

Activities to help learners who may see upsetting content

Educator's Guidance

The online world offers many benefits for children and young people, however there is also the risk of being exposed to content which is upsetting, harmful or inappropriate.

Safeguarding advice

If you become aware of a learner having seen upsetting content online:

- reassure the learner that it's okay to have an emotional response to what they have seen and that you are there to help them
- keep your own responses calm and supportive
- avoid showing strong emotions like shock, anger or disgust, even if the content is distressing
- follow your school or setting's safeguarding policies and procedures to escalate the incident to a designated safeguarding lead/person, if necessary

For more advice visit:

childnet.com/safeguarding

Worried about a viral challenge or trend that may show upsetting content or encourage harmful behaviour?

saferinternet.org.uk/online-challenges

Reducing the risk

- Don't click on unfamiliar links or pop-ups.
- Look for clues that something might not be okay for you to see. This could include age ratings, comments, reviews, or content descriptions.
- If you're unsure, ask a trusted adult to look before you do.

Responding to an incident

- It's not your fault that this has happened.
- Stop looking e.g. pause the video, turn the device over, or turn the device off.
- Talk to an adult about what you have seen and how it made you feel.

Activities to help learners who may see upsetting content

Reading & Writing Activities

Divide learners into groups and give them each a scenario (page 3) to read and discuss, and then share their ideas and advice.

Discuss the advice given on page 1, then have learners write acrostic poems around key words like 'report' or 'pause'. These could then be used as part of a display with an advice theme.

Get learners to write their own short stories about someone who sees something upsetting online. Explain the stories must have a positive resolution.

You could give all learners a character to work with, or even the first half of a story to expand on. Use these stories as the basis for a discussion around how to respond to seeing unpleasant content.

Sports & Drama Activities

Place solutions such as 'stop looking', 'tell an adult' or 'get help' around a space, perhaps with obstacles for learners to navigate around.

Read out the scenarios (page 3) and have learners race to their chosen solution and ask them to explain their choices.

Have learners write and perform scripts for the scenarios (page 3). Have the audiences or other learners clap or call out when the performers should 'pause' what they are doing or watching and seek help.

Have learners think of physical actions for commands like 'put device down', 'tell an adult' or 'turn away from screen'. Have learners move around the room and call out a prompt, e.g., 'scary video'. Learners should choose their responses and perform the associated action.

Art & Design Activities

Have learners create and play their own 'happy viewing' board game, where safe and smart choices help the players succeed, and obstacles take the form of pop-ups, scary videos or games.

Work together or in small groups to create a set of top tips for dealing with upsetting content online. Have learners use art resources to create a series of online safety posters or leaflets for the school.

Using the scenarios (page 3), have learners draw the different physical and emotional reactions they might have if they saw something upsetting online.

Learners could then draw symbols to represent the different solutions available.

These scenarios give examples of the different ways children may be exposed to upsetting content online and can also be adapted for use in teaching and learning activities. For example, to help learners think about how they might respond.



Malik clicked on a link promising him free gems for his favourite online game. When the website had loaded, it showed him some upsetting and confusing videos. Malik was not sure what the videos were, but they made him feel worried and sick.

Yusuf heard his friends talking about a new online challenge in the playground that everyone was doing. When he got home, he decided to search for it online to see what they meant. What he found frightened him.

Julia was looking up ideas for a project on the school computers. Most of the pictures she found were helpful, however some of them showed things Julia didn't want to see. Julia felt frustrated and was worried that she might get in trouble.

Alyssa was watching her favourite shows online. Midway through one of the videos, the content changed and showed Alyssa something upsetting. Alyssa felt anxious and thought her parents might take her tablet away from her.

Riley set up a social media account that their parents don't know about. They are being suggested content on their feed that makes them feel uncomfortable. Riley can't get the things they've seen out of their head and keeps getting more suggested content.

Finley downloaded a new game to play on his tablet. Once he started playing, he realised that the game was much scarier than he thought it would be. He felt scared and that night had nightmares about what he'd seen.

Mason heard about a natural disaster that happened in another country. He searched online to learn more about what had happened and how he could help but ended up seeing upsetting videos. He felt sad and worried about what he had seen.

Neha and her older brother Kiran were watching videos on his social media account. Kiran was enjoying himself, but Neha was scared of some of the videos they were seeing. Neha was worried about getting her brother in trouble if she told anyone.