



Target audience

Children aged 11-14

Timing

45 minutes (1 hour with ground rules)
(+ extension to 1.5 hours)

Key vocabulary

Online identity, expression, freedom, representation, equality, empowerment, inclusion, judgment, assumption

Preparation

Familiarise yourself with the other documents included in this pack.

Resources

- Interactive whiteboard, whiteboard or clear wall space
- Sticky notes / blank paper
- Pens

Lesson aim

This lesson aims to help young people consider the barriers experienced by some people which prevent them from expressing themselves freely online, and offer a range of strategies for working together to make the internet a more inclusive space for everyone.

Lesson outcomes

Learners will be able to:

- Describe some of the pressures people can feel when they are using social media (e.g. pressure to conform).
- Explain how online content can help to reinforce stereotypes, as well as break them down.
- Explain, with examples, how diversity and inclusivity can be both supported and restricted online.

Free to be ME

	Activity	Timing (suggested)	Grouping
Optional Starter	Ground Rules (see 'Establishing a safe and supportive learning environment' document)	15 minutes	Whole group
Starter	Agree or disagree?	5 minutes	Pairs/Whole group
Activity 1	Be FREE	10 minutes	Small groups
Activity 2	Respond and reply	15 minutes	Pairs
Activity 3	Diamond Nine	10 minutes	Pairs
Plenary	Make a pledge	5 minutes	Individuals



Optional Starter: Ground Rules

Run the Ground Rules activity from the '[Establishing a safe and supportive learning environment](#)' document to create a safe space in which to discuss the theme of online identity.

Starter (5 minutes)

Read or display the following statement:

"The internet is a place where everyone is free to be themselves."

Ask learners to discuss in pairs whether they agree or disagree with the statement, and why. After a few minutes, open up discussion to the whole group, using the questions below for further guidance.

Key Questions

- Do you agree or disagree with the statement? Why?
- What do you think freedom of expression means? Do you think it's important?
- What rights and responsibilities do online users have?
- Do you think people always behave the same online as they do offline?
- What might prevent someone from being themselves online?

Activity 1 (10 minutes)

Explain to the group that they're now going to consider one interpretation of what it means to be free online. Display the FREE acronym from [Appendix 1](#). Explain that for someone to feel comfortable and confident enough to be who they want to be online, they first need to feel: **fairly treated, represented, equal and empowered**.

Split the learners into three groups. Explain that each group is going to be given a character and a short description of their experiences online ([Appendix 2](#)). Ask the groups to read the descriptions and discuss the follow-up questions. Remind them of the ground rules / importance of listening and contributing with respect.

Activity 2 (15 minutes)

Ask each group to split further - now into pairs or threes. Each pair should develop a short response to the character they were discussing. This could be done verbally, as a written response, or filmed to create a short video clip. The response should reflect their own, or their group's, feelings on the character's perspective.

They may choose to include the following:

- personal feelings and emotions (empathising or contradicting the character's stance);
- reflections on their own online experiences;
- advice or guidance; or
- arguments trying to change the character's opinion.



Note for educators

Some learners may initially have strong emotional responses to the perspective expressed by the three characters. Acknowledge that this is completely normal and a reflection of real life! Encourage them to verbalise these thoughts and emotions.

Once they have their initial thoughts down, invite them to rethink and rephrase in a more constructive form. Points they may need to consider, include:

- How would what I have written make the character feel?
- Is what I have written going to help things move forward, or set the conversation backwards?
- How can I help this character understand my perspective?
- Am I using any words or phrases that might be considered offensive? What alternatives could I use?
- What advice or guidance can I offer this character?

Once all learners have created their response, invite pairs to share their work with the whole group. One learner should read out the character description, and the second should deliver the response. Invite other pairs who were looking at the same character for any additional thoughts, before opening discussion to the rest of the group.

Do this for all three of the character descriptions provided, ensuring that all learners have a chance to reflect on the three different perspectives, and have an opportunity to respond if they wish.

Key Questions

- Did we all respond the same way to the different characters?
- What was the most difficult part of your response to write? Why?
- Do you think there are real people who think and feel the same way as your character does? How would you respond to them?

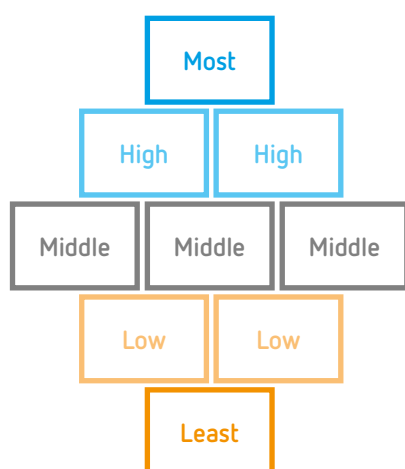
To further explore factors online which prevent people from being themselves, why not try **Quick Activity 2, Hidden Identities** (20 minutes)?

Activity 3 (10 minutes)

Reflect on the acronym for 'FREE' displayed earlier in the lesson.

Ask the group:

“What online behaviour or actions could everyone do to help people feel FREE online?”



Take initial suggestions and, if possible, record these somewhere visible in the room. Provide learners with copies of **Appendix 3**. Invite them to sort the cards in a diamond nine layout (see diagram).

The top of their diamond should be the **most useful action** to take to promote inclusion online, with the bottom of the diamond the **least useful**. Give learners a few minutes in small groups or pairs to sort the cards, before discussing as a group.

Key Questions

- Did we all agree on the placement of the different actions?
- What makes an action more or less useful?
- Can you think of any situations where the usefulness of an action might change?



Ask the group to reflect on the actions they thought of earlier – do these relate to any of the actions on the cards? If they thought of different or new ideas, encourage them to write them on slips of paper and discuss where they would be placed in the diamond.

Finally, explain to the group that they're now going to change the focus of their diamond 9. Ask them to reorder the actions so that the top of the diamond has the **easiest** action to complete, and the bottom of the diamond has the **most difficult** action or action which requires the most effort.

Key Questions

- Are the most helpful actions always the easiest?
- Why do you think this is?
- Do you think people online are more likely to choose a quick and easy response, or a helpful response?
- Were there any actions which were both easy and helpful?

Extension (10 minutes):

Ask the learners to think about all the actions they thought of, and all the actions they have found on the cards. Challenge them to write a character description like those they used in Activity 1 and 2. The description should be of a person who always works hard to make the online world an inclusive place, where everybody feels fairly treated, represented, equal and empowered.

Plenary (5 minutes)

Explain to the group that, as they've seen, there's lots of things we can do to help the internet be a more inclusive place. We don't have to do **all** these things **every** day, but putting in the effort to make small changes in our behaviour can make a real difference to other people's experiences online.

Invite learners to make a pledge of **one small thing** they will do to help make the internet more inclusive for everyone. These could remain private, be shared briefly with the rest of the group or displayed in the room/elsewhere in the setting for other learners to see.



Appendix 1

F

Fairly treated

R

RepreSented

E

Equal

E

Empowered

Appendix 2



Persona 1

I go online all the time but mainly because everyone else at school does. I don't really get what's so good about it. None of the big YouTubers, or influencers, or anyone online really stands for me and it actually feels a bit rubbish because it makes me feel like I don't fit in. Emojis are fun and cute and all, but I can never find one that shows my life and my experiences, so what's the point! One time, I thought – 'okay, if there's nobody like me online, then I'll just have to be the first...' but then when I started posting, people online were really quick to judge and it's not like all the comments were hate – some were really supportive, but I think one mean comment can outweigh even 10 positive ones. I just don't feel like there's a space for people like me online – we're not represented!

Key Questions

- How did you feel reading or hearing from this person? Are their experiences online something you can empathise with?
- "People online were really quick to judge." Do you think the internet is a judgemental place? What kinds of things are people judged on?
- Do you think it's important that everyone is represented online? How diverse is the online world?



Persona 2

I like going online after school – I spend quite a lot of time on Instagram and YouTube, or sometimes Twitch if I'm in a gaming mood. I follow quite a lot of people including lots of 'influencers', I guess you'd call them. I think it's cool to see how they live their lives, and earn money, and all the stuff they spend it on. This one guy comes from the same town as me – that's kind of a claim to fame. It's good to see people like me can make it big! Some of my friends follow completely different people online – I think it's really interesting to be nosy on their feeds because sometimes they have posts about stuff I don't know anything about. I guess it's good to see different beliefs and faces and stuff, instead of just the same old ones you're used to. I don't do it too much on my accounts though because I don't want people to assume I'm gay, or religious, or just into something I'm not.

Key Questions

- How did you feel reading or hearing from this person? Are their experiences online something you can empathise with?
- "I don't want people to assume I'm gay, or religious, or just into something I'm not" We sometimes hear about assumptions being made because of people's likes or comments. What impact do you think that has on how people choose to present themselves online?
- Do you think it's important to seek out new and different opinions online? Why or why not?



Appendix 2



Persona 3

I don't get why people are so worried about equality online. Of course everyone's equal – that's the whole point of the internet! Anyone can set up an Instagram account, anyone can make YouTube videos, and anyone can do whatever they want! Obviously not everyone's going to get tons of likes and followers – I don't go online to look at ugly people, or fat people! I know some people from school who spend ages worrying about what they do and say and like online – like they've got to create this perfect online profile to fit in, but it's a bit embarrassing really. If you're worrying so much about fitting in, it's probably because you don't. Being fake isn't going to fix that. Keep your posts and your opinions to yourself or find somewhere people agree with you. Don't fill up my feed with it!

Key Questions

- How did you feel reading or hearing from this person? Are their experiences online something you can empathise with?
- “I don't go online to look at ugly people, or fat people!” If everyone in the world felt like this, what would be the result?
- Do you think it's possible for anyone to be entirely real online? Can you think of anybody who you think does this well?



Appendix 3

Seek out different opinions and perspectives to your own online.	Ignore a mean or hateful comment as opposed to agreeing with it.	Publically support someone who you think may be being harassed or discriminated against online.
Reshare and like content from causes or campaigns online, even if they're not directly relevant to you.	Make an effort to follow and interact with a diverse range of people and accounts online.	Report a mean or hateful comment.
Create posts and talk with friends online about discrimination and what can be done to encourage inclusivity.	Apologise if you accidentally cause offense online.	Send a private message of support to someone who you think may be being harassed or discriminated against online.