



Activity: Friends: In-Person and Online

Topics included: Connections online and in-person

PLEASE BE AWARE: THIS LESSON MAY CAUSE YOUTH TO THINK ABOUT A SITUATION THEY HAVE ALREADY EXPERIENCED OR ARE CURRENTLY EXPERIENCING. IF THEY HAVE HAD A SIMILAR EXPERIENCE AS OUTLINED BELOW, THEY MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE TOLD A PARENT. PLEASE BE OBSERVANT AND NOTICE ANY CHANGES IN APPEARANCE, BEHAVIOR, OR MOOD.

ANNOUNCE THAT YOU ARE AVAILABLE TO TALK PRIVATELY AFTER CLASS WITH ANYONE THAT NEEDS HELP. TALK WITH ANY STRUGGLING STUDENTS PRIVATELY AND ASSURE THEM YOU CAN HELP. ALWAYS REFER STUDENTS TO THE APPROPRIATE ADMINISTRATOR IN THE SCHOOL TO HELP THE STUDENT AND ALWAYS NOTIFY A PARENT.

Lesson Overview:

This lesson is designed to inform students about the differences between in-person and online connections. It outlines how to safely engage with online friends and what information they should/shouldn't share.

Key Ideas:

- A. What/who makes a friend
- B. Digital connectedness
- C. Safe behavior with online friends

Societal norms have changed drastically over the past decade and with the advent and rapid evolution of technology and how it's used, today's students probably don't remember when there wasn't technology an arm's length away at all times. Thus, the meanings of words have evolved too. Before the 2000s, the word *friend* had one connotation: an in-person companion with whom you share a strong bond and hold in high respect and esteem. Friendships were formed by spending time together in various activities and having conversations, allowing people to get to know and understand each other. Today, the word *friend* can have a different connotation: someone that you have an online connection with but have never met or spoken to in person.

But is that really a *friend*?

Instructional Activities:

Instructor: *After sharing the above with students, ask them how many actual in-person friends they have, ones they speak with regularly, trust, and enjoy spending time with. *Ask them to check one of their digital platforms to see how many digital friends they have. Would you share personal things with both your actual friends and digital friends? Why or why not?*

**If a student does not have a social media presence, ask them to think of reasons they might or might not share the same personal information with a person who was only a digital connection.*

Complete a T-chart like the one attached with students asking them to brainstorm words/ideas that come to mind when they think of a “friend” and words/ideas that come to mind when they think of a “digital connection.” Once completed, guide students through a discussion about any similarities and differences between the two.

Instructor: *Is there anything you shared online that you wished you hadn’t? If so, why? *Have any digital connections ever asked you to meet in person? How did you feel about that?*

**If you have students who do not have a social media presence, ask that they think about these things for the future. They can still benefit from the discussion.*

Did you know that PEW Research Center found that while most online friendships stay online, 20% of teens have met an online “friend” in person?

Show the following video and discuss <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOsgQbmvuUQ>

Social-Emotional Learning:

Instructor: *How would you feel if a “online friend” turned out to be the exact opposite of who they said they were? Opposite sex, older, lives closer than reported?*

What in-person adults do you know that could help you if you discovered an online friend was not who you thought they were?

Possible assessment questions:

- A. What is a friend?
- B. What is a digital connection?
- C. Should you ever meet a digital connection in person?

Reference:

- Pew Internet Study
<https://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/06/teens-technology-and-friendships/>

Additional Resources:

- Shape the Sky Pledging to Safeguard for Security:
<http://www.shapethesky.org/pledge/>
- Shape the Sky Technology Contract between youth and parents:
<http://www.shapethesky.org/technology-contract/>
- Where to report online exploitation:
<http://www.missingkids.org/gethelpnow/cybertipline#collapseHowtoPromotetheCyberTiplineonYourWebsite201906130048>



Friend or Digital Connection?

Brainstorm words/ideas that come to mind when you think of a “friend” and words/ideas that come to mind when you think of a “digital connection” and put them in the chart below.

Attributes associated with a “Friend”	Attributes associated with “Digital Connection”
Ex: someone I trust	Ex: unsure if I can trust