



# RESPECT

## Be kind online

The concept of friendship is a complex one for many young people, and can prove especially challenging for young people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who find social interactions difficult. Online interactions can offer young people with ASD a positive option, as young people find it easier to express themselves through a screen rather than face to face. It can be very easy for them to consider the people they chat to online as being 'friends' but it is important to make a distinction between offline and online friends in terms of the trust they can place in those friends. This concept is covered in more detail in the ['TRUST'](#) section of the toolkit.

Regardless of whether another user online is considered to be a friend or not, the need to show respect is very important and should be encouraged in the same way as it is offline.



## What is respect/being kind?

The best place to start is to consider whether your pupils understand how to show respect for others in the offline world, for example, what does 'being kind offline' mean to them? Respect and kindness can take different forms so discussing and exploring what respect means to your pupils is a key step. By exploring this topic and helping your pupils understand being respectful and kind offline, they can use this understanding to consider how the same behaviour applies online too.

Respect/kindness could include aspects such as:

- ◆ Using manners/being polite
- ◆ Listening to others
- ◆ Being mindful of others' feelings/recognising when something we have done has upset someone or affected them negatively
- ◆ Saying sorry when we make a mistake
- ◆ Understand that we are all different
- ◆ Helping someone
- ◆ Personal boundaries

Once you have established these foundations, you can begin to extend their understanding to the idea of 'being kind online'. The groundwork you will need to cover will depend on the ability of your pupils and on their understanding of what can sometimes be a tricky concept to grasp. Offline activities that explore friendship and what it means to be a good friend can help with this.

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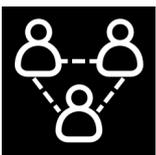
## Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is one aspect that may come up when discussing being kind and respectful online. Advice about how to deal with cyberbullying incidents that your pupils may experience is covered in the **'ACTION'** advice. It is also important to discuss the importance of showing respect for others (both online and offline) and regardless of whether they are a friend or not.

Discuss with young people how they communicate with others online and what they think being respectful means. You may discuss language used (e.g. use of 'please' and 'thank you', not swearing) as well as how a cyberbully may behave (e.g. taunt or make fun of someone, write mean or threatening messages, write lies about someone, post pictures or videos that show someone in a negative light) in order to highlight disrespectful behaviour online. Other behaviours may be mentioned such as a user ignoring other people, or players in an online game who aggravate others or don't follow the rules.

By identifying these different behaviours, young people with ASD can then be helped to decide which are acceptable and unacceptable (ie. which are kind or unkind) and possibly be more aware when they encounter such behaviour online. It can also provide your pupils with a clearer idea about how they should behave online towards others.

- ◆ More information and advice on cyberbullying in relation to young people with ASD can be found here:  
[www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/media/7441/cyberbullying-and-send-module-final.pdf](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/media/7441/cyberbullying-and-send-module-final.pdf)



## Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are highly popular services for young people. It allows them to share photographs, communicate with their friends and access information. They are a really positive way of interacting for many groups of young people.

**Social networking offers him a sense of being part of something whereas because of his disabilities his social circle is quite limited. He follows the postings of his mainstream friends and enjoys looking at photos.**

*Parent of a young person with ASD*



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## Top tips to teach safe social networking

- ◆ **Friends:** Before a young person accepts a friend request, they should always be asking themselves if they know this person in real life. It's important to always remember that not everyone online is reliable and some people may lie about who they are. Once they accept someone as a friend they are potentially able to see all of their content. Some sites and services allow sharing of different content with different groups and these can be managed by using privacy settings.
- ◆ **Privacy:** Most social networking sites have tools available to protect the things young people post online and how much they share with others. It's really important to help young people set privacy settings so that they are only sharing information with people they trust.
- ◆ **Think before you post:** It is important that young people remember that once they post something online it is potentially there forever! Even a comment made in a game or posted on a social networking site can be copied or captured by others before it is removed or deleted by the person who originally shared it. It is also important to think about what they post about other people, as even something sent as a joke could really upset someone.
- ◆ **Photos:** Encourage pupils to think carefully about the photos they choose to share online; do they give away a lot of information about them (e.g. a picture of them in their school uniform)? Also keep in mind that photos can be easily copied, changed or shared. Young people need to think carefully about the type of things they post online, and if they are posting content of someone else they should always ask that person for permission to share that content.
- ◆ **Tell:** If a young person is upset or worried about content that is posted about them or a friend, they should always tell a trusted adult and together you can ask the person who posted it to take down the content. Encourage pupils to explain how that content made them feel and share that explanation with the original person who posted it to help them understand that the young person was hurt or embarrassed by their comment or photo. This can encourage young people and others to think more carefully about their own online actions in the future.
- ◆ **Reporting:** Most social networking sites have tools to help young people block, delete or report people who are nasty or aggressive to them. All reports are anonymous to the person who posted the content which is reported, and will be responded to promptly.



## Emails and text messaging

Like social networking, emails and text messaging follow many of the same rules as social networking. Sometimes a message can be read in the wrong way and can upset or hurt someone's feelings. For young people it can sometimes be difficult to remember that what they are writing is going to be received by a real person. Advise them to only write something that they would actually say directly to that person.

An important aspect to consider with pupils is how messages can be shared rapidly across the internet with other users. Using real life examples can help them become more aware of how things can go viral online and a good example you could use can be found here: [www.childnet.com/blog/a-teacher-shows-her-students-what-could-happen-if-they-post-a-photo-online](http://www.childnet.com/blog/a-teacher-shows-her-students-what-could-happen-if-they-post-a-photo-online)

Should one of your pupils come to you concerned that they have received something upsetting online (e.g. a text message, photo, email), encourage them to save the content and show you. Follow the advice in the **'ACTION'** section for how to manage a potential cyberbullying situation.

Regardless of the method used by a young person with ASD to communicate, in order for them to understand the importance of being kind online and treating others with respect online, they must first understand how to be a good friend in the offline world. There are a number of activities in our **ACTIVITIES** matrix which focus on this and can help you to explore this concept with your pupils.