Internet Safety:
Let's Start A Conversation
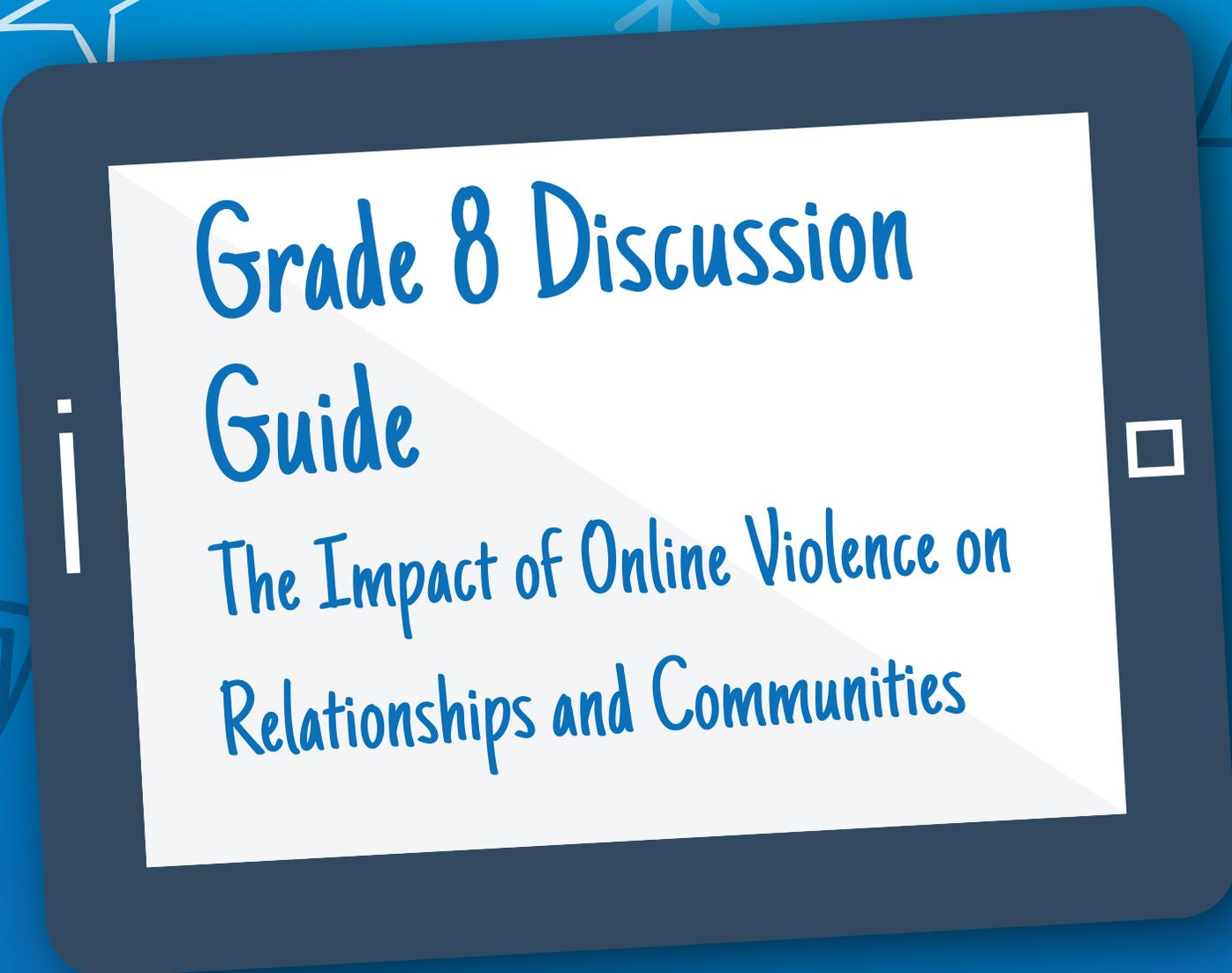
Grade 8 Discussion Guide

The Impact of Online Violence on Relationships and Communities

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Healthy Schools Healthy Communities

How to Use This Guide

Together, watch the video *The Impact of Online Violence on Relationships and Communities* 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 team is in the change room getting ready for practice. Three teammates are watching a viral video on a cell phone. The video shows random acts of violence and encourages viewers to participate in their own random act of violence, record it, and post it using the #pickagroup; #makeitreal. An older teammate encourages the three younger teammates to earn their reputation by participating in the viral campaign. The three younger teammates decide when and where to meet to complete the challenge. The senior student realizes that they have wrongly encouraged the younger players to commit an illegal act and insists that they do not complete the challenge. The principal meets with the student who posted inappropriate comments about the act on the social media feed and explains the connection to inciting violence and the possible impact on the school community.

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 online violence when using digital technology. It is important to understand how online violence impacts individuals and communities and the ways of safely responding when encountering online violence.

- What types of violence might we encounter online, in social media, chat rooms, online video games, and websites?

- How might viewing and participating in online violence impact how a person views relationships or other people?
- How do online violent behaviours such as racially-based and gender-based violence contribute to violence in communities?
- What is the impact of online violence on the person who participates in the violence?
- How is the person who is the target of the violence and those who witness it impacted?
- How might you safely respond to online violence? Who might you go to for help?

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.

Online Violence

- Online violence can lead to real acts of violence.
- Viewing and participating in violence online impacts how we view relationships, people, and the world.
- 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.
- The portrayal of characters can also impact how we perceive gender and gender roles in society.
- Inappropriate or hurtful language in a video game can influence our language choices in real life.
- Social media can be used to bully, harass, or threaten someone or spread rumours.
- Violent images posted on social media can be used to promote harmful attitudes against other people or groups.

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

- Websites can contain pornographic or violent images, which can be used to promote hate and violence against others.

- Social media is a source for accessing songs with violent lyrics. Listening to songs that have violent content may affect someone's emotions and cause them to feel more aggressive and have hostile attitudes towards other people or groups.[2]

- Some hate groups also use chat rooms that are part of social media and games to recruit people to believe in their opinion and manipulate their point of view.

- Information posted on various websites is meant to influence other people's beliefs and views by the subtle comments or false information that is targeted at a particular group. This can impact someone's attitude and beliefs which can lead to violence offline.

- Being a target of online violence can result in the person who is targeted feeling anxious or fearful for their lives and unsafe in their community.

Strategies to Combat Online Hate and Cyberviolence

- Talk to someone you trust.

- Document the violence and share it with a trusted adult, school administration, or police.

- Contact the police.

- Practice safe online intervention. If you see someone being attacked on social media, send them a private message to ask how they are doing and to find out if they need assistance.

- Report online abuse or harmful content to appropriate social media platforms and take steps to block the person responsible.

- Speak out. Talk about online harassment. Discuss online abuse with everyone and share information about it in their online communities.

- Be part of the solution. Advocate for education programs that combat stereotypes and encourages learning about others.

(The strategies to combat online hate and cyberviolence were excerpted from: Canadian Women's Foundation (2019). The Facts about Online Hate and Cyberviolence Against Women and Girls in Canada.)

Additional Resources

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

- Cybertips.ca

- Public Health Agency of Canada, Resources to keep children safe online

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

2 Adapted from: American Phsycological Association (2003). Violent song lyrics may lead to violent behavior.