



Gooseberry Alert 31

Changing Perceptions – Is ‘stranger danger’ an outdated concept online?

Please share your Gooseberry Alert content with students, staff and parents.



All that we ask in return and in the spirit of modelling positive digital citizenship: when sharing our content, please acknowledge ‘Gooseberry Planet Limited’ as the source of your advice. Thank you.

Gooseberry Student ‘Thoughts’ of the week

Communities online are made up of different people, doing different things. Most people online do not want to upset us or cause us harm, but there are some people online who do.

Connecting and communicating online can be fun but it can also be risky. It can be difficult to know exactly who you are connecting with and if it is safe to do so.

Exploring the topic:

- Who might you encounter online and how well do you ‘know’ them?
- What risks might you and your friends face online?
- How do you know who you are connecting with?
- Suggest why people might enjoy connecting with others online.
- If someone’s behaviour became a concern, how would you respond?
- Explain how you might connect in safer ways online.

Suggest safer ways to connect online?



Key Messages: The internet is a fantastic resource which can be fun, friendly and educational but the people we connect with online can pose a risk to our safety. We can keep ourselves safer by making responsible and thoughtful decisions when choosing who we connect with, what we say and what we do online.

Please share with students.

Gooseberry Teacher ‘Thoughts and Discussion’ of the week

Although this is an important issue, take care when addressing it in class to ensure that the discussion is age appropriate and does not unnecessarily worry younger children. We recommend you acknowledge the many good things about online life too.

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Fact: At some point, children will connect and communicate online with people they have only met online.

Whether you are digitally naïve or a digital native, we all perceive the online environment differently, as lines become blurred between what is ‘real’ and ‘virtual’. As adults, we need to re-think how best to keep children safe online and question the often outdated rules that we followed as children.

Supporting students with the appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding to connect and communicate safely online is a challenge. Some familiar social concepts and ‘rules’ that we perceive as effective in ‘real-life’ (like the concept of ‘stranger danger’) although still relevant, can be more difficult for children to assess online.

The speed and ease with which we form judgements and relationships online has dismantled familiar social barriers that would once have protected children. Recognising, reducing and responding to risks online requires an alternative approach to help students stay safer online.

The concept of ‘stranger danger’ is outdated online. Although younger children should avoid accepting “friends” they do not know in real life, most children will at some point connect with people they have only met online and they need to develop the skills to limit their risk. These risks can include grooming and



radicalisation (undertaken by people viewed as ‘friends’), as well as drugs, fraud and online scams (using information that we have shared online).

A re-think is most certainly in order and we need to teach children to use their intuition, to be aware of when someone is being friendlier or more complimentary than expected, to question the motives of such people, not to be afraid to “unfriend” or refuse to reply to someone online, and to discuss it with a trusted adult. This should be done in an age-appropriate way but we must recognise that although we would not allow a young child to walk down the street by themselves, many parents are effectively allowing their children to do this in the online world.

Adapting our perceptions to better reflect those of the students and the environments that they are exploring online could be one way to support effective planning for the task ahead. The technology may change but having secure knowledge, understanding and skills alongside practical strategies could help to keep students safer online.

Some key questions to discuss with colleagues:

- How do we instil accountability for behaviour whilst avoiding blame when mistakes are made online?
- How do we build confidence so that children seek help at the right time from the right person?
- How can we be proactive about connecting (safely) with people online without actively encouraging it?
- How can we get the balance right between celebrating the value of online communities whilst helping children recognise, assess and respond appropriately to risks within them?

Key Messages: To help children stay safer online, we must adapt to new ways of thinking and challenge concepts like ‘stranger danger’. We must explore and understand the concept of ‘friendship’ and consider how we talk to and prepare our students for an independent ‘life online’.

Please share with staff.

Gooseberry Parent ‘Support’ of the week

For today’s children, being part of an online community is perfectly normal and is considered by them to be an acceptable way to ‘make friends’. It is inevitable that at some stage, **your child will connect and communicate with people online.**

We should acknowledge the many advantages of the online world but educate our children, in an age appropriate way, of the risks. Being aware of who poses a risk and how to safely manage communication online is a life skill they need to develop. But we need to do so sensitively, so that we do not unnecessarily worry younger children.

Any App, website or online game where people can connect and communicate creates potential risks. Unfortunately, the sites that appeal to children are targeted by those who wish them harm. A stranger attempting to engage in conversation with a child on the street would likely be identified by the child as a potential risk. The same person, playing alongside them in an online game, or engaging in an online chat, is unlikely to be seen in the same way. Using the “stranger danger” terminology in this context is ineffective and possibly misleading. Current risks to children include not only paedophiles but also those wishing to recruit drug runners (often tackling younger children who are less likely to be jailed if caught) and those trying to radicalise.

Speak to your child about the risks they face when communicating and connecting online:

- **Inappropriate chat or requests** – empower your child to just say “No”. It might be something we discourage in other situations, but it is the best strategy in this case!
- **Sharing** - avoid sharing personal information and photographs online that could be misused by others.
- **Grooming** – teach your child to be wary of flattery, gifts and unusual amounts of contact.
- **Communication** – ensure that your child is confident about what to do if they feel uncomfortable or are targeted online. Make sure you are ready to listen and help. Assure them you will not be angry if they admit foolish behaviour online – that their safety is the most important thing.



- 📱 **Online Friends** – only have trusted friends from ‘real life’ as friends online.
- 📱 **Apps appropriate for age** – using apps, games and websites that are age appropriate can reduce the risk of problems. Following community rules and knowing how to report inappropriate content can also help.
- 📱 **Turn off Microphones if playing games that connect with others online.**

In the news... In the news... In the news... In the news... In the news...

App Update: Facebook – Youth Portal <https://www.facebook.com/safety/youth> Facebook launches a new ‘Youth Portal’ with the aim of ‘Empowering Youth’.

The portal uses clear content, designed specifically with young users in mind and includes practical tips for using Facebook services as well as information to help secure and manage an account, with step by step instructions. There is also simplified information about what personal data is collected and how it is used. Please note that this still includes the users’ communications and content, their connections, tags of them by others on Instagram, information about their device settings including camera, microphone and location information, websites they visit, apps they use and purchases they make. This information is not just held by Facebook but may be shared with a wide variety of third parties.

Contact us at:
www.gooseberryplanet.com
Email us:
help@gooseberryplanet.com

Whether this is a serious attempt by Facebook to raise awareness and encourage users to be more responsible online or whether it is just a cynical attempt to attract younger users, you will have to make your own decision.

Want to know more? Visit us at www.gooseberryplanet.com