

We are careful when talking to virtual friends

Virtual friendship vs real friendship: who we can trust

1 About this unit

UNIT SUMMARY

In this unit, children will understand what is meant by virtual friendship and how this differs from real-life friendship. First they will discuss places people might meet **virtual friends**. Then they will test a virtual friendship with a real friendship. Finally, they will imagine they are a virtual friend and discuss what information they could share online.

REPORTING ROUTES

In Year 4, children should know a range of ways to report concerns and inappropriate behaviour through:

- talking to a trusted adult
- calling Childline (0800 1111).

These points should be re-emphasised in any teaching and learning where children are working online.

If any safeguarding issues or concerns arise during this unit, you must follow your School Safeguarding Policy.

ONLINE SAFETY FOCUS

In this unit, children will:

- understand that virtual friends are still strangers that they do not know
- apply their knowledge of online safety to decide what information they, as virtual friends, can safely share online
- recap rules for reporting suspicious or uncomfortable online situations.

ENGAGING PARENTS AND CARERS

- In this unit, children who play online games at home are encouraged to show parents and carers the list of virtual friends that they play with, and any online chats they have taken part in.
- Consider running an online safety session for parents outlining the potential risks associated with online gaming and virtual friendship. You may wish to include guidance on how parents can update the settings of online gaming accounts to limit access and communication with other players.
- You may wish to share parent-specific web links in *Useful links* via a newsletter or phone text.

TEACHER KNOWLEDGE

- Virtual friends are people that we meet online, but whom we do not know in real life. Many children will have experience of meeting virtual friends at home via a gaming environment, through platforms such as PlayStation Network and Xbox Live.
- Review the definitions of the following terms using the glossary on page 64: **friend list**, **virtual friend**.

CROSS-CURRICULAR LINKS

Computing

Use technology safely and respectfully, keeping personal information private; identify where to go for help and support when they have concerns about content or contact on the internet or other online technologies.

2 Getting ready

ONLINE SAFETY PRINCIPLES

Think about how you can embed the online safety learning and outcomes from this unit within your whole-school online safety strategy through:

- whole-school e-team engagement
- online safety displays
- use of a website online safety area
- Twitter tweets. For example: 'This half term our Year 4 pupils are learning about the difference between real and virtual friends.'
- a school newsletter. You may wish to paste the following advisory text for parents and carers into your school newsletter, or send home in book bags (see editable *Newsletter text* on My Rising Stars): 'This half term, Year 4 pupils have been considering the differences between virtual friends and real-life friends. All children have been asked to share any online games they play with virtual friends with their

parents and carers. Please encourage them to do this and contact the school if you have any worries and concerns about inappropriate contact within these games.'

THINGS TO DO

- Familiarise yourself with the steps of this activity before running this online safety session.
- Print and photocopy *My virtual friend* photocopiable master – one per child.



MY RISING STARS RESOURCES

- *My virtual friend* (.pdf)



OTHER RISING STARS RESOURCES

- This unit has some links with *Switched on Computing, Unit 3.5 – We are communicators*.
- Any lessons in *Switched on Minecraft* are an opportunity to highlight differences between virtual and real friends.



INCLUSION/THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Some children might not play video games at home or be aware of social media sites. Reinforce that it is not necessary to play video games or know about social media sites to understand the differences between virtual and real friendship.
- If, during the course of this unit, you discover anything that concerns you about children's communications online, follow your School Safeguarding Policy.



USEFUL LINKS

- Drama resource for teaching children to stay safe gaming online; includes lesson plan and scripts:
www.childnet.com/resources/only-a-game
- Caught in the web (Newsround) provides several online safety storylines; the 'White Knight and Lost Princess' storyline is the most relevant for this unit:
www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/13908828
- Online gaming – an introduction for parents and carers:
www.childnet.com/ufiles/Online-gaming.pdf
- NSPCC Share Aware web page for parents:
www.nspcc.org.uk/ShareAware
- Childnet film winner – 'Chips and bangs' – good and bad online friends:
www.childnet.com/resources/film-competition/2015/primary-category

3 Running the lesson



Resources

- *My virtual friend* photocopiable master – one per child

Possible outcomes

- Children will create a virtual character and think about how much they know about this character compared to how much they know about a real friend.

Step 1: Introducing the session

- Explain to the children that in this session, they are going to unpick the difference between virtual friends and real friends.
- Explain that a virtual friend is a real person that we communicate with on the internet but whom we have never met in real life.

Step 2: What is a virtual friend?

- Ask the children where people might meet virtual friends, for example, playing video games, or on social media sites. Do any of the children already have a virtual friend that they communicate with on the internet? If they mention a website, app or social media site you are unaware of, ask them to describe it.
- Explain that if children have a games console or play video games on a computer, they are most likely to meet virtual friends by adding them to their **friend list**. Reinforce that virtual friends are real people, but not real friends. They are still strangers.
- Explain that gaming sites often provide suggestions for people to connect with based on the account holder's interests or their friend list. But even if our real friends know the people being recommended, they might still be strangers to us.

Step 3: Virtual and real-life friends

- Explain to the children that they are going to test virtual friendship and real friendship to see which is more trustworthy.
- Hand out the *My virtual friend* photocopiable master and ask the children to create a virtual friend in the box. They can draw or write down anything about the virtual friend but it must be human and can't be based on anyone they really know.
- Once the children have completed their creation, ask them to exchange their virtual friend with someone on a different table.
- Explain that you are now going to ask a series of questions about the virtual friend in front of them. Children should write down the answers but only if they have this information. They cannot make answers up or ask the creator. If they don't know the answer, they should write a cross.

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- Ask the children the following questions about the virtual friend in front of them:
 - What town does the friend live in?
 - What does the friend like most about you?
 - What was the last game you played together?
 - What is the friend's favourite food?
- Once children have written their responses, ask each question again. This time see how many children know the answers. Push them to think hard about their answers. If the information is not written or drawn on *My virtual friend*, they can't possibly know.
- Now ask the children to turn to the person next to them and take it in turns to ask and answer the same questions about a real-life friend of their choosing.
- Bring the children back together and ask them what they have learned about virtual friends and real friends. Who can they trust and why? Emphasise that virtual friends are still strangers so we cannot trust them like we would our real-life friends.

Step 4: Being a virtual friend

- Now ask the children to imagine they are a virtual friend playing a video game.
- Ask them to think about their own rules for staying safe online, protecting personal information and their rights and responsibilities as digital citizens.
- Within their table grouping, ask the children to discuss what, as a virtual friend, they would tell other gamers online about themselves.
- Once the children have spent some time discussing and debating their responses, bring them back together and if necessary, reinforce the point that we should never provide personal information to other gamers online because they are strangers.
- Ask them to discuss what they would do if someone online was making them feel uncomfortable by asking them questions they don't want to answer.

Step 5: Summing up

- Reinforce that the people we meet only online *are* real people but not real friends. Real friends are people we know in real life. We cannot be certain that any information a virtual friend tells us is true or accurate and we must be careful not to reveal any information about ourselves, our family or our real-life friends online.

4 Taking it further

- Tell the children to take their own virtual friend home and pin it somewhere to remind them that people we meet online are not real friends (this might be next to their games console or the family computer).
- If children play online games at home, ask them to show their grown-ups the list of virtual friends that they play with, and any online chats they have taken part in.
- Encourage any online gamers in your class to think about how many people on their friend lists are real-life friends and how many are virtual friends.