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**Informing Adolescents about Potential Internet Risks and Tools for Safely Navigating  
Online Spaces**

Rhiannon Jean Elliot

A Capstone Project for the Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Science

### Introduction

This capstone project focuses on digital safety for adolescents who have already been or are accessing online spaces for the first time. Adolescents today have been growing up in the age of technology and are likely to have had access to digital devices, such as smartphones, tablets, computers, and gaming consoles, from a much younger age than previous generations. Today, 96% of teens in the U.S. say they use the internet daily, with about 95% of teens reporting having a smartphone (Faverio & Sidoti, 2024). With adolescents accessing the internet more often, they must understand the risks they may encounter online and how to navigate it safely and responsibly. Adolescents are more vulnerable to online risks, such as phishing scams, grooming, or other dangerous behaviors. Because of this, there is a need for comprehensive online safety education that explains the potential risks they may come across with real-life examples and tools to navigate online spaces in safe and smart ways. My project will first describe the potential risks of the internet, using the four main categories of online risks (content, contact, conduct, and commerce). Secondly, the project will explain the potential dangers and benefits of talking to people online and online friendships. Lastly, the project will highlight examples of ways adolescents can protect themselves online using the acronym SMART (*Stay Safe, Don't Meet Up, Accepting Files, Reliable?, and Tell Someone*) and how to implement it into their online lives. My capstone project will address this by providing a one-time workshop incorporating these three lessons in an interactive presentation that includes videos from adolescents' experiences and points of view and an assessment of their knowledge. This workshop will be presented at the Village Project's after-school site in Seaside, California, with participants ages 12 to 15 years old who have access to the internet through digital devices.

### Needs Statement

Adolescents of today are accessing the internet at a higher rate than their previous generations; out of the 96% who say that they use the internet daily, the amount of adolescents reporting that they are online “almost constantly” has nearly doubled to 46% in the past ten years (Faverio & Sidoti, 2024). Because of this increased internet usage and access to online spaces, adolescents need to be equipped with the knowledge of potential dangers and have the means to keep themselves and their private information safe. To promote awareness of this topic, this project will teach adolescents about the risks involved with accessing the internet, additional information about communicating with people online, and tools on how to protect themselves online.

During adolescence, a period of development between the ages of 10 and 19, is characterized by the hormonal and physical changes caused by puberty, moving from elementary school to middle and high school, social changes and pressures, emotional volatility, and an increased want for independence. The amount of time an adolescent spends with their family drastically decreases as they get older, with 5th graders spending 35% of their waking hours with family down to 14% by 12th grade (Grusec & Hastings, 2014, p. 62). Due to this rise of independence and individuality during this time, adolescents are learning about their own values, placing more importance on peer and romantic relationships, and they are figuring out how to make decisions that are right for them. Because of this, adolescents are shaped not only by their peers and family, but also by what they see online and on social media. The prevalence of online use was exasperated by the COVID-19 pandemic because school-aged children had to take online classes from home, and their use of mobile phones and computers significantly increased, which led to a rise in mobile phone addiction (Li et al., 2022). This increased use of the internet

and social media means that adolescents are spending more time in online spaces, which can help them find their self-identities, communicate with their peers, and emotionally express themselves (Zhang, 2023). “However, studies have shown that excessive screen time and media multitasking can negatively affect executive functioning, sensorimotor development, and academic outcomes” (Muppalla et al., 2023). With the conflicting effects social media has on adolescents' development, it means that they need guidance on how to navigate the intricacies of online spaces so as not to create bad habits or open themselves to unnecessary risks.

Social media has become an integral part of our society, with people using it to connect with family and friends, as well as interact with celebrities and other influencers. Adolescents have been using social media at a much higher rate than ever before, with 95% of adolescents ages 13-17 having a smartphone, 90% of adolescents having a laptop or computer, and 80% of adolescents having some sort of gaming console. With that, 53% of adolescents report being on the internet in some way “almost constantly,” with adolescents using YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat the most out of all social media sites (Vogels et al., 2022). Through these social media sites, adolescents are not only connecting with their peers and family members, but they are also accessible to the general public. While sites such as YouTube do not have private messaging options, sites such as Instagram and Snapchat are more commonly used for their private messaging amongst adolescents. Parents of these adolescents are also giving their children their own smartphones at increasingly younger ages, with 51% of parents giving their child(ren) a smartphone between the ages of 9 and 11 years old. This is mainly used for ease of communication with the child when they are apart (Auxier et al, 2020). When it comes to screen time, on average, adolescents in the United States spend up to 9 hours daily on digital devices. While screens can entertain, teach, and keep children occupied, too much use may lead

to problems. Some problems that may arise are exposure to violence, misleading or inaccurate information, and cyberbullies and predators. As well as too much screen time can lead to sleep problems, low self-image, and less time spent with family and friends outside of the digital world (AACAP, 2020).

With the increased use of technology by adolescents, there is an increased risk of exposure to dangers that come from being unsupervised on the internet; despite efforts by caregivers and tech companies to protect kids from problematic material, they still encounter these dangers and problematic material online (Weir, 2023). These dangers can be categorized into four distinct categories known as the 4 C's of online risks: content, contact, conduct, and commerce. The first risk is content, expressed by material they might find upsetting, disgusting, or otherwise uncomfortable, especially if they encounter it accidentally. This can include pornography, violence that is either real or simulated, content that is racist or homophobic, drug use, self-harm, or misinformation. What adolescents see online is one of the most significant risks since it is quite literally what the internet is: content, so making sure that adolescents are protecting themselves from interacting with inappropriate content is imperative. Secondly, contact risks are described by the potential harm that adolescents may face when talking with other people or users online. This includes peer pressure or inappropriate commercial advertising. This also includes interactions with adults posing as children or adolescents, in order to groom or exploit the child or adolescent for either sexual, financial, or other purposes. The third risk is conduct, or the behavior one exhibits online. Examples of this risk include cyberbullying, sexting, sending or receiving nude or semi-nude photos, sharing content that reveals personal information about other people, impersonating people online or "catfishing," and using other people's personal or financial information for one's own personal gain (Orlando,

2023). The last risk category is commerce, which includes things like online gambling, inappropriate advertising, and phishing or financial scams. Even with how technologically savvy today's adolescents are, they are still susceptible to falling for online scams. Online scam complaints from persons under 21 years old to the FBI reached about 23,200 last year, drastically increasing from 9,000 in 2017. The most common scams that adolescents are falling for are job scams, online influencer scams, online shopping scams, and romance scams (O'Brien, 2021). This can be due to the level of confidence that adolescents have when navigating the internet due to having "grown up" using it, or when it comes to influencer scams, the influencer is taking advantage of the parasocial relationship one has with a large online creator. These four risk categories cover many dangers that adolescents may face and need to be aware of.

Expanding on contact risks, minors, especially young adolescents, are especially vulnerable due to their inexperience in the outside world and are easy targets for those wishing to harm the minor because it is easy to gain trust from them once a relationship is formed (i.e., stranger danger is gone once communication beyond a certain amount of time has begun). These adults are called cyber predators, and they use online spaces and contact with minors in order to "groom" them for the adult's personal gratification. Adults online can hide behind a false identity and convince these children and adolescents to trust them, and then the cyber predator can harm the child or adolescent emotionally or physically. In other cases, these predators can misguide the child or adolescent into giving them photos of themselves, personal information, home addresses, or financial account information from their parents (Wolak et al., 2008). These cyber predators, or groomers, can interact easily with children and adolescents through the internet via chat platforms or various forms of social media. Parents who give their children and adolescents smartphones with 24/7 internet connection mean well, but unfettered access to the internet means

that most adolescents are interacting with social media. Also, adolescents can spend tremendous amounts of time playing online games. Gaming and social media platforms with private messaging tools pose considerable dangers to adolescent girls and boys (Dorasamy et al, 2021). This is because social media and gaming platforms are within the public domain, where anyone can access adolescents and vice versa. While this access is safe when adolescents are interacting with peers or family members, adolescents need to be wary when interacting with people that they do not otherwise know in their personal lives outside of online spaces.

Due to the risks of having a social media presence and accessing online spaces, adolescents must learn how to navigate the internet safely. Adolescent online safety includes understanding the implications of how they present themselves and interact with others digitally (sharing thoughts, photos, videos, and connecting with others) and what information they consume and its potential risks (Nemecek, 2024). In order to have adolescents understand and remember the ways to stay safe online, a simple acronym is used: SMART, which stands for “*Stay Safe, Don’t Meet Up, Accepting Files, Reliable?, and Tell Someone.*” While this acronym is usually used for younger children, it can still be useful for adolescents since it covers any dangers discussed within the 4 C’s of online risks. The “stay safe” emphasizes the importance of securing their private information by not sharing it with strangers online or posting it publicly. Private information includes information such as name, home address, phone number, social security number, school name, and other personal information. The “don’t meet up” means that adolescents should not meet with someone they only know from online spaces without explicit permission and supervision from a parent or guardian. It is also essential to remind adolescents that they never truly know who they are talking to online. The “accepting files” reminds adolescents that they should, one, never accept a friend request from someone they don’t know,



and two, do not accept files (such as emails, texts, documents, and photos) from strangers. Opening files from people they do not know may cause their devices to become corrupted by viruses, or adolescents could receive content that may be disturbing. Adolescents should also be reminded that they have the option and the right to block anyone who is making them feel uncomfortable. The “reliable” emphasizes the importance of using their critical thinking skills to determine if the information that they are getting online is reputable and correct, as well as not spreading misinformation. The “tell someone” reiterates the importance of talking to a trusted adult, such as a parent, guardian, or teacher, if someone or something is making them feel uncomfortable or concerned. This also applies if adolescents see a peer being bullied or put in uncomfortable situations online, having trusted adults to step in when adolescents are dealing with difficult situations is important in supporting the adolescent in their journey navigating online spaces (AGParts Education, 2023). In short, a few ways online safety education can be summed up by having adolescents privatizing their social media profiles, only adding or friending people they know in real life, ignoring or deleting messages from people they do not know, avoiding posting any personal information as well as photos of themselves when they are a minor. It is also important to remind adolescents that while there are many dangers they can face online, the internet is a great tool to use to connect with others, be creative, and have fun, but also to make sure that they use the internet responsibly and safely.

In conclusion, this capstone project aims to increase adolescents' awareness of dangers they may encounter in online spaces as well as tools they can use to mitigate those risks. My workshop will teach adolescents about online risks, examples of them and collaborating on how to minimize those risks. The workshop will also educate adolescents about online interactions and the positives and the negatives of communicating with others online. And lastly my

workshop will give adolescents ideas on how they can protect themselves and their personal information while online.

### **Theory**

The theory that will be implemented for this capstone is Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory. This theory demonstrates how the environment shapes human behavior based on social, cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences and impacts how humans learn (Rosenthal, Zimmerman, & Bandura, 1978). People observe behavior through social interactions that they witness with people they are interacting with personally or secondhand through consumption of various media forms. Media, specifically social media, can powerfully influence an individual's behaviors, attitudes, and values and often depicts certain behaviors, attitudes, and values as more prevalent or acceptable than they are. When those who are being observed have favorable outcomes, their behavior is more likely to be imitated, while those who are reprimanded or have had undesired outcomes are more likely to be avoided. Bandura's theory is based on the knowledge that people learn through observing, imitating, and modeling others' behavior. When adolescents are online, the people they observe through their screens online can influence their behavior. Adolescents are susceptible to following whatever their favorite online influencers are doing or following trends that emerge online. For this reason, this theory is particularly qualified to be referenced within my project to enhance my understanding of teaching adolescents digital safety.

An additional component of the Social Learning Theory is that in order for humans to remember the information they learned successfully, their attention, memory, and motivation must be supported (Rosenthal, Zimmerman & Bandura, 1978). Social Learning Theory offers an opportunity to improve retention throughout my workshop, as the concepts within the theory will

be supported through my curriculum. For success in an activity using the social learning theory, it will need to get and hold the student's attention. My workshop will gain their attention through videos of adolescents speaking about their experiences in online spaces and group discussions that result in positive reinforcement, i.e., giving out gummy bears or chocolates for answering questions. Adolescents' active participation in the workshop will help them maintain focus throughout the presentation. Nevertheless, attention alone is insufficient when it comes to retaining information (Rosenthal, Zimmerman & Bandura, 1978). The subject matter encapsulated within my presentation will help the adolescents take the information they learned and commit it to memory. This will be done by using interesting visuals and videos, and matching and writing information down from memory. Doing this will aid their commitment of the information to memory. Additionally, self-efficacy and motivation are components of Bandura's social learning theory. How someone believes in how they impact their environment truly shapes their realization of that impact (Freudenberg et al., 2010). Therefore, for this social learning to happen, the participants must exchange knowledge in an interactive environment with a social outcome. The participants will be participating in continual discussions about the topic and aid in their increasing knowledge about online safety.

### **Consideration of Diversity**

My workshop was held at the Village Project in Seaside, California. The Village Project Inc. is a nonprofit organization geared to meeting the needs of the underserved African American community in Monterey County. They have several programs that support the community, such as therapy services, youth programs, workshops, and an after-school program for students kindergarten through 12th grade. I did my project at the Mae C. Johnson Education and Cultural Enrichment Academy, the after-school program the Village Project provides. They support more

than 70 students, with the majority of the students being African American and a small minority of the students being Latino or mixed race. The program mostly serves lower socioeconomic status families, and the majority of the students I have worked with are 12 years or younger. Keeping this in mind, I wanted to focus on the older students who were either in middle school or entering high school, since most of the focus of the program is to provide early support for students. The target demographic for my participants was to have several students between the ages of 11 to 14, to have a range of students who are more likely to have a digital device or more consistent use of technology. The actual participants ranged from 12 to 15 years old, with a mix of both boys and girls. The sociodemographics of the participants in the project were as follows: Sex and gender identity is 71% Male and 29% Female. Race and ethnicity are 86% Black or African American and 14% Latino. Their ages consisted of 14% are 12 years old, 29% are 13 years old, 29% are 14 years old, and 29% are 15 years old. All of the participants attend a school in the Monterey Peninsula Unified School District (MPUSD), where the majority of the students are Latino at 62%, 18.8% White, 8.6% Asian or Asian Pacific Islander, and 5.2% Black or African American. In MPUSD, 43.5% of students are on the free or reduced lunch program (US News, 2023). As of 2022, 96.5% of households in Monterey County have access to the internet and a computer in the home (Census.gov, 2023).

These characteristics influenced my development of the project because I had a wide range of ages I could focus my project on and had to consider diversity with my presentation, as I am a mixed Latino person who does not have the same sociodemographic issues that my participants may face. I knew I wanted to focus on adolescents within my project, so formulating the curriculum was more focused on the content provided to the participants, making sure that the information was both age-appropriate and engaging. I also wanted to ensure that the

questionnaire I provided for my assessment had language and terms based on the topic that was easy to understand. The videos I found to aid in my lesson plan included many different racial and ethnic backgrounds, a mix of genders, and had actual adolescents presenting the information. It was important to me to have the participants see people that they would consider their peers reiterating the information I was presenting on in order for them to feel represented. This project could be seen as not entirely inclusive, as it could isolate those who do not have access to the internet or do not have a digital device. A potential limitation of this project was that all the information was given and written in English, and while all my participants spoke English as a primary language, it would not have been accessible to those who were English learners or spoke other languages besides English.

### **Learning Outcomes**

My capstone project focused on informing adolescents about risks they could face online, as well as strategies to help them navigate those risks. This project had the following learning outcomes:

1. Adolescents will be able to identify the 4 C's of internet risks (content, contact, conduct, and commerce).
2. Adolescents will identify at least one benefit and one risk of interacting with people online.
3. Adolescents will be able to describe at least three online safety strategies.

## **Methods**

### **Location and Participants**

This project was conducted at The Village Project, Inc. at their afterschool site in Seaside, California. The participants attended a one hour, one-day workshop that consisted of three lessons with an assessment before and after the presentation. There were seven participants between the ages of 12 to 15 years old, with five boys and two girls. All participants were a part of The Village Project's after-school program Monday through Friday. Six participants were African American, one was Latino, and all spoke English as a primary language.

### **Procedures and Materials for Section #1**

The adolescents gathered in the room where I was presenting, along with a teacher and the volunteer coordinator for the site, to watch the presentation. Once everyone was settled, I started my presentation (see Appendix A) and introduced myself to the participants with some fun facts. Even though I have been volunteering at the service site for almost 6 months, I do not directly work with most of the adolescents, as the younger students need more hands-on help. I then passed out my questionnaires and started a five-minute timer for them to complete the first page. Each participant filled out a pre-lesson questionnaire (see Appendix B) to assess their amount of internet usage and what applications they use. This assessment found that each participant spent over 3 hours online daily, and the majority of the participants use Instagram and TikTok out of all the social media applications. After they filled out the questionnaire, I started my first lesson about the 4 types of online risks: content, contact, conduct, and commerce. I slowly revealed each word that represented the online risks and had adolescents participate by asking what they thought each word meant before revealing the definition of each risk. Next, I broke down each risk by giving a more detailed description of each online risk and explaining

possible harmful examples associated with that risk. Throughout this part of the lesson, I reiterated the importance of being aware of these online risks and potentially risky behaviors in order to keep themselves safe from harm online, as well as it is okay to go to trusted adults if they ever feel unsafe online or come across any of these dangers. A few of the students noted concern about how their online conduct will affect their futures, and I noted that with the increase in social media and online usage, it is possible that college or job recruiters may use their digital footprint as a point of assessment. I also reassured them that they are still rather young and that going forward, they should be more aware of what they are doing online and understand the potential negative consequences that may come out of what they are doing and posting online. Before moving on to the next lesson, I also showed a short YouTube video titled *“Teen Voices: Oversharing and Your Digital Footprint,”* which mostly reiterated what I had already gone over during this first lesson and broke down what their digital footprint is and how to think critically before posting online.

### **Procedures and Materials for Section #2**

For the second lesson of the presentation, I first previewed the topic of online friendships and grooming in the “contact” section of the previous lesson to gauge their understanding of the topic. Secondly, I answered questions about the term “grooming” and its possible examples, as students were unfamiliar with it. I also prefaced the topic of talking to people online by telling them that it is okay to talk to people they know in real life online, but to be wary of those who they only know from online spaces and not give out any personal information or photos to a person online before knowing they are who they say they are, and even once they are sure that they are a safe person, to still be aware of what information they give out and any media you send to them. Thirdly, we talked about how using artificial intelligence (AI) could be a possible

factor to consider when interacting with people online and reminding them to use critical thinking when looking at images or information we see online. Lastly, we watched a YouTube video titled “*Teen Voices: Who You’re Talking to Online*,” where adolescents in the video explained the benefits and risks of interacting with people online. After the video finished, we discussed what was said in the video and gave examples of potential risks and benefits of having internet friendships.

### **Procedures and Materials for Section #3**

For the third and final lesson of my presentation, I first asked the participants to think about everything they learned over the course of the presentation and, using that information, come up with six ideas for ways to protect themselves online. Most of them were shy and did not necessarily want to participate, but I told them that if they were to participate, they could get either gummy bears or a piece of chocolate. They then were more motivated to participate, and I got six ideas jotted down into the presentation slide. This was a precursor to my lesson on SMART guidelines for online safety. I then went through the acronym SMART, which stands for “*Stay Safe, Don’t Meet Up, Accepting Files, Reliable?, and Tell Someone*.” For “stay safe,” I expressed the importance of not giving out personal information such as home address, where they go to school or places they often frequent, as well as phone number or social security number. For “don’t meet up,” explained the seriousness of not meeting up with people that they have met online and if they were to meet up with someone to make sure that they tell a parent or guardian before meeting up with anyone to potentially set up a safe meeting place for all parties involved to avoid unnecessary dangerous situations. For “accepting files,” I told them that accepting files such as emails, direct messages, pictures, or texts from people they do not know can be dangerous and may cause their devices to develop a virus or open themselves up to harm,



depending on the content. For “reliable,” I talked about using their critical thinking skills to determine if the information they are looking at is correct online. For “tell someone,” I reiterated the importance of telling a trusted adult if anything or anyone is making them feel uncomfortable or unsafe online and that whatever adult they choose to tell would be happy to help them and not be ashamed or embarrassed as those trusted adults have their best interest at heart. Throughout this part of the presentation, I answered any questions they had about the different ways of being safe on the internet.

After this lesson was over, I had the participants turn to the second page of the questionnaire I had given them at the beginning of the presentation and answer the three questions listed (see Appendix B). The first question was about matching the internet risk to the examples of that risk. The second question asked the participants to list at least one benefit and one risk of interacting with people online. The third and final question asked the participants to list three strategies on how to keep themselves safe while online. I gave the participants seven minutes to finish the questions, allowing them to have extra time if needed. All of the participants also received either gummy bears or a piece of chocolate for their participation in watching the presentation and turning in the completed questionnaire.

## **Results**

### **Pre-Lesson Questionnaire**

At the beginning of the presentation, I had the participants fill out a pre-lesson questionnaire (see Appendix B) that included information about the participants' demographics, such as age, school district, gender identity, and information about internet education and use. Participants had five minutes to complete the pre-lesson questionnaire:

*Question: At school, have you had a lesson on online safety?*

<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Did Not Answer</b>
4/7 (57%)	2/7 (29%)	1/7 (14%)

*Question: At home, have your parents or guardians talked to you about online safety?*

<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Did Not Answer</b>
4/7 (57%)	2/7 (29%)	1/7 (14%)

This second question had the same results as the previous question, but not the same participants answered the same. I then began asking questions about their specific online usage, beginning with the age at which they started going online.

*Question: At what age did you start going online?*

<b>Under 5 years old</b>	<b>7-8 years old</b>	<b>9-10 years old</b>	<b>11-12 years old</b>	<b>13 years old or older</b>
1/7 (14%)	1/7 (14%)	1/7 (14%)	2/7 (29%)	2/7 (29%)

*Question: Do you currently have a phone with internet access?*

<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
5/7 (71%)	2/7 (29%)

*Question: Do you currently have a device that is not a phone with which you can access the internet? If yes, which devices do you have?*

<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>
6/7 (86%)		1/7 (14%)
<b>A Tablet or iPad</b> 2/6 (33%)	<b>A Laptop</b> 3/6 (50%)	

If they answered “Yes” to either of the above questions, I had them self-identify how many hours they spend online per day outside of school-related obligations.

*Question: If you answered yes to either of the above questions, how many hours do you spend online per day (not school-related)?*

<b>1-2 Hours daily</b>	<b>3-4 Hours daily</b>	<b>5-6 Hours daily</b>	<b>Over 6 Hours daily</b>
1/7 (14%)	1/7 (14%)	3/7 (43%)	2/7 (29%)

*Question: Do you have social media? If yes, circle which platforms you have.*

<b>Yes</b>					<b>No</b>
7/7 (100%)					0/7 (0%)
<b>Instagram</b>	<b>TikTok</b>	<b>Snapchat</b>	<b>Twitter/X</b>	<b>Twitch</b>	
6/7 (86%)	6/7 (86%)	3/7 (43%)	2/7 (29%)	1/7 (14%)	

This pre-lesson questionnaire was to see how my participants interact with the internet, have them reflect on their online usage, and give me an idea of adjusting the presentation based on their answers. I had somewhat anticipated that most of the participants would have online access, but I was surprised that all of the participants had social media.

### **Post-Lesson Questionnaire**

There was no formal assessment after each individual lesson since I wanted them to focus on the information being presented and see how much they remembered over the hour-long presentation. Participants were given a formal post-lesson questionnaire attached to their pre-lesson questionnaire (see Appendix B), where they answered three questions related to each lesson. Participants were given 7 minutes to answer all three questions, with some leniency if they needed more time.

The first lesson's learning outcome is participants will be able to identify the 4 C's of online risks (content, contact, conduct, and commerce). For this, the participants had to draw a line to match each one of the four C's to their respective examples of that risk. I did add an additional "C" in the form of cyberbullying that we had touched over briefly, but it was not one of the 4 C's that they were supposed to identify to test if they had been paying attention to the presentation. Only content, contact, conduct, and commerce connections were graded. For the participants to have passed the assessment, they needed to have scored at least a 3 out of 4. If the participants scored 2 out of 4 or less, they failed. After reviewing the answers, four out of the seven participants (57%) identified all of them correctly. Two out of seven participants (29%) identified 3 out of 4 correctly, with both of them mistaking conduct and cyberbullying, which were somewhat similar in terms of answers. One participant out of seven (14%) only identified 2 of them correctly. If I had not added cyberbullying as a potential matching pair, six out of seven

(86%) would have gotten this question fully correct; because of this, this learning outcome was fully met because the majority of the participants were able to identify the 4 C's of online risks correctly.

The second learning outcome is that participants will identify at least one benefit and one risk of interacting with people online. For this learning outcome, the participants had to answer the question in their own words in the space provided on the page. For the participants to pass, they would need to list at least one benefit and one risk of talking to people online. If they could only come up with a benefit or a risk, they would get partial credit but would not fail. And if they could not come up with any benefits or risks, they would fail. After reviewing the answers, one out of seven participants (14%) came up with 2 benefits and 2 risks. One of the seven participants (14%) listed 1 benefit and 2 risks, and 1 risk was listed as a benefit, which I did not give credit for. Four out of seven participants (57%) listed 1 risk and 1 benefit. One out of seven participants (14%) could only list 1 risk. The most frequently mentioned risks were “getting kidnapped,” “send inappropriate photos to you,” “they can be older,” and “they can take your information.” The most frequently mentioned benefits were “making new friends” and “being able to talk to someone.” This learning outcome was fully met because the participants could identify at least one risk and one benefit of interacting with people online, with a few of the participants being able to list more than one of either. While most of their answers were similar, they all used their own words when it came to answering the question.

The third and final learning outcome is that participants will be able to describe at least three online safety strategies. Lastly, participants had to write down three strategies they learned to pass for this learning outcome. If they write down 2 or fewer strategies, they would fail. After assessing their answers, four out of seven participants (57%) listed 3 strategies. Two out of seven

participants (29%) listed only 2 strategies. One out of seven participants (14%) did not list any strategies but listed 3 online risks (content, conduct, and commerce). The most frequently mentioned strategies were: “don’t post your private information online,” “don’t click unknown links,” “don’t post inappropriate things,” “don’t accept friend requests or follow strangers,” and “private your accounts.” This learning outcome has very little flexibility to the number of strategies they listed because, throughout the presentation, I incorporated many examples of online safety strategies, and before introducing this lesson, I had the group come up with at least 6 strategies, so it should have been relatively easy to come up with 3 examples of online safety strategies. This learning outcome was partially met because I was expecting all of the participants to be able to come up with at least 3 strategies, and only a little over half of the participants were able to meet that learning outcome.

### **Discussion**

This capstone project focuses on digital safety for adolescents and provides them with tools to protect themselves online. This was done by providing them examples of risks they could face online, as well as strategies on ways they can keep themselves safe online. Overall, I would say that this project was largely successful, with two of the learning outcomes being fully met and one being partially met. I think this success was due to having the participants involved in discussions about each learning outcome and having the information taught to them in multiple ways. Learning outcome one was successful because 86% of the participants could identify at least 3 of the 4 discussed online risks. This success is essential because it was pertinent for me to properly educate the participants about potential online risks since adolescents are more likely to be vulnerable to them. Also, the participants were engaged in learning about the risks since they reported that their only introduction to online safety in schools

was cyberbullying and expressed that they would have appreciated learning about the discussed risks before going onto online spaces. Learning outcome two was also successful because 86% of the participants could list at least one benefit and one risk of interacting with people online. I think that this was successful because, in addition to talking to the participants about online friendships, the video they watched had adolescents talking about their experiences with talking to people online and navigating online friendships, and having someone who was around the same age as them made the messages land better than the discussion we had about the same topic. While learning outcome three was only partially met, almost all participants could list at least 2 strategies they could use to keep themselves safe online. Also, the participants listed a wide range of strategies, which means they did not all get the same information from the project; hopefully, they will help each other be safe and smart in the future while in online spaces.

While this project had many successes, there were some limitations. Even though learning outcome three was partially met, I would consider this to be closer to a failure as all of the participants could not come up with three online safety strategies, and one participant answered the question completely wrong. This could have been due to confusion or rushing to complete the assessment, but the participants were given so many examples as well as they had come up with a list of their own at the beginning of the third lesson that was added to a slide in the PowerPoint. Another limitation was that the participants were all around a large table, but there was not enough space for all of them to sit comfortably, and two of the participants sat near the table but did not have table space to write on when filling out their assessments. Having the participants seated around a table meant they were more likely to be distracted by one another, and several times, I had to redirect attention back to the presentation.

Looking at the successes and limitations of this project, for future considerations, I would like the project to be presented in a less distracting environment, such as a more traditional classroom set up where the desks are facing towards the front. In the future, for this project, I would also like to add more real-life scenarios and potential consequences, as the participants had some questions I could not answer fully. I would also like to give this presentation to a larger group or at schools, as all adolescents could benefit from learning this information. I would also like to augment this project to be accessible and age-appropriate for younger children, as they are also accessing the internet and online spaces if they have access to a digital device. This project and the information provided would also benefit parents or people who work with children and adolescents, as the internet and online spaces are being used more frequently at younger ages. Overall, I see this project as a success. I hope that more children and adolescents are able to have access to online safety education, as this will greatly benefit them from being exposed to inappropriate content when they are not ready or being exploited and falling victim to scams.



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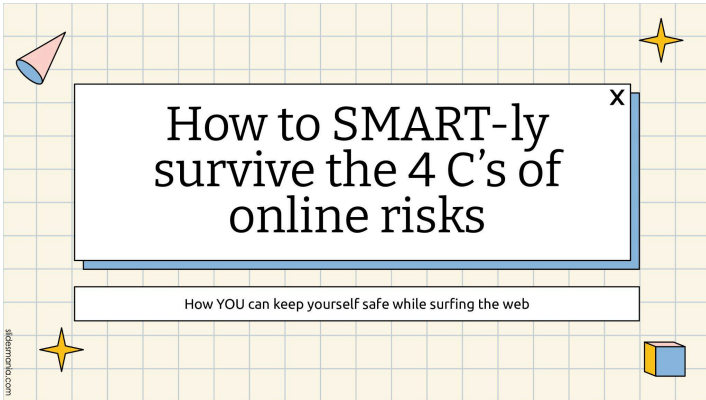
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**APPENDIX**

**Appendix A**

*Workshop Presentation for Adolescents*



How to SMART-ly survive the 4 C's of online risks

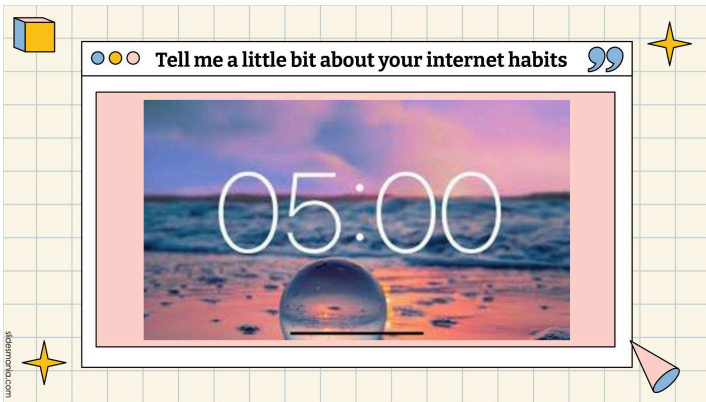
How YOU can keep yourself safe while surfing the web



Hello! I'm Rhiannon

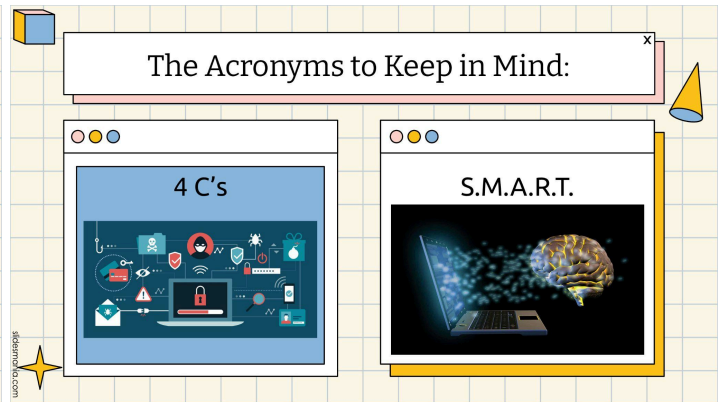
Some fun facts about me:

- ★ I'm a student at CSUMB
- ★ I grew up in Davis, CA
- ★ I have 5 siblings (I am the middle child)
- ★ I have 2 cats and 2 rats that I adore



Tell me a little bit about your internet habits

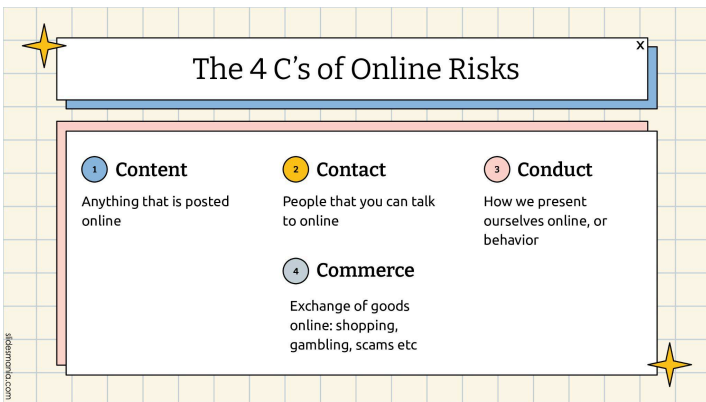
05:00



The Acronyms to Keep in Mind:

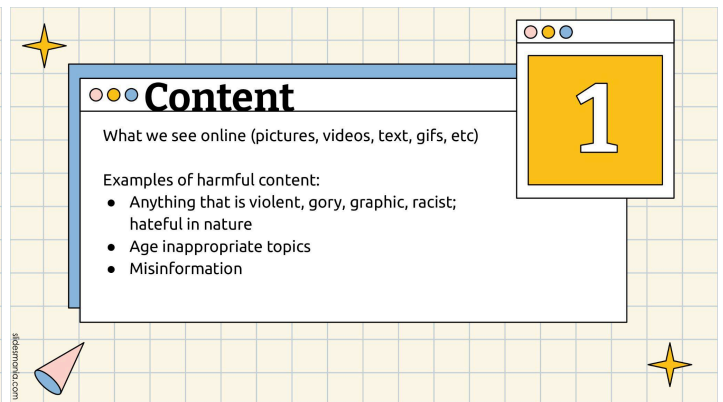
4 C's

S.M.A.R.T.



The 4 C's of Online Risks

<b>1 Content</b> Anything that is posted online	<b>2 Contact</b> People that you can talk to online	<b>3 Conduct</b> How we present ourselves online, or behavior
	<b>4 Commerce</b> Exchange of goods online: shopping, gambling, scams etc	



**Content**

What we see online (pictures, videos, text, gifs, etc)

Examples of harmful content:

- Anything that is violent, gory, graphic, racist; hateful in nature
- Age inappropriate topics
- Misinformation

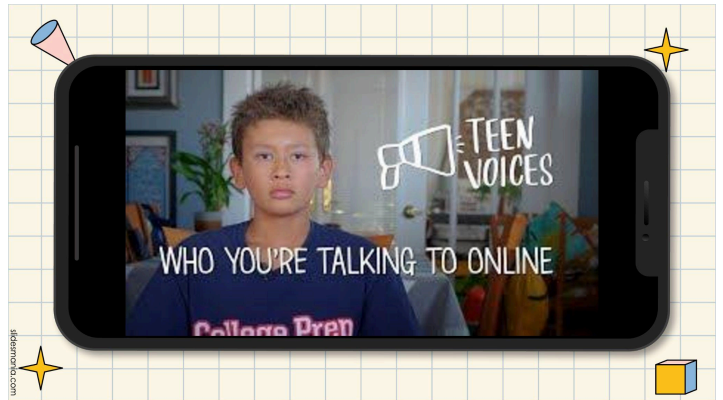
1

## Contact

Who you are talking to online

Examples of harmful contact:

- Harassment
- Stalking
- Grooming (or adults posing as minors)



## Conduct

How you act online, your behavior

Examples of harmful conduct:

- Bullying, exclusion
- Trolling
- Shaming
- Negative peer pressure

## Commerce

Money or personal information exchanged online

Examples of harmful commerce:

- Phishing/scams
- Gambling
- Identity theft/fraud

While the internet is a great way to create community, play games, and learn; it is also important to remember to be smart and keep ourselves and others safe while online. This is important because there are more young people having access to the internet more than ever before, and it's up to us to keep ourselves aware of dangers that you might run into and how to avoid them.



### What are ways we can protect ourselves online?

- Ad Blocker
- Make Accounts Private
- Strong Passwords
- Do not post personal information
- Don't click unknown links
- Don't talk to strangers online

### How can we be SMART online?

- Stay Safe**  
 Don't give out personal information to people you don't know; such as your address, where you go to school, phone number, SSN, etc.
- Don't Meet Up**  
 Meeting someone you have only been in contact with online can be dangerous. Always talk to an adult you trust before meeting up with anyone you don't know in person.
- Accepting Files**  
 Accepting emails, direct messages, pictures or text from people you don't know can harm your devices or yourself depending on the content.
- Reliable?**  
 Check information before you believe it. Is the person or the website telling the truth? Use your critical thinking skills!
- Tell Someone**  
 Tell a trusted adult if something or someone online makes you feel unsafe or worried.



## Appendix B

### Workshop Assessment Documents

#### Pre-lesson Questionnaire

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender Identity: \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle the answer that is the best fits you:

At school, have you had a lesson on online safety? YES / NO

At home, have your parents or guardians talked to you about online safety?  
YES / NO

At what age did you start going online?

I have never seen a computer      Before 5 years old      5-6 years old  
7-8 years old      9-10 years old      11-12 years old  
After 13 years old

Do you currently have a phone with internet access? YES / NO

Do you currently have a device that is not a phone with which you can access the internet? YES / NO

If yes, which of devices do you have? Tablet/iPad      Laptop/Computer

If yes to either of these questions, how long do you spend online per day (not school-related)?

1-2 hours      3-4 hours      5-6 hours      6+ hours

Do you have social media? YES / NO

If yes, circle which ones you have:

Instagram      Facebook      Twitter/X      Snapchat/BeReal

Tik Tok      Discord      Twitch      Tumblr

Online Games (Roblox, Minecraft, Fortnite, etc)

#### Post Lesson Questionnaire

Draw a line to match the 4 C's of online risks discussed today with their definitions:

<u>CONDUCT</u>	Phishing or financial scams, gambling, etc
<u>CONTENT</u>	Talking with people online; harassment, grooming, etc
<u>CYBERBULLYING</u>	Behavior online; peer pressure, shaming, trolling, etc
<u>CONTACT</u>	Inappropriate photos, videos, or text (can be violent or graphic)
<u>COMMERCE</u>	Spreading rumors of lies about someone else

What are some **benefits** and **risks** of talking to people online?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are 3 strategies to keep yourself safe while online?

1: \_\_\_\_\_

2: \_\_\_\_\_

3: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix C

Presentation from Capstone Festival

# Online Risks & Online Safety for Teens

By: Rhiannon Elliot  
Human Development & Family Science

## Introduction

- ★ My capstone project focused on informing adolescents about risks they could face online, as well as strategies to help them navigate those risks.
- ★ I wanted to focus on this because my younger siblings that have gone to me for help when navigating difficult situations involving online spaces and have witnessed an increased use of social media in younger teens.

## Needs Statement

**Issue:**

- ★ Adolescents are accessing the internet more than ever before and are more vulnerable to online risks than other age groups.

**Need:**

- ★ Adolescents need comprehensive online safety education that includes more than just cyberbullying and realistic examples of online dangers.

## Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory

- ★ Humans can learn from others through observation, imitation, and modeling
- ★ How humans learn about their environment is influenced by the behavior patterns of the people around them, i.e. what they see online

**Cognitive Factors (also called "Personal Factors")**

- Knowledge
- Expectations
- Attitudes

**Environmental Factors**

- Social norms
- Access in community
- Influence on others (ability to change own environment)

**Behavioral Factors**

- Skills
- Practice
- Self-efficacy

**Determines Human Behavior**

## Social Learning Theory Application

- ★ In order for humans to remember the information they learned; attention, memory, and motivation must be supported:
  - ❖ Asked the participants questions
  - ❖ Interesting videos that included adolescents sharing their stories about the topics
  - ❖ Gave out candy as prizes for participation, which helped them stay engaged

## Learning Outcomes

Created a one-day workshop to teach adolescents about online risks and how to protect themselves

- 1 Adolescents will be able to identify the 4 C's of internet risks (content, contact, conduct, and commerce).
- 2 Adolescents will identify at least one benefit and one risk of interacting with people online.
- 3 Adolescents will be able to describe at least three online safety strategies.

## Participants

The Village Project's after school program in Seaside, California

- ★ 7 school-aged children; (5) boys & (2) girls
- ★ Age ranged from 12 to 15
- ★ (6) African American, (1) Latino
- ★ All spoke English as their primary language

## Methods

- 1 Discussed the 4 C's of online risks (content, contact, conduct, commerce); gave examples of each
- 2 Watched a YouTube video "Teen Voices: Who are you Talking to Online;" discussed positives and negatives of online friendships
- 3 Group discussion about ways to help them stay safe online, then gave them 5 simple solutions to use the internet SMART-ly

## Results for Learning Outcome #1

Adolescents will be able to identify the 4 C's of internet risks (Content, Contact, Conduct, and Commerce).

Participants had to match the risk to its example:

- ★ 6 out of 7 got three or more of the risks correct

Learning outcome was **Fully Met**

## Results of Learning Outcome #2

Adolescents will identify at least one benefit and one risk of interacting with people online.

Participants filled out a question asking about the benefits and risks of talking to people online:

- ★ 5 out of 7 listed at least one benefit and one risk
- ★ 2 out of 7 listed at least one benefit or risk

Learning outcome was **Fully Met**

## Results of Learning outcome #3

Adolescents will be able to describe at least three online safety strategies.

Participants listed 3 strategies of online safety:

- ★ 4 out of 7 listed 3 strategies
- ★ 2 out of 7 listed 2 strategies
- ★ 1 out of 7 listed 0 strategies

Learning outcome was **Partially Met**

## Discussion: Successes & Challenges

**Successes**

- ★ Learning outcomes 1 & 2 were fully met
- ★ Adolescents were really engaged and interested in the topic
- ★ Asked a lot of questions about the topic

**Challenges**

- ★ Sometimes they would be distracted, still on topic, but would have to repeat myself
- ★ Wasn't enough seats at the table for everyone

## Discussion: Future Considerations

- ★ Have students in desks instead of together in a group around a table
- ★ Focus more on additional online risks and potential real-life consequences
- ★ Give this presentation to a larger group or to individual school classrooms, as all students can benefit from this information

## Thank you for listening!