

LESSON PLAN 29: TEACHING ONLINE SAFETY

Objective: Improve understanding and implementation of ways to stay safe when using the Internet

Age range: 7-18

If you're looking for a way to discuss Internet safety with your class, try a technique Marian Merritt calls 'The Talk'. She explains:

"You don't have to be a Web expert to help kids enjoy the Internet safely. What you need to do is talk to them about what they're doing online, explain the rules ... and then repeat the talk every year. I won't lie to you, getting them to tell you, with honesty, about their online experiences is hard. However, research shows they want us to know more and are overwhelmingly willing to talk about their Web experiences ... you just have to know how to ask."

YOU WILL NEED

Time to talk.

DEVELOPING SKILLS

Safer computer and Internet use, awareness of online dangers and how to deal with them, conversation, understanding, connecting with others.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

You and your class will have a better understanding of using the Internet, the dangers it poses, and how to operate more safely in an online environment and successfully deal with any problems.

METHOD

1. Identify a time and a place to talk. It doesn't have to be a formal classroom setting. In fact, a more casual setting – perhaps sat outside, around a table in the canteen, or on the school bus – may help people to talk more freely and openly. Also, dealing with smaller groups may be more productive, both in terms of being more personal and giving more opportunity for everyone to have their say.

2. Ask your students about their use of the Internet. Here are five basic questions – they should work with all ages, but adjust the content to be age appropriate:

Q. What are your friends doing online?

This question directs the attention away from the individual and towards the general online activities in his/her crowd. It's a good way to start and keep things neutral.

Q. What are the coolest or newest websites?

Ask your students to tell you why these sites are cool. Also ask about the sites that aren't popular anymore, and why.

Q. What are your favorite sites?

Ask them how they use the site and why it's a favorite. You can also get them to show you the sites.

Q. Do you know what cyberbullying is?

They may not know it by name but they'll know what it looks and feels like. Talk about stories you've read or seen about nasty

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR OLDER STUDENTS

- Q.** Do you really know everybody on your friends list?
- Q.** Do you ever get messages from strangers? How do you handle them?
- Q.** Do you know anyone who's seen someone they'd met online?
- Q.** Are people in your group of friends ever mean to each other online? How? Have they ever been mean to you? What would you do if they were?

emails, embarrassing photos, and personal information that was shared. Make sure they know it's incredibly common and how to react when it occurs (don't respond, save it, block it, report it).

Q. When online, have you ever seen anything weird or felt uncomfortable?

This is an opportunity to discuss cyberbullying, accidental browsing discoveries such as porn or racist sites, or even 'odd' experiences involving friends. Seeing something bad is inevitable when someone is active on the Internet. Make sure kids know they can come to you for help and you won't overreact.

3. Marian concludes: *"That's it. That's 'The Talk'. It's not hard, it's not technical, it's totally doable and I hope you'll give it a try."*

Marian Merritt is Symantec's Internet Safety Advocate (www.symantec.com/norton/familyresources/).

See page 22 for her thoughts on the role teachers have to play in keeping students safe online.

FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES

1. Do it all again in a year (or earlier, if you think it's necessary). Remember, your students' online activities will keep changing. Yesterday everyone was talking on MySpace, now they're use the built-in messaging in Twitter.
2. Talk about the similarities and differences between personal safety in the real world and an online environment.
3. Discuss other safety and security issues posed by the Internet, such as spam, viruses, phishing, data and identity theft, etc.
4. Look at the changes (good and bad) that the Web has made to our lives, and discuss how to adapt to deal with these changes.

