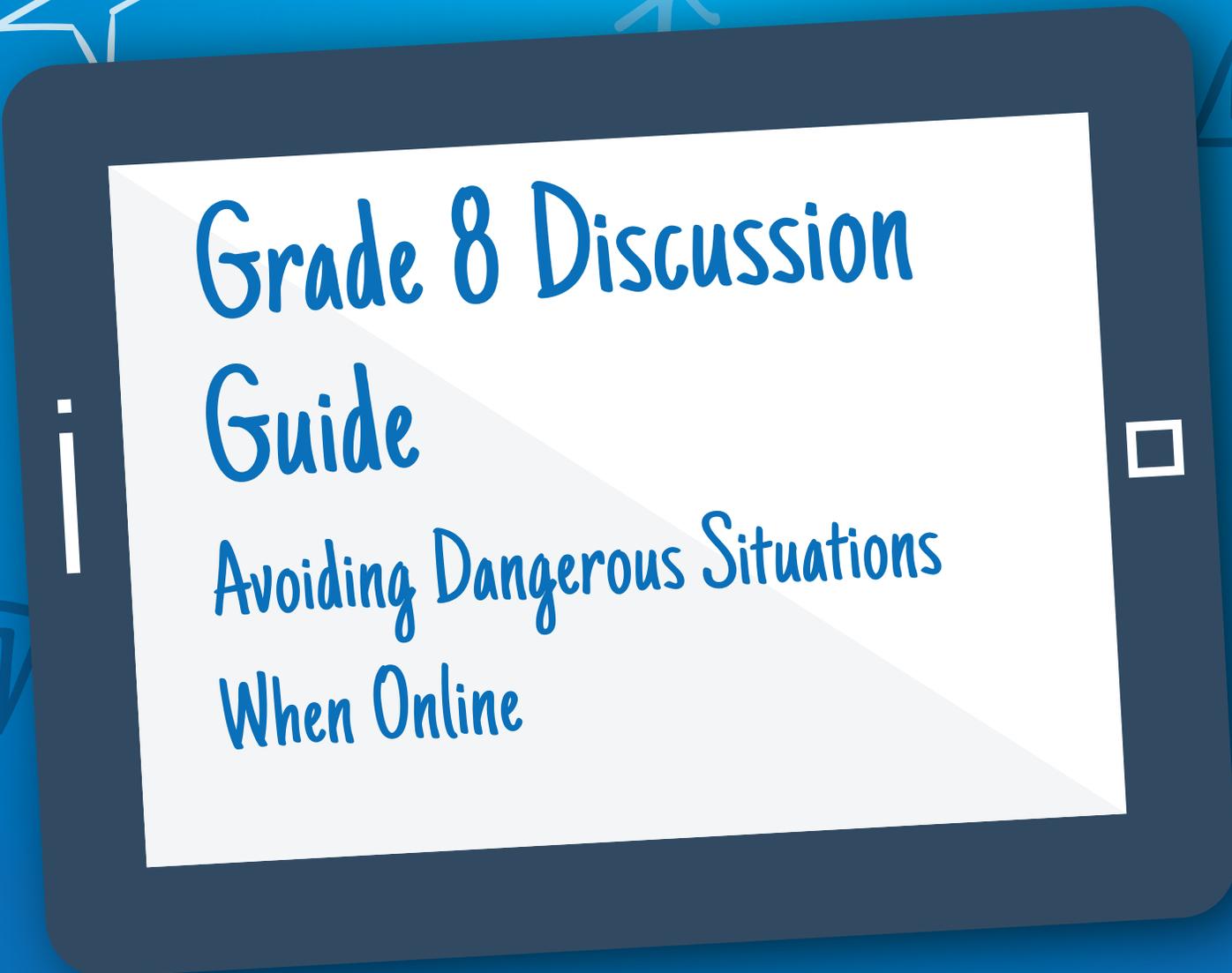




Internet Safety: Let's Start A Conversation



Grade 8 Discussion
Guide
Avoiding Dangerous Situations
When Online



How to Use This Guide

Together, watch the video *Avoiding Dangerous Situations When Online* and then use the Conversation Starter Questions and Themes to Reinforce the Learning to facilitate your conversation. You can also use the Conversation Starter Questions and Themes to Reinforce the Learning to spark a conversation without watching the video.



Video Description

A young person is sitting alone in their room, playing a virtual war game. A text box pops up on the screen from one of the other gamer “friends” they have met online, inviting them to join a gang. An older sibling comes in to get the young person off of the technology, claiming they spend too much time playing video games, and need to do something else. The sibling sees the message from the friend. The young person and their sibling engage in conversation to discuss the choices, why they want to join, possible consequences, and the social and legal ramifications. The older sibling decides to talk to their younger sibling about options for resolving the situation.

Conversation Starter Questions

Technology provides easy access to information, keeps us connected to friends and family, and helps us learn new skills. We can also encounter misinformation and online violence when using digital technology, which can impact our mental health. It is important to be aware of how technology impacts your life, the potential risks, and how to avoid dangerous situations when online.

- In what ways do you think technology reflects reality and fantasy?
- How can you know if the information and comments posted on social media are reliable, accurate, or true?
- How can someone be coerced or recruited online into doing something they may not want to do? What might be some warning signs?

- What are some of the impacts of participating in online violence?
- What are some strategies you can use to keep yourself safe from dangerous situations online, such as coercion and being exposed to gangs?

Themes to Reinforce the Learning

Your child will have discussed some of these Internet safety topics and strategies as part of their learning at school. As technology evolves, it is important to continue to be aware of how technology impacts their life and the potential dangers of using technology. Consider working the following topics and strategies into your conversations with your child to support their learning and encourage them to apply these strategies in all online situations.

Video Games

- Violence in video games can include inappropriate language and gestures, violence against women, and threats between players that can impact the way we view real people and relationships.
- There is a growing concern that being exposed to the extreme violence found in video games can cause someone to be less sensitive to violence in the real world. It can also lead to real acts of violence.¹
- The way women are portrayed in some games can impact attitudes toward women in real life and how we perceive gender and gender roles in society.

Online Coercion

- Accidentally accessing content that is sexually explicit or shows real or pretend violence can then lead to receiving inappropriate pop-up messages, images, or threats.
- Be aware of adults pretending to be a peer who might persuade you to meet them in real life or coerce you into a relationship.
- When someone doesn't feel they have a lot of support, they may get involved in an online relationship because it makes them feel special. They might be receiving compliments from the person online and offered gifts. They can then be pressured to share sexually explicit images or engage in sexual behaviour with the person online. If they don't, it could lead to threats or sexual harassment.²
- Signs of coercion include being secretive about what they are doing online, having money or possessions that they can't explain, getting upset after being on their social media or getting a text, deleting their social media account without an explanation, or afraid to go to some places.³

1 Extracted from: Harvard Health Publishing – Harvard Medical School. (2020). [The health effects of too much gaming.](#)

2 Adapted from: Internet Matters (2022). [Learn About It.](#)

3 Adapted from: Internet Matters (2022). [Learn About It.](#)

Online Recruitment

- Being recruited to join a gang may be dangerous because it can involve doing things that are illegal like stealing, using alcohol or drugs, and violence against others.⁴
- Gangs can use technology to post comments or make videos that could express hate or encourage violence toward others because of their race, sex, or gender. It might lead someone to believe the comments and join the gang.
- Some members of gangs use social media platforms to promote their image, their membership in certain groups, and their reputations.
- Gangs can also use social media to initiate violence and show it online. Visiting their website might show that you agree with the opinions posted and may motivate you to join the gang.
- Someone may be more at risk to join a gang for status, recognition or wanting to belong if they don't feel like they are part of a community. If they feel unsafe in the school or community, they may feel that they will be protected if they join a gang.⁵
- Youth can also be persuaded to join a gang by friends who are gang members or gangs in the school or community.
- Signs of gang membership include being secretive or withdrawn from friends and family, increased absence from school, dropping out of activities, changing their friend group, their appearance, or their profile picture to show association with a gang, listening to or sharing music that is known to be associated with a gang.⁶

Strategies to Stay Safe from Online Dangers

- Don't accept friend requests from strangers.
- Don't share any personal information online (e.g., address, phone number, pictures that have your school's name, a car license in the background).
- Be careful when browsing online to avoid accidentally landing on websites that contain sexually explicit or violent content.
- Check and set privacy settings to make sure they are secure.
- Be aware of the messages that are being communicated in chat rooms, the content of games, and how it might affect your perception of others.
- Think about what you are hearing and seeing, and the accuracy of the information being shared.
- Stay away from social media accounts and websites that spread misinformation or promote violence.
- Be careful what you download.

4 Adapted from: Public Safety Canada (2022). [Youth gang involvement: What are the risks factors.](#)

5 Adapted from: Public Safety Canada (2022). [Youth gang involvement: What are the risks factors.](#)

6 Adapted from: Paradigm Treatment (2014). [Warning Signs of Teen Gang Involvement.](#)

- Stop communicating with individuals online and block them from accessing your social media accounts. Deactivate all accounts used to communicate with the individual.
- Don't respond to threats.
- Stop accessing the accounts of people who might be in gangs or who are using their social media to recruit others.
- Stay away from peers or gang members who might try to influence you.
- Speak to a trusted adult about what is happening.
- Contact the police.

Additional Resources

For additional information about the dangers of technology and strategies to stay safe online, consult:

- [Cybertips.ca](https://www.cybertips.ca)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada, Resources to keep children safe online](#)

For more information on Ophea, visit www.ophea.net