



CITIZENS CRIME COMMISSION
OF NEW YORK CITY

Lesson Plan: A Student's Guide to Using Social Media Safely

Objective:

To have students identify harmful and violent social media content they witness, experience, and post. This lesson aims to provide students with action steps on how to handle such posts and avoid or resolve conflicts without causing harm to oneself or others. This issue is of great importance as this harmful content creates real world conflicts and violence among youth. Further, law enforcement, employers, schools and colleges, among others, use social media to monitor youth and inform decisions, which can lead to arrest, being fired from a job, being suspended or expelled from school, and/or denied admission to college or a scholarship.

Introduction (3-5 minutes):

Introduce today's topic of social media use and **how it affects life both on- and off-line.**

- For example – How many of you use social media? What do you generally use it for?

Have students **identify positive and negative impacts of using social media.**

- What are some of the pros and cons of using social media? What do you like about social media? What don't you like? How do you feel about what happens on social media? How do things on social media impact your life offline?
 - NOTE: Teens report that social media has both positive and negative impacts on their lives. ***Positive examples include teens feeling better about themselves, increased sympathy for others, and increased self-confidence; however, negative outcomes include problems with parents, anxiety from posted content (i.e. pictures/videos), friendships ending, and face-to-face arguments.***
 - **If students have not brought up negative impacts such as fights, arrests, violence, etc. resulting from social media, ask them about these consequences.**
 - Youth use social media to express a range of behaviors and emotions. ***While some of these behaviors and experiences are common among the general teen population – face-to-face arguments, friendships ending, getting into trouble at school*** – high-risk youth also use social media to ***provoke physical violence***. This behavior is exhibited in a variety of ways: **posting orders of protection that identify complainants to intimidate informants; posting fight videos to shame rivals; posting surveillance photographs of rivals they intend to attack/shoot; instigating conflicts by posting photographs of themselves in front of a rival's apartment building or "turf;" blatant posts discussing serious violent events; incoherent and emotional arguments between rivals; obvious promotion of gang activity; and incessant taunting of rivals.** An on-going cycle of

violence is created as youth instigate, react, and retaliate to content posted on social media.

- Do you ever witness or experience people fighting online or posting something to make other people mad? Have you ever seen pictures/videos of teens with guns, drugs, or wads of money?
 - Follow up with asking them why they think this is happening. How do they feel when they witness or take part in this harmful behavior?
- *Highlight behaviors that might influence the positive and negative outcomes.*
 - How does someone's behavior influence a negative/positive situation, give an example of provoking an argument or ignoring a nasty post, etc. For example, if someone comments "you're ugly" on someone's picture, that will most likely have a negative effect, where saying "you look nice" will have positive effects, and not saying anything will (most likely) have neutral outcomes. Ask students, what is a situation where not saying something would be positive or negative instead of neutral?

Harmful and Violent Social Media Posts (5-10 minutes):

Begin to delve deeper into the problem behaviors happening online – specifically violence, criminal activity (guns, fight videos, drugs, wads of cash, etc.), harassment, meanness, bullying, etc. – by giving students more information on today's topic.

Ask students to identify what their biggest problems are on social media.

- *If students don't identify violence, criminal behavior (guns, assaults, threats, mobbing¹, wads of cash, drugs, etc.), bullying as big problems, ask them why these are not problems and stress the serious harm these types of posts can bring to themselves, people they care about, and others.*
 - For example: have you ever seen people post statuses referencing another person, either by name or not? Have you ever witnessed someone threaten or harass someone on social media? Has anyone "liked" or "shared" a fight video? How can this be harmful to you and others?

Inform students on how police, employers, schools, and colleges all use social media to monitor youth and inform decisions about their futures.

- **Posting inappropriate content online can get you expelled, suspended, fired, hurt, killed, or arrested.**

¹ For the purposes of this curriculum, "mobbing" is defined as when a group of youth is mobilized to a specific location and they travel together down a street, through a park, subway station, or store. Mobbing is a way for crews to promote their image by projecting their strength, size, toughness and power, and a means to intimidate others. Videos of youth mobbing often exhibit them engaging in criminal activities such as theft, vandalism, weapons possession, harassment, and assault, among others.

- Social media activity is seen by everyone in a user’s network (and sometimes the entire public), allowing people to re-post/share posts, causing the posts to be seen by even more people.
 - Police can very easily become aware of posts involving criminal activity, and have used social media as evidence against youth in prosecutions.
- **Deter youth from engaging in criminal activity both on- and off-line.**
- **Posting, liking, sharing, and commenting on criminal activity on social media can put youth at risk for violence, victimization, disciplinary action, and arrest, such as:**
 - Posting, sharing, liking or commenting on pictures/statuses/videos/etc. that include guns, drugs, wads of cash, fights, threats, promoting violence, promoting a crew/gang , etc. This can link youth to criminal activity and can create consequences such as getting arrested, suspended, expelled, fired, or rejected from a job, school, or scholarship.
- Tell students they should not “friend” people or accept “followers” they do not know.
- When youth involved in criminal activity are arrested, often charges are increased due to social media activity. Social media activity has supported the prosecution of youth on felony charges including Conspiracy to Commit Murder, even if the youth was not present for the murder. As a result, youth can face long prison sentences (20+ years).
 - Examples of posts used in criminal prosecutions include: pictures with guns; discussing previous violent events (like shootings, robberies, fights); taunting and threatening rivals; discussing law enforcement activities; coordinating shootings, buying/selling/accessing guns; promoting a crew; associating with a crew by saying “Free XXX” if they have been arrested/incarcerated; music videos calling out rivals; and videos of criminal activity (fights, jumping turnstiles, robberies).
- Remind students that content posted online can live forever and that content is still accessible from the site’s servers after it is deleted by the user – *meaning anyone with a court order can still obtain it. Therefore, students should always think about what they post before they post it and consider who in the future might be able to see or access it.*
- **Employers** use social media as an informal background check – make sure your profile pictures are appropriate and none of your profile is public. If any content is public for some reason, *make sure it is appropriate for anyone to see.*
- Some **colleges and employers** request your social media usernames and passwords to be considered for admissions or hiring– this provides them access to look through all of the applicant’s social media history, messages and posts.
 - Some states have passed laws that make this practice illegal. A national law is currently being pushed (SNOPA), so keep up to date on the laws around this important issue.
 - Facebook has made sharing or soliciting a password a violation of its Statement of Rights and Responsibilities.
 - Inform students that they can tell a college or employer that they cannot share their password because it violates their user agreement with Facebook (or other social media site with the same policy). But note that the college or employer may not admit or hire them as a result of refusing to provide this information.

- **Scholarship providers** have denied applicants a scholarship because of what they posted on social media.
- Bullying, threats, and ranting about your school/classmates/teachers/bosses online can also lead to disciplinary actions such as suspensions, expulsions or being fired.

Once the harmful topics are identified by students (or instructor), get students to define these terms and provide examples of what this looks like to them.

- For example, harm and violence on social media could be something that hurts someone’s feelings, makes them feel in danger, or promotes criminal activity (shootings, violence, assaults, guns, drugs, rape, etc.).
 - Examples may be purposely provoking someone online, posting something nasty about someone, picking on someone repeatedly, making fake accounts to stalk/harass someone, posting about criminal intentions (i.e., mobbing, killing someone, threats), photos or videos of fights or weapons, drinking or using drugs alone, etc.
- Follow up on the problem behaviors listed above by asking students how they currently handle these situations – ignore, confront, post/reply, “like”, tell friends, tell adults, etc.

Dealing with Harmful and Violent Social Media Posts (15-20 minutes):

Ask students how they decide what to do when they see a harmful post.

- How do you know whether a post is serious or not? For example, we have all seen people post things that are not serious, but how do we know? Ask students for an example of this.
- Advise students that they can assess what is written. Depending on their relationship with the person posting and how serious they believe the person to be, they should take action. For example, if it is a direct threat, and you feel the person will act on it, what can you do?

Let students define high, medium, and low-risk posts – For example:

High-Risk: Content that promotes easy access to weapons (pictures posing with guns, selling guns, posts about being armed with a weapon); life threatening; dangerous; threats; previous assaults (these often trigger retaliation); about a crime that is about to happen; or violent content of someone you know that becomes viral (shared videos of fights/humiliating pranks/shaming/bullying/memes/gifs).

Medium-Risk: Likely to cause a serious argument, but no one is in physical danger yet; current court cases/arrests; drugs; cash; mobbing; recruiting people for a fight; or drinking and drug use (especially if the teen is alone).

Low-Risk: Mean/offensive general remarks; attention-seeking; or promoting crews or groups.

NOTE: Be aware that a situation can go through all of these risk levels. For example, what started off as medium-risk can easily become a high-risk situation.

- Ask students how they can track the progression of such posts. This can help them *identify if a post is escalating or deescalating*.
 - **Escalating** posts include those that are shared/reposted by others, involve arguments in comments sections, or become more serious in threats and intent (can include thoughts of suicide, threatening harm to another person, threatening to commit a crime).
 - **Deescalating** posts include those that have stopped getting attention, are deleted, someone in a position to help is intervening/ has been notified already, the person is no longer engaging/responding, or the person is ignoring comments.

Direct students to come up with action steps for each of the risk levels (and any other situation-specific response that appears necessary from the conversation with students). Prompt them for action steps by asking:

- When your friends are having an argument in-person, what do you do to calm them down?
- Do you think this approach would be different online? How is it different? How does this change your approach?
- If you see something harmful on social media, is it okay to intervene if done safely? What would this look like? Reinforce that **students should always make sure they are not putting themselves in danger by intervening**.

Examples of Possible Action Steps:

ADVICE: The best ways to resolve a conflict is to be an *active listener*, *calm down their anger*, make sure they realize the possible *consequences of their actions before retaliating*, and getting them to *walk in the other person's shoes*.

High-Risk:

- Inform a trusted adult, community member, anti-violence organization, or the police.
- **If a student thinks a shooting or other serious violent crime is about to happen**, the adult or youth should tell **the police and/or a local anti-violence organization so they can stop the shooting/crime**
 - **Tell the story about Iquan Williams** – his brother saw a post stating that someone was going to shoot up the party Iquan was attending. His mother told him to come home, he told her he was on his way, but a shooting happened at the party before he left and he was killed. If someone had told the right people (the police or an anti-violence organization), about the shooter's posts Iquan would probably still be alive. – *What are other stories like this?*
- Tell other people that might be near or going to the location of the shooting/crime so they can *avoid the area*.
- Flag/report the post so the site can take it down; take a screen shot of the post to share it with a trusted adult.

Medium-Risk:

- If the person posting is a friend, try to **talk with them privately** and see how you could help calm them down. If you feel that this is appropriate, use the following tactics:
 - Reducing Anger:
 - **Promote other activities**: Going for a walk/run; listening to music; reading a magazine; etc.
 - *Reframing the situation*: Are you sure the other person meant to hurt you? What if that post wasn't about you?
 - *Distract them*: Refer them to funny sites; tell a funny story; look at pictures; etc.
 - Do **not** get them riled up by replaying the event over and over again.
 - **Outline potential consequences**: Ask them what their goals are (either for life, or for next week, or even tomorrow) and explain how responding can impact these goals.
 - Show them that getting in a fight online/harmful posts *can mess up their plans*.
 - Empathy:
 - Make sure they *recognize how the other person is feeling*.
 - Ask them how might what you say hurt others? How would you feel if that was said to you? *How would you feel if that was said to your brother/sister/cousin?*
 - Self-Control:
 - Help your friends **identify the stress points in their body** – for example, when they get mad, where is their tension (hands, jaw, back, shoulders, legs, etc.)? Do they get sweaty? Do they pace? Does their heart begin to beat faster? Etc.
 - This will help students recognize their anger at earlier stages.
- Inform a trusted adult or community member if you think the problem is escalating.
- If the person getting picked on is a friend or someone you know, *reach out to them and let them know you support them and are there to listen*.
- If someone is posting *about criminal activity*, remind your friends that social media is monitored by police, employers, schools, etc.
- If people are fighting online, think if there is a way to deescalate the argument without putting yourself at risk – maybe you can post a picture from when you were all friends, talk with them offline about what's going on, or tell someone that can help mediate the conflict (anti-violence organizations, school counselors, teachers, etc.) - see above examples of high-risk action steps
- If you notice a friend is using drugs or alcohol a lot or alone, try to let them know you are worried about their use and see if they would be open to talking to someone about it (local community based organization, school counselor, etc.).
- Flag/report the post so the site can take it down.
- Take a screen shot of the post to share with a trusted adult.

Low-Risk:

- *Monitor the post* to make sure no one will get hurt.
- If you are worried about this person, offer to talk or hang out to give support.

Activity (5 minutes):

- **Discuss or hand out an example** of a harmful post to each student. Read through the scenario together.
 - Is this a high, medium, or low-risk situation? Why?
 - What would you do if you saw this post, but it wasn't about you?
 - What would you do if someone posted this about you?
- **--OR--**
- **Role play** a scenario where a student saw a harmful post the night before, and provides advice in-person the next day at school.
 - Let students create the scenario by allowing them to decide what the post said and how they want to handle it the next day, etc.

Final Thoughts: Always be responsible on social media:

- What you post impacts yourself, people you care about and others.
- Employers, colleges, scholarship providers, schools, and the police can monitor your online activity, including private messages.
- Content can still be accessed from the site's servers after it is deleted by the user.
- Always think before you post, and report harmful posts appropriately.
- Take screen shots or find another way to record/document the post in order to show it to a trusted person who can help intervene.