

Tech Misuse Scenarios

Talking to Teens about Online Harassment

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Use the following scenarios to have a conversation with young people about some of the problems they might confront when using technology. Discussing these issues ahead of time can help prepare them for what to do if something similar happens to them or a friend.

SCENARIO ONE

Karen is a very devout teenager who leads a prayer meeting every morning by the high school flagpole. Many boys and girls are simply drawn to Karen as a friend because of her sweet nature and hopeful innocence. Other girls in her school, however, feel threatened by Karen, and they begin to drum up ideas to expose her as a fraud. Specifically, they create a Snapchat Story implying that Karen is sleeping around with the boy's track team. Karen is alerted to the Story by her close friend Sarah and is heartbroken. However, they think quickly and use iOS's Screen Recording function to save the digital evidence. Then, she takes it to her teachers, who then contact the school administration.

Questions: What would you do if you were the principal? What would you do if you were Karen? What would you do if you were Karen's close friend and really wanted to help? How could those who spread the rumors understand how hurtful their actions were? Any other thoughts?

SCENARIO TWO

Two female sixth-graders, Katie and Sarah, are exchanging hateful texts back and forth because of a misunderstanding involving a boy named Jacob. The statements have escalated in viciousness from trivial name-calling to seriously wild statements that included death threats. Both girls have come to speak to the school counselor in tears, both angry at what is going on, and emotionally distressed about the things being said online and that so many other students in their classes are seeing. In fact, other girls at school are getting involved and starting to take sides, which is leading to additional drama and even some minor physical violence at school.

Questions: Should the police be contacted? Are both girls wrong or justified? What should the girls do in this instance? Are the behaviors of the other girls taking sides justified? What should be done about them? What would you do as a parent if you discovered this problem involving your own child? What might a school counselor or administrator do to keep this situation from further deteriorating? Should the girls meet in some sort of restorative justice or remediation setting? Any other thoughts?

SCENARIO THREE

A mother is walking by her son Jonathan while he is on his iPhone and notices that he keeps hiding the screen and pretending that he isn't doing anything when she walks by or gets close to him. Upon further observation, the mother sees that Jonathan is sending out hateful tweets via what seems to be a Twitter account he has set up to impersonate someone else. Most are primarily insults and name-calling, while others are threats.

Questions: What should the mother do first? Should Twitter get involved to stop the harassment (e.g. deleting the account, banning the user, etc...)? How big of a deal are threats on Twitter? Should legal systems get involved – in an instance where this is a hate crime depending on what is said and to who? How should Jonathan be allowed to use his phone moving forward? Should Jonathan's phone privileges be taken away, limited, or even monitored, and how? How can things be made "right," as it relates to those he hurt and humiliated with his online posts? Any other thoughts?

SCENARIO FOUR

Lindsay has just moved to town from Oregon and enrolls in the local middle school. Very pretty, outgoing, and funny, she quickly wins the attention of a number of the school's football players—much to the distress of the school's cheerleaders. Bonnie, the head cheerleader, is concerned about Lindsay stealing away her boyfriend Johnny, the quarterback. With the help of her cheerleader friends, Bonnie decides to create a "We Hate Lindsay" Instagram account, where girls can post comments as to why they hate Lindsay and why they think she should move back to Oregon. Soon, the entire school becomes aware of the site's web address, and many others begin to post hurtful sentiments about Lindsay. Desperately wanting to make friends in a new town, Lindsay is crushed and begins to suffer from depression and a lack of desire to do anything aside from crying in bed.

Questions: If you were Lindsay's mom or dad, what would you do? What would you do if you were Bonnie's parents? What if you were the parents of any of the students making hurtful comments? What might the school do to help Lindsay? If you were Lindsay's teacher, what would you do? If you were her best friend, what might you say or do to help? Any other thoughts?

SCENARIO FIVE

Chester, a tall, skinny teenager who excels in STEM classes, feels embarrassed when he has to change into gym clothes in the boy's locker room at school because he lacks muscularity and size. Other, more athletic, and well-built teens notice Chester's shyness and decide to exploit it. Using their phones, they covertly take pictures of Chester without his shirt on and in his boxer shorts. These pictures are then circulated among the rest of the student body via Instagram. Soon enough, boys and girls are pointing, snickering, and laughing at Chester as he walks down the school hallways. He overhears comments such as "There goes Bird-Chested Chester," "Big Wus," and "Pansy." These words wound him deeply, and the mistreatment begins to affect his math and science grades.

Questions: If you were his teacher, what would you do? If you were his parent, what would you do? What can Chester do to deal with the harassment—now and in the future? How can his classmates really understand how much pain they are causing with their words and actions? Should Chester simply be taught resilience? What would you do if you were a bystander? What should the school do to help Chester? What if you were the parent of one of the students who originally circulated the photos? What do you think should happen to these individuals? Any other thoughts?

SCENARIO SIX

Heather is a fourth-grader who is extremely proficient at using the Internet. On Monday, she receives an e-mail from someone named "stalker2023@gmail.com." The subject and body of the e-mail state, "I'm watching you. Be afraid." Heather immediately deletes it and thinks nothing of it. On Tuesday, she receives another e-mail from stalker2023@gmail.com, and this time, the subject and body of the e-mail are, "I am getting closer, and I see you right now as you read this." Heather starts to get worried but doesn't want to tell her parents because she is concerned they will take away her Internet privileges. On Wednesday, she awakens to a new e-mail from stalker2023@gmail.com that reads, "Be very afraid. Today may be your last." Definitely frightened and concerned now, she rushes home after school, bent on bringing it up to her mom and dad as soon as she sees them. To her dismay, she finds a note on the table stating her mom went grocery shopping and her dad will be home late. Her palms begin to sweat and her heart begins to race. She goes to her bedroom, throws her backpack on her bed, and checks her e-mail again. Twenty-five new e-mails pop up. Each one is from the same sender: stalker2023@gmail.com. They all say the same thing: "I am in your house. I am on your Wi-Fi. You don't know where I am, but I know where you are!" Heather grabs her house key, rushes out of the front door, locks it, runs to her friend's house, and tells her friend's mom about her situation.

Questions: What would you do if you were her friend's mom? What can Heather do to keep herself safe? To whom else should she turn for help? Should the police be involved and what could they do to protect Heather?

SCENARIO SEVEN

Stan is an eighth-grader who is physically abused by his alcoholic uncle when he visits him on weekends. Additionally, Stan is being pushed around by some of his peers in middle school because he wears black all the time and has been labeled a "loner." Recently, Stan has realized that on Discord, he is finding social interaction with others much easier and more rewarding. Nonetheless, he still harbors much anger and bitterness within due to the treatment by his uncle and some of his classmates. He decides to get back at his uncle and some of his classmates by posting personal information about them—along with some true stories about his negative experiences with them—on a public server he created on Discord. This information includes their cell phone numbers, home phone numbers, and home addresses. Because Stan has made many friends on Discord, they rally around him in support and decide to exact some vigilante justice on their own to help Stan get revenge. A large number of his online friends use the phone numbers and addresses to make repeated prank calls, to order hundreds of pizzas to the victims' doors, and to sign them up for many, many pornographic magazines. Stan is extremely pleased at the harassment that his uncle and mean classmates are now experiencing.

Questions: What would you do if you were Stan's parent and one of his classmates alerted you? What if you were Stan's school principal? How might Stan learn that such vengeful behavior is inappropriate? How might Stan get help for the abuse he suffers and the way he feels? Are Stan's friends on Discord justified in their actions or should they face punishment for the harassment they caused? Does the actions of the abusive behaviors of his uncle and classmates affect how Stan or others should be punished? Do you feel any sympathy for why Stan did what he did?

SCENARIO EIGHT

James is frustrated and saddened by the comments his high school peers are making about his sexuality. Furthermore, it appears a group of male students have created a fake profile to impersonate him on an online dating site. Posing as James and using his contact information, they start sending out very provocative and sexually bold messages to other guys on the site. When James starts receiving e-mails from members of this site in his inbox, he is mortified and devastated.

Questions: If you were a school guidance counselor or administrator within the school, what would you do if James approached you with the problem? What about if you were James's mom or dad? What if you were a student, how might you help James? Would you report the behavior of James' friends? What kind of repercussions should happen to the students who

created the fake dating profile? What can James do in response? What would be some incorrect and unacceptable ways that James might try to deal with this problem?

SCENARIO NINE

Casey loves playing games on his Xbox console, especially since it allows him to link up to and compete with other players across the world on Xbox Live. He recently met one teenager in Russia named Boris while playing Overwatch 2. Together, they became almost unbeatable whenever they competed as a team against other teams online. At some point, though, Casey told Boris he had found a better gaming partner and didn't want to play with Boris anymore. Boris was outraged that he was being "dumped" as a gaming partner for someone else, and he began to tell other people on the gaming network that Casey "sucked" at all video games and no one should ever be his partner unless they wanted to lose really badly. Soon after these statements started circulating, Casey's new gaming partner dumped him, and everyone else on the network started to reject him (which was particularly crushing because online gaming was a safe haven in his difficult life). When coupled with recollections of other times he has been rejected, this experience began to make Casey feel completely hopeless. He then started to express suicidal intentions to his sister.

Questions: Can this example really be characterized as cyberbullying? How would you handle this as a school administrator? How would you handle this as a parent? What should his sister do and how can schools equip her to respond effectively to Casey's problems? Who could Casey reach out to help him deal with how he is feeling? Does Boris deserve any punitive actions taken against him? Any other thoughts?

SCENARIO TEN

Trevor is sixteen and into drag racing. He and his friends often go down to the local drag strip and race other sixteen- and seventeen- year olds in their enhanced cars. Because drag racing is a testosterone-heavy event, egos get involved quickly. Speed is often equated to masculinity and strength, and physical fights sometimes break out when winners gloat too much over losers of races. Local police have had to report to the drag strip often in recent weeks and have threatened to shut down the strip completely if any more fights occur. Therefore, the aggression has been transferred from the real world to cyberspace, and winners are gloating over and making fun of losers online through texts and public forum posts at the local racing scene's Facebook group. Trevor is undefeated in his racing exploits, and this has given him a very inflated self- conception. His success has gotten to his head, and he has been getting his kicks by insulting and humiliating online those who lose against him. Some guys he has defeated are sick of how he's been acting and are organizing a group to go over to his house, trash his car with shovels and sledgehammers, and beat him up. Trevor gets tipped off about this plan the day before it is supposed to happen.

Questions: What should Trevor do? Who should be involved, and what should be done about this problem—in order of priority? What are the differences between cyberaggression and in-person aggression? Is one more severe than the other? Have you ever seen online incidents transmute into real-world violence?

SCENARIO ELEVEN

Ethan, a 15-year-old student, loves music and art. Ever since he was in middle school and saw his favorite artist Imagine Dragons perform, he has wanted to become a great musician. For his 16th birthday, his parents bought Ethan a Fender acoustic guitar. Since then, Ethan has been practicing nonstop every day after school and has quickly learned how to play and read music. Ethan feels confident enough to play in front of his family and a few friends, who have been encouraging him to play at the school's talent show coming up in a few weeks. Ethan agrees despite being unsure about what other classmates will think of him. The following day, Ethan registers for the talent show and tells a few of his friends that he plans on posting a video on YouTube of him practicing the song he will play. Ethan also wanted to share the video online to see if he would get some positive feedback, to ideally raise his confidence to play in front of his classmates. He records himself playing in a four-minute video and uploads it to YouTube, excited to receive feedback. The following day at school, Ethan tells his friends that the YouTube video has been posted and that they should check it out. Later that day, Ethan eagerly checks his video and sees that there are hundreds of comments. As he begins reading the comments, tears begin to well up in his eyes. Comments like "You suck" and "AAHHH MY EARS!" And "You have no talent" are just a few of the many that are posted. Comments were also posted that had nothing to do with Ethan's guitar playing and singing. Some comments read "Nobody at school likes you" and "You're fugly as heck". Ethan removed the video, vowed to never play guitar again and dropped out of the talent show.

Questions: If you were Ethan's friend, what would you do? What should the school do? Should the talent show go on? What can Ethan's family do that would actually be helpful? Does YouTube have certain responsibilities to protect Ethan from these comments? How and why? How can we encourage other students to not say anything if they don't have something nice to say?

SCENARIO TWELVE

Aram and his family moved from the Middle East to the United States when Aram was two years old. Growing up, it was always difficult for Aram to fit in because kids would always tease him about the way he looks and where he was born. For Aram's tenth birthday, his parents bought him a PlayStation 4. Aram fell in love with video games; it was an escape from all the teasing from school. After a while, Aram began asking his parents if they'd allow him to access a PlayStation Network (PSN). At first, his parents refused. It wasn't until Aram turned 12 that his parents decided it was okay that he played on that online gaming network. Aram loved wearing his headset, and loved talking to people all over the world as it just seemed easier

to make friends this way than in person. He was happy and really enjoying it. One night before dinner, however, Aram's mother noticed that Aram was crying and upset. She asked Aram several times what happened but he refused to say what was wrong. Aram's mother had a feeling it had something to do with PSN. After dinner, Aram went back to playing and his mother decided to come in and check on him. She noticed he was still upset, so she asked him if he could take off his headset. She then went over to unplug the headset, so that she could then hear other players' voices live through the television speakers. That's when Aram's mom heard all the nasty comments people were saying to Aram. Other PSN players were calling Aram awful racist names, and calling him a terrorist. This is what had made Aram so upset prior to dinner.

Questions: What would you do if you were Aram? Should Aram's mom take his console away? Is it PSN's responsibility to help create safe gaming spaces, or the creators of the specific game being played? What is the responsibility of all gamers in creating a welcoming community for others? Was Aram too young to have access? How is racist or religious bullying different than regular bullying?

SCENARIO THIRTEEN

Allison has been dating Josh since last year when they were both freshmen in high school. Allison is a very intelligent student and is quite popular among her sophomore class. Lately, however, Allison's popularity has gotten Josh jealous. After weeks of arguments, Allison decides it is best that they break up and remain friends. At first, Josh agrees but over time he becomes bitter about the breakup. Allison has become the most popular student at school, and this has made Josh furious – who is no longer as popular as he was when he was dating Allison. One day, Josh and his friend notice that Allison has a cold sore around her mouth. Allison was battling a fever and flu the week before Josh and his friend noticed this. Josh, still upset over their breakup, decides to spread a rumor about Allison. During their lunch break, Josh and a few of his buddies decide to go to the school library to use the computers. They each log onto their social media accounts and begin telling everyone they know to stay away from Allison. Specifically, Josh began telling everyone that Allison had an STD and that was why Allison broke up with him. Word began to spread at school as well as on Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok stating that Allison was sleeping around, and that is how she got an STD. It only took a day to go by until Allison began to notice her classmates acting differently towards her. When she found out about the rumors, she was so embarrassed and hurt. She went to the school's office and had her parents pick her up.

Questions: What would you do if you were Allison? How should the school get involved? The police? What might be an appropriate formal response? What concerns do you have for Allison's well-being, and how might she be supported in the short-term and the long-term? What can be done about the false rumors being spread on social media? What would you do if you were Allison's best friend? Her parents?

SCENARIO FOURTEEN

Lena is a 17-year-old cheerleader for her high school's football team. Despite being somewhat new to the school, she's made some friends with the girls on the team. One evening, after a late pre-game cheer practice, the captain of the squad, Mia, tells Lena about a homecoming party that she's having Friday night after the big game. Lena, excited to be noticed by the head cheerleader, calls her mom to say she's been invited to a sleepover. Her mom, happy that Lena is making some friends, agrees to the sleepover. Friday comes quicker than expected and Mia tells Lena they'll carpool together after the game. The team wins and everyone leaves to head to the party, including the quarterback, Dylan, whom Lena has a crush on. While the party is in full swing, Lena is already on her 4th cup of beer, playing beer pong with Dylan who tells her "she's more fun when she's drinking." As she watches the pair, Mia announces a drinking contest between Lena and Dylan and with that announcement, everyone has their phones out using Snapchat to record the moment. Lena is having the time of her life, drinking beer, taking shots, dancing on top of a table, kissing Dylan, all while the crowd is shouting her name with excitement. Next morning, Lena wakes half-clothed and sees that her phone has blown up text notifications and missed calls from her mom. She checks her phone and sees her classmates, and random people tagging her on Instagram and Snapchat. With her heart racing with nervousness, she looks through her social media accounts and finds a post on Mia's Finsta that says, "we can't have sl*t*s on the cheer team", "clearly, she's a drunk", "if you have 20\$ I bet she's in!" Lena notices she's blocked from viewing the rest, so she turns to Instagram. Still scrolling, she's tagged on a Finsta page and sees all multiple videos of her drinking, dancing on Dylan, and her passed out drunk. Her phone buzzes again and a new text reads, "since you can't stop being such a drunk sl*t, you're officially off the team".

Questions: What would you do if you were Lena? Should the school get involved? How can a school administrator handle this issue? Should the school encourage Lena to talk to her mom? If Lena does share the truth about everything that happened, what should Lena's mother do? Should the police be involved? Do social media sites have a responsibility to do something here as well? What are some ways that Lena can overcome this?