Online relationships: what is it?

As described in the UKCCIS 'Education for a Connected World' framework, this unit "explores how technology shapes communication styles and identifies strategies for positive relationships in online communities. It offers opportunities to discuss relationships and behaviours that may lead to harm and how positive online interaction can empower and amplify voice."

Introduction to the unit

There are many different sites and platforms that children and young people use to build and maintain relationships. As more sites, apps and games rise to the surface and adopt new communication features, forming new friendships has become much easier then ever before. However, it's important for young people to understand that not every person online is exactly who they say they are.

Key learning outcomes

✓ To be able to describe the benefits of communicating with people online and understand what type of online programs/apps could be used as a venue for hosting conversation.
✓ To be able list strategies for identifying whether or not someone is safe to talk to online.
✓ To be able to recognise the signs of an unhealthy, or potentially dangerous online relationship and know what actions to take if they are concerned about something that had happened online.

Key words

- Online relationships
- Online grooming
- Sexting
- Sexual violence and harassment
- Online profiles
- Fake profiles
- Catfishing
- Trolling

Resources

- Weblinks to articles and videos included within activities

Challenge for more able pupils:

Activity 5 – Pupils to be able to discuss the implications of GDPR in education establishments and the workplace.

Learning style predominance of pupils:
(This space is left blank for the teacher to fill in)

SEN provision:
(This space is left blank for the teacher to fill in)

Learning style:
Discussion, research and reflection

Approximate time altogether:
1hr 40minutes

Online relationships

Key learning objectives:
To be able to…
- ✓ Define what is meant by online relationships.
- ✓ Reflect on their own relationship between themselves and their devices.
- ✓ Assess the relationships they have online.

Key learning outcomes:
Pupils will be able to define what is meant by 'online relationships' and assess the positive and negative impacts of online relationships. Pupils will also be able to assess the relationship they have between themselves and their devices.

Key questions:
- How many online friends do you have?
- Do you know all of your online friends?
- Do you communicate with your friends regularly? If yes, how? (video call, message, phone call…)
- What is a digital detox?

Activity 1

What are 'online relationships?'

Question: 'What are online relationships?'

Students to define what 'online relationships' are and to provide examples of how online relationships can be formed online (2 minutes). Afterwards, ask pupils to feed back their answer to a partner (2 minutes). As a class, discuss both the positive and negative impacts the internet can have on relationships.

Reflection questions
- How many online friends do you?
- Do you know all of your online friends?
- Do you communicate with your friends regularly? If yes, how? (video call, message, phone call…)

As a class, read the article 'Simon Cowell says giving up mobile phone has made him happier' by Haroon Siddique in The Guardian June 2018. Link:
https://www.theguardian.com/media/2018/jun/03/simon-cowell-says-giving-up-mobile-phone-has-made-him-happier

Reflection questions
- What are the reasons for giving up his phone?
- Is technology and social media changing family relationships?
- What benefits did he experience as a result of not using his mobile phone?
- Should his son, aged four, be using technology?
- What is a digital detox?
- How long could you go without using your phone?

Time taken:
20 minutes

Activity 2

Key learning objectives:
To be able to…
- ✓ Assess when the use of technology has become controlling and give examples.
- ✓ Explain why controlling features can be considered abuse.
- ✓ Know where I can go for support and advice about my online habits.

Key learning outcomes:
Pupils will be able to define the term 'persuasive design' and explain the techniques used by tech companies to encourage further use of apps, devices and sites, etc. Pupils will also understand how these techniques can be considered as abuse. Pupils will be able to reflect on their own online habits and will list self-help tips to help them maintain a balanced and healthy relationship with their devices.

Key questions:
- See reflection questions.
- What is persuasive design?
- What persuasive design techniques are you aware of?
- Why might persuasive design be considered as abuse?

Dear diary

As a homework activity, ask pupils to document how much time they spend interacting with technology over a weekend including watching TV, playing games and texting friends. Some devices may already collect this data, such as Apple's 'screen time' feature.

Reflection questions
- Knowing that you were recording your screen time, did you change/alter your activities at all?
- Were you surprised by the result of this activity?
- Did you feel that your online activities impacted your lifestyle or wellbeing in any way?
- What did you do when you weren't using devices and how did you feel?

In groups of 3-4, ask pupils to create a spider diagram with the title 'persuasive design techniques'. Firstly, ask pupils to answer the question 'What is persuasive design?' Persuasive design is a technique adopted by engineers to influence how people interact with devices and influence them to take certain actions. For example, a push notification on a text message.

Ask pupils to complete their spider diagram by listing all the persuasive design techniques they can think of with how they interact online. To finish the activity, ask pupils to write a paragraph in their books that explains how persuasive design techniques can be considered as 'abuse' and what they can do to help them maintain a balanced and healthy relationship with their devices.

Time taken:
15 minutes

Activity 3

Key learning objectives:
To be able to…
- ✓ Describe how technology allows access to communication with diverse online communities.
- ✓ Research and provide examples of when the internet has been used to encourage discussion between diverse online communities.

Key learning outcomes:
Pupils will discuss the communication opportunities the online world allows and how this can be used for positive change and to be able to give real-life examples. Pupils will define the terms respect and know ways in which they can be mindful and respectful to others online.

Key questions:
- How can you communicate online?
- How can you communicate with other communities online?
- Can you think of any examples where people have come together online to discuss a topic/fight for a cause?
- What is respect?
- What is meant by the phrase 'culturally diverse'?

Social movements

Ask pupils to conduct research on and give examples of where and when the internet has been used to encourage conversation between culturally diverse communities beyond an immediate social group. This may include conversations such as the 'Black Lives Matter' campaign, the 'love wins' campaign, or even when something tragic happens in the world, such as a terrorist attack and communities come together to share their sadness and condolences. Ask your pupils if they have ever been involved in one on these public discussions.

Ask pupils to answer the question 'What is respect?' Respect is to take into consideration the feelings, wishes and rights of others. Just like you would in real life, this means that you have to take into account the gender, cultural sensitivity, political beliefs and religious beliefs of others online.

Time taken:
15 minutes

Online relationships

Key learning objectives:
To be able to…
- ✓ Describe the laws that govern online behaviour, including sexting, sexual violence and harassment and revenge porn.
- ✓ Give examples from the media in historical cases to support my understanding of this topic.
- ✓ Describe actions I can take if I, or another individual, is targeted by illegal online behaviour.

Key learning outcomes:
Pupils will know the laws regarding online sexual behaviour and give examples of historical cases to support their understanding. Pupils will list strategies to help them identify a healthy and unhealthy relationship and know effective strategies for stopping a unhealthy relationship.

Key questions:
- What is sexting?
- What is sexual violence and harassment?
- What is revenge porn?
- What are the laws regarding online behaviour?
- What are the signs of an unhealthy online relationship?
- What is consent?

Time taken:
30 minutes

What is 'sexting'?

'Sexting', also referred to as 'sending nudes', is a combination of the words 'sex' and 'texting'. Sexting describes the act of sending a sexually explicit message, image or video to another person through technology.

As a class, watch the Childline #ListenToYourSelfie 'The Game' campaign video. Link:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcMd468Pqbs
Reflection questions:
- What type of online relationship is this – positive or negative? Why?
- What are the laws regarding 'sexting'? (It is illegal to take, receive, possess and share an indecent image of anyone under the age of eighteen).

Ask pupils to answer the question 'What is revenge porn?'(2 minutes). Pupils to feed back their answer to a partner (2 minutes). As a class, discuss the legalities of revenge porn, it's relation to sexting and the impact this can have on individuals.
As a class, read the article by Bedfordshire police 'Man jailed for revenge porn offences and harassment' February 2019. Link:
https://www.bedfordshire.police.uk/news-and-appeals/revenge-porn-sentencing-feb19
As a class, read the Government's factsheet on revenge porn. Link:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/405286/revenge-porn-factsheet.pdf
Reflection questions
- What is an unhealthy online relationship?
- What are the risks involved in sexting?
- What are the consequences of revenge porn?
- What support is in place in the community to help report incidents of sexting and revenge porn?

Teacher Note
These incidents should always be reported to a trusted adult immediately. It is the responsibility of the Designated Safeguarding Lead to ensure individuals feel safe at all times. You can also report incidents to the police, the Internet Watch Foundation, Childline, the NSPCC and CEOP.

Activity 5

Key learning objectives:
To be able to...
- ✓ Describe the laws that govern online behaviour, including bullying, harassment and trolling.
- ✓ Give examples from the media in historical cases to support my understanding of this topic.
- ✓ Describe actions I can take if I, or another individual, is targeted by illegal online behaviour.

Key learning outcomes:
Pupils will know the laws regarding negative online behaviour and give examples of historical cases to support their understanding. Pupils will list strategies to help them identify illegal behaviour and know what to do if they see/come into contact with illegal behaviour online.

Key questions:
- What is trolling?
- What is banter?
- What are the laws regarding online behaviour?

What is 'trolling'?

Question 'What is trolling?'
Ask pupils to answer the question 'What is trolling?'(2 minutes). Pupils to feed back their answer to a partner. (2 minutes). As a class, discuss the impacts of trolling and the differences between trolling and light-hearted banter.

According to UK laws, the 'general legal principle is that what is illegal offline is also illegal online, including stalking, harassment and sending malicious communications.' The Communication Act 2003 states that it is an offence to send electronic communications that are considered grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character. It is also an offence if the communications cause annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety to another. For example, this can include cyberstalking. Trolling offences include virtual mobbing, cyberbullying, disclosing private sexual images without consent, coercion and control, cyberstalking and harassment.

As a class, read the article in The Guardian 'Internet troll jailed over threats and racist messages to MPs' April 2019. Link: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/apr/18/internet-troll-jailed-over-threats-and-racist-messages-to-mps

Time taken:
20 minutes