once teens engage in these relationships, they might agree to do things they would not normally do because of the imbalance in power between them and the solicitor. It is often not until much later that they realize that they were being manipulated.

common sense says

Teach your teen not to flirt with people they don't know. Your teen should understand that face-to-face flirting with peers is normal, but flirting with strangers or acquaintances online is risky – no matter how old they are – because the exchange can move from harmless to unhealthy very quickly. Flirting may seem like an invitation to solicitors, and lead to unwanted exposure to sexual topics or requests. It may also lead a teen to believe that they are in a serious, romantic relationship with someone they don't really know. Both situations can make a teen feel harassed, manipulated, or uncomfortable.



Common Sense on Risky Online Relationships

- **Make sure your teen feels safe telling a trusted adult.** If something creepy or inappropriate happens, teens need to know they will not get in trouble if they tell you or another trusted adult about it.
- **Talk to your teen about healthy relationships.** It can be difficult for some teens to recognize when others are manipulating them, especially those teens that want to experiment or prove that they are mature. Discuss which factors make relationships healthy, and why teens should not compromise on these values.
- **Look for warning signs.** Does your teen seem withdrawn, spend endless hours online, or appear to be hiding something? Teens who wind up in inappropriate online relationships often show these warning signs. If you think this might be happening, ask your teen about it.

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