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LESSON 3—Online Issues: Bullies and Predators

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- discuss how the online environment can lead to issue development
- demonstrate their knowledge that those met online are strangers
- act appropriately in online relationships knowing the concept of willing participant
- avoid inappropriate online relationships

Read and Discuss

- Read Brittany’s story, located at the end of the lesson plan, to the class.
- Have the group brainstorm how this could have been prevented.
- Have students answer the following questions:

Why do students feel safe on the Internet?

Possible reasons include in own home, behind screen, anonymous, etc.

What are some dangers on the Internet?

Possible answers include predators, thieves, bullying, bad sites, hate sites, etc.

What are some good things on the Internet?

Possible answers include research, information, ability to find things, maps, directions, etc.

Discussion Continued

Guide students into a discussion of the concept that anyone met exclusively online (not a known friend from the physical community) is a stranger.

- Ask students to define the term “stranger.”
- Ask students to list common advice/rules concerning strangers in the physical world.
- Explain to students that those rules also apply online. All people MET exclusively online are strangers. Nothing is really known about these people.

Define “online predator”

1. Explain that some people lie about who they are and what they want on the Internet for various reasons. Sometimes it is to steal an identity or to bully. Other times it is to meet children and teens to form an inappropriate relationship. These people are known as “online predators.”
2. Ask students if they know what the word “predator” means. Take their answers, and try to form a definition.
3. Relate their answers to online predators by reinforcing the following: A predator is one who stalks or uses lies, secrecy, or stealth, to get close enough to another person in order to easily hurt or harm them.
4. Ask students if they know what the word “prey” means. Take their answers and try to form a definition.

Define “prey”

1. One who is a victim or one who is vulnerable to victimization by a predator is prey.
2. Relate the concept to the online environment.
3. Have students review the information covered in Lessons 1 and 2 that can aid in minimizing online dangers.

Group Activity

Hand out reference pages on the grooming process. Review steps in the grooming process.

(1) SIMILAR INTERESTS

An online predator will establish a relationship by discussing common interests, likes, and dislikes with the intended victim. This leads to a feeling of familiarity and friendship. A predator can find potential prey to begin a relationship by searching online profiles and screen names for interest topics, such as particular sports or hobbies, as well as birth dates or ages. Once the grooming process starts, the victim feels like he or she really knows the predator—it is difficult to consider this “friend” a “stranger.”

Reinforce – If you have only communicated with someone via online methods, you cannot be sure if the person is who he or she claims to be. People online are not always who they say they are. It is very easy for anyone to feel like he or she knows someone online when it is not really true. A predator uses this concept to his or her advantage.

(2) TRUST

A predator will want to listen to anything the victim wants to talk about. This tactic is used to build trust. For example: If you are being victimized, the following might be a typical scenario. If you have a bad day at school or at home, he will be sympathetic. He will tell you that he understands. You will begin to believe that this person really cares about you.

Reinforce – The longer people “talk” and share online, the more the victim will come to believe that this online person is no longer a stranger but actually a friend. Soon a sense of trust is developed in this false friend. A predator uses this to try to separate the victim from his or her true friends and family.

(3) SECRECY

As the relationship progresses, a predator will usually ask the victim to keep the friendship secret from others. He or she may explain that other people, especially parents, won’t understand how you (the victim) can be such good friends with someone you met on the Internet. This approach gives the predator confidence that it will be more difficult for an adult to step in and protect the victim.

Reinforce – This type of behavior is a very important warning sign. Any time an online “friend” asks to keep the relationship a secret, recognize this as a warning and report it to a trusted adult. A true friend would not need to keep the relationship a secret.

(4) BREAK DOWN BARRIERS

Once the predator has built a trusting relationship, he or she will continue to break down barriers in order to achieve the ultimate goal of a face-to-face meeting. One way this is accomplished is by sending pictures that may at first make the victim feel uncomfortable. This often happens because kids and teens are naturally curious about many things. Predators prey on that curiosity and continue to feed it so that the victim will not be afraid. This is done by gradually sending more and more pictures and other inappropriate material so that the victim becomes less sensitive to things that normally would make him or her uncomfortable.

Reinforce – It is normal to be curious, but students should know that it is against the law for anyone to send pictures of people (of any age) without their clothes on to someone they know is younger than 18 years old. This criminal action must be reported to a trusted adult and/or law enforcement.

Discuss with the students that if anyone sends them pictures or any other material that make them feel uncomfortable for any reason to tell a trusted adult (parent, teacher, law enforcement officer).

(5) MAKE THREATS

Sometimes, but not always, a predator will threaten the (victim). A predator may threaten in different ways to keep the victim from telling an adult. One tactic is to use a reverse threat. Example: Imagine you are a victim. A predator will tell you that if you tell anyone, he or she will tell your parents about your relationship, then your parents will be really mad at you and may take away your computer or ground you. The predator may tell you that he or she knows where you live and can harm you or your family.

Reinforce (1) Students need to know that if anyone ever threatens them, online or offline, they need to tell a trusted adult. The ultimate goal of an Internet predator is to always get the victim to meet with him or her in person.

Reinforce (2) As intelligent young people, they may believe they can never be tricked by an adult they meet online. But the fact is, criminals make it their business to devise ways to deceive them.

Willing Participant Article:

Read the second teacher article to the students.

Discuss the following:

How was the girl in the story a “willing participant” in events?

- She knew she was meeting someone older (she thought in his 20s).
- She knew her parents would not approve.
- She agreed to meet him.
- She had dinner/drank wine, etc.

How did the girl not follow safety and security rules/principles concerning the Internet?

- Can others make similar mistakes when online? How can these mistakes be prevented?

Scenario Activity

- Divide students into small groups.
- Hand out the scenario cause/effect sheet.
- Instruct each group to answer the questions and discuss in their groups.
- Regroup as a class and discuss the answers to scenarios.

Wrap-Up Discussion

1. Review and reinforce the concept with students that anyone met online is a stranger.
2. It is important to never reveal personal information online and have safe screen names so that they are not targeted by strangers online.
3. It is important to report stranger behavior online that makes them uncomfortable, asks for personal information, or requests a face-to-face meeting.
4. It is important to be aware of the grooming process and also not to be a willing participant.

Brittany

The following article is based on a compilation of several real stories about Internet safety issues.

Most teenagers and young adults these days have been online. Certainly there are plenty of good reasons to use the Internet—hanging out with friends, doing research, and playing games. Unfortunately, there is increasing danger involved in getting online.

Take Brittany for example. Brittany was a young teenager. She liked to hang out, play softball, and chat on the Internet—especially with Jason, the friend she had met while online. Even though they had never met in person, she just knew that Jason was her soul mate. He liked everything she liked, and they could always talk about softball. He knew her team number, and she had described the new uniforms to him.

Jason had reminded Brittany about being careful; to be careful about giving out personal information online—he cared about her and wanted her to be safe. As a matter of fact, he had reminded her so often that she tended to tune him out. To her way of thinking, it wasn't like she chatted with anyone she didn't know! Besides, she never gave out her home address or phone number.

Brittany felt safe online. However, she wasn't fully aware of all of the dangers out there. Even without sharing her address, Brittany had supplied Jason with enough information in their conversations for him to be able to find her offline. And more importantly, Jason had built a trusting relationship with her, even though they had never met.

Fortunately, Brittany's friend was, in reality, a 35-year-old law-enforcement officer who was involved with the prevention of Internet crimes. Establishing an Internet relationship with Brittany was used to show how easy it is for people on the Internet to get information that can potentially put others, especially young people, in danger.

Demonstrations like this one have been used across the country to show that only until you know what the dangers are how to protect yourself can you be assured that you will have a great time online and still be safe.

The Grooming Process

How can you be sure who you're talking to online? Internet predators use what is known as the grooming process to create seemingly safe online relationships and then betray that friendship by attempting to break down barriers and cause harm.

Online predators find their "prey" by going to chat rooms where young people gather or by searching online profiles for a specific type of victim.

Predators use a process to "groom" their victims, which usually follows this pattern:

- (1) Establishes similar interests through chatting or instant messaging. This leads to more private communication like e-mail and phone calls.
- (2) Builds trust. A predator counts on the fact that establishing so much in common with an online friend will lead to a trusting relationship. A predator is hoping that you will develop such a trust that you will separate yourself from your true friends and family.
- (3) Keeps it a secret. It is a predator's goal to keep the friendship a secret from others. Engaging in a secret friendship like this leaves you vulnerable.
- (4) Breaks down barriers. A predator works on the trust that has been established and may break down barriers further by exposing you, the victim, to pictures or materials that may at first make you uncomfortable. This is a common tactic because kids and teens are naturally curious about many things. The more a victim is exposed to, the less he or she will feel that it is wrong.
- (5) Makes threats. Sometimes, but not always, a predator will make threats to the intended victim to keep the relationship a secret. Online threats are against the law. Think about it: Would a real friend threaten you or your family with harm?
- (6) Meets face to face. The ultimate goal of an Internet predator is to get the intended victim to meet with him or her in person. You may believe that you can never be tricked by someone you meet online, but remember that predators make it their business to learn tactics to deceive their prey. NEVER meet anyone in person who you only know online.

Best Advice

Online friendships can be fun, but always consider what kind of information you are sharing.

If you notice that one of your online friendships is following the grooming process pattern, proceed very cautiously. There is no reason for an online friend to want to have a secret relationship with you and/or to force you to meet in person.

Let your friends and family know about people you meet online, and tell someone immediately if you are threatened or feel uncomfortable about anything that is said or sent online.

Teacher Resource Article

Information taken from an article in The Mercury News, by Celeste Ward Posted on Oct. 24, 2002

The headline read: Orange County Man Held on Charges. Law-enforcement officials reported that a 39-year-old man was arrested at the Oakland airport as he tried to catch a flight home after luring and spending the night with a 15-year-old girl he met on the Internet.

Police said he solicited the girl through her screen name and online profile, which listed her age as 16. An official stated, "He clearly knew her age, but she thought his age was in the 20s."

The two apparently corresponded for a month to six weeks and eventually agreed to meet. The suspect then flew from southern California to the northern part of the state for the meeting. The day of the meeting, the girl told her mom she planned to spend the night at a friend's house and was dropped off at a theater, where the suspect, a file clerk for the federal Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), was waiting inside.

The two spent the evening at a hotel, where he supplied her with wine. The girl told the police that she passed out and believed she was sexually molested while unconscious. After the girl awoke in the morning, she begged to go home. The suspect finally got a cab and had the victim dropped off near her friend's house.

Unknown to the victim, her story began to unravel when a friend called to ask the girl's mother where she was. Her parents panicked and called police, who started to search for her early in the morning. By the time the girl walked up to her friend's home, her father was there waiting.

It was reported that police interviewed the victim and then sent investigators to the hotel, where the suspect had inadvertently left his ATM card. According to the police, he had also made some toll-free calls from the room. A call to Southwest Airlines led detectives to believe the suspect would be on an afternoon flight to Orange County that day. The suspect was arrested as he waited to get on that flight.

Agents from the federal Department of Justice seized computers at the suspect's house and office to help local law enforcement trace his activities. Their concern was that this victim had not been the first. Police said at the time, "The fact that he went to this extent—to fly 500 miles to meet someone under age—is not typical of a first offender."

Cause and Effect

1. Janice reveals her name and age to an online chat buddy.

- Effect: The online chat buddy turns out to be a predator who lures her to a meeting and tries to harm her.
- Other possible effects/consequences to her actions: _____

2. Mark uses his e-mail address as a screen name for a bulletin board.

- Effect: His e-mail box is flooded with spam, retail announcements, etc.
- Other possible effects/consequences: _____

3. Sarah is a big fan of her local football team—the Dallas Cowboys. Everyone at school knows this. Her password is Cowboygirl.

- Effect: Sarah's ex-boyfriend has an idea of her password, guesses it, and uses her account to send bad e-mail to others. Now everyone is mad at her.
- Other possible effects/consequences: _____

4. Mary's screen name is hotchick15. She uses it whenever she's chatting.

- Effect: Mary receives lots of harassment on chat sites.
- Other possible effects/consequences: _____

5. Eric has chosen a screen name that reflects his faith.

- Effect: He recently received more than 50 hate mail messages and threats.
- Other possible effects/consequences: _____

6. When Andy signed up for AOL instant messaging, he filled out his personal profile with all his information.

- Effect: Everyone on the Internet can find out who he is and what he posted. They can use this information in any way.
- Other possible effects/consequences: _____

7. Chad has been e-mailing a girl he met online. She asks him to send a picture. He does.

- Effect: Chad was browsing the Web and finds his picture, but it's been changed so that he looks like he weighs 500 pounds.
- Other possible effects/consequences: _____
