ONLINE
Communication

Learning context

The world we now live in is changing pretty quickly. The internet, and in particular, mobile smart phones, now allow us to communicate at any time. In fact, the communication never stops. But as we reach an age where we begin to use this technology, do we really know what we need to know to be safe? It may sound like a silly question, but there have been many examples of young people misusing this technology, and ending up in trouble. You may say that you know how to do this, but I'm afraid it's not that simple. What you may do, and what other people may do are two completely different things. To learn more, we will begin to look at 'positive' use, and also 'negative' use through true stories and case studies.

Key points and content

The world is now communicating in very different ways. Communication is constant and while most of it is safe and useful, we're now finding out that some of it is not. It can be very easy to make mistakes that can be costly when sending a message. There are an increasing number of stories in the news where young people have become victims when activity becomes dangerous. In this lesson we will look at messaging on a mobile phone. As always there are some simple 'do's' and 'don'ts' that can really help you. These principles, warnings and expectations will reoccur across these sessions, making the learning more about the awareness of the user rather than the medium.

This is important because

Imagine if your parents bought you a car today. Would you just be able to get in and drive? What could happen if you did? What about all of those other drivers too, do they all drive safely?

Of course not. The reason why we learn to drive at 17 years old is because we are old enough to understand the responsibility that comes with driving. This responsibility is all about understanding the importance of safe driving and that the car has to be properly used. But who teaches us how to use a mobile phone? Do we need to be responsible when we use one? Does a mobile phone have to be properly used?

Investigate

To allow the children to talk and discover, we can pose some questions that provoke discussion. The initial theme is responsibility. (You may want to ask the children what the definition of 'responsibility' is to start with).

There are 6 areas to investigate. Use pictures to prompt.

Q: At what age does the government believe that you can be held responsible for the following things?

- Buying an alcoholic drink without an adult (From 18 years old).
- Driving a car (From 17 years old).
- Working Part-time (From 14 years old).
- Getting married without parental consent (From 16 years old).
- Flying a plane or helicopter (From 17 years old)
- View an 18 rated film (From 18 years old)
- Convicted in a youth court, serving up to 24 months and/or paying up to a £1000 fine (from 14 years old)

Using a mobile phone to communicate (No legal age)

- Why is this the 'legal' age?
- What are the positives?
- What are the negatives or risks?

Ultimately, the discussions should present that fact that the younger you are, the less aware you could be of the risks and dangers. These dangers can cause serious harm, including fatalities. Because users are often below the recommended age, they would not have the life experience or the awareness to fully understand the implications - before using.

Key point: The exception would be new technology such as mobile phones, and yet the outcome can still be damaging. Because of the size and speed of the virtual world, we have to learn manage ourselves as best we can.

These sessions reflect the fact that we are beginning to understand this responsibility.

The risks

Michaela was 12 years old when she began her crush with a boy in her year. They began 'going out' with each other and about a month later, things began to be a bit more aggressive. The boy began to ask her for photos of her in her underwear. He texted and said "You should do it, if you love me you would." She talked to her friends who told her that this was normal. So Michaela took the picture. It was simple. It only took a few seconds. She thought that this would mean that he would love her, and that he would stay with her. But it didn't stop there. He began to ask for more. She decided she didn't want to share pictures anymore, but the damage was already done. The other children in the school found out and then she began to be taunted on the corridors, with some people telling her to kill herself. She blamed herself and not the boy in question. When her parents found out they couldn't understand. They thought that she would have understood the situation better. This situation is called 'sexting', which is a very dangerous prospect. Anything related to our bodies or our emotions is highly personal and highly sensitive, and it requires the utmost safety.

Activity

This situation is called 'sexting'. It can demonstrate how simple it can be to send a message that can have serious negative consequences. This can happen with text or with pictures and so we must always think carefully before sending and responding to messages. You may have something particularly topical that you could incorporate.

Play the game, '**To Send or Not to Send**'

This could be set out as a sorting activity in groups or pairs to encourage discussion.

You can apply a rule after a while – **Who** are you messaging, **Why** are you messaging and **What** could happen?

Here are some example statements that would take seconds to send. But could they have consequences?

- I think that Steven (change name) is an idiot.
- Did you watch EastEnders last night?
- Did you hear what Darren said, that's so GAY!
- Liverpool are rubbish, can't believe they lost 2-0!
- Here's my number 08383902
- What have you been saying curry boy?
- I'll meet you at 3 outside the park.
- Do you still love me?

There should be lots of chat and discussion. Once a message has been sent – that's it, you can do nothing about what could happen next.

Summary

When we start using texts, emails and picture or video messages, we have a responsibility to do this carefully. Sending or receiving any personal messages can be high risk and could have a long lasting negative impact. 'Sexting' is illegal. People who do this can be prosecuted as the law would say that they are distributing offensive images, even if the picture is taken and shared with their permission. Texts and images may not be able to be completely removed, which could really affect a young person's future. It can also lead to blackmail, bullying, unwanted attention and emotional distress.

- *Threat from peers*
  Whilst we often hear about stranger danger, it can also be pressure from our 'peers' of even 'friends' that can lead to problems occurring.
- *Threatening and controlling*
  There could be a range of behaviours that people try to threaten, control and manipulate. It can lead to harassment, bullying and even violence.
- *Technology makes the problem worse!*
  It can be very easy to distribute and share online with the wrong people. New technology is also very easy to use.
- *Younger children are becoming more affected*
  Whilst more children access this technology, more will not understand it well enough to manage themselves properly.

The simple solution is to be open and honest with your communication. If you wouldn't share comments face to face, then you shouldn't share your most personal thoughts online. If you ever find yourself in a situation that you are uncomfortable with, remember to talk to your parent or teacher.

The benefits

A mobile phone can certainly help us to be safe. We can text family and friends, or call to make sure that they know where we are and what we are doing. As we become more independent, this helps to make sure that there is little room for worry or problems. Texts and messages can do wonderful things in our world if used properly. Here are a few examples.

- Texting in New York city has helped to reduce the murder rate by 60%! Fast, real-time information from the general public has helped the police department to map crime and to deploy staff.
- In Sweden, blood donors receive a message when their blood has been used to help someone else.

True Story!
Whilst working in the Congo, Africa, a London doctor working for a charity came to the aid of a 16-year-old boy. The boy had been attacked by rebel forces and was dying. At the time, 15 centimetres of his arm was remaining, with much of the surrounding muscle left dead. At the time, the doctor thought that he would have about two or three days left to live.

Meanwhile, back in Charing Cross Hospital London, a professor was made aware of the situation. The professor had performed an operation before that would involve an amputation, removing the collar bone and shoulder blade.

The Professor texted the surgeon step by step instructions, explaining exactly how to treat the boy. The operation was successful.