

The Sex Educator

A MAGAZINE FOR EDUCATORS

WHO CONDUCT SEX EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

WITH HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS

Produced by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux

du Québec, Université du Québec à Montréal and Tel-Jeunes

20

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FLIRTING ONLINE:

TOWARD A SAFE AND FULFILLING EXPLORATION OF SELF AND OTHERS

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My friends really encouraged me to add a guy they met on holidays to my MSN contacts, so I did. He looks really cute in the picture; his hair is dark brown and he's got great abs. I spoke to him a couple of times and he seems really nice. Mostly, I feel like he understands me and I can trust him. I've told him lots of secrets. He's really way cool! The other day, I added a photo to my profile. I'm in my bathing suit and I'm blowing a kiss.

I don't know if HE's seen it, but a lot of my friends have noticed it, so much that the next day at school, I was teased because of it. Some people called me "easy" and a few students even laughed at my body... I don't know what to do anymore. A guy printed the photo and put it up on my locker. I want this to stop. Help!

sweet c@ndy



Does sweet c@ndy situation surprise you? Yet, it is based on real events. It reflects certain aspects of adolescent online flirting, a typical behaviour that is part of an adolescent's psychosexual development and it contributes to developing intimacy and identity during adolescence.

Identity refers to how an individual perceives himself or herself. In their quests for identity, adolescents seek to assert their independence from their parents by experimenting and exploring relationships with others, whether romantically or as friends (Allison and Sabatelli, 1988). Through these relationships, teens begin to look for special intimate and physical contacts with a partner, which takes us back to the notion of developing intimacy (Thériault, 2006).

The capacity to form satisfying intimate relationships develops in parallel with identity: the two phenomena are interrelated. On the one hand, identity construction contributes to developing the capacity to form satisfying intimate relationships (Erikson, 1968, cited in Thériault, 2006); on the other hand, intimate relationships enable adolescents to learn about themselves through their interactions with others. Moreover, intimate relationships provide a safe framework for adolescents that allows them to separate from their families and start asserting their own identities.

Flirting is not foreign to this developmental process. It involves revealing oneself, initially for purposes of attracting another person, get to know oneself and testing one's potential to seduce, while working on building intimacy with the other person or persons (Colson, 2009). However, when this occurs over the Internet, flirting can place uninformed

adolescents in situations that can be risky to their safety and well-being. This is why it is useful to encourage young people to analyse the contexts in which they use the Internet and to ask themselves questions such as the following:

Do we really know the people we meet online? Can we trust a friend we meet on the Internet? Can we fall in love with someone we meet on the Internet? Why is it easier to assert our identity online than in person? What are the consequences of disclosing intimate information on the Internet, whether emotional or involving parts of the body?

This edition of *The SexEducator* gives you tools to help young people answer these questions, in particular through learning activities related to flirting online. The following information will help you become aware of the importance of Internet use related to young people's interpersonal relationships, online seduction behaviours—through which they explore their identities and their sexuality as they develop capacities for intimacy—as well as the risks to which they can be exposed. Understanding online flirting among adolescents will enable you to better guide them so they can become more responsible when they surf the Web.

@-TEEN GENERATION

The Internet is an inevitable part of life for adolescents today. The survey entitled *Jeunes et Internet : 2006* looked at 1,369 young Quebecers aged 12 to 18 years; it demonstrated that 99.9% of them use the Internet regularly (Piette, Pons and Giroux, 2007). According to a survey of 2000 young Quebecers, 57% of 12- to 17-year-old participants use the Internet more than 11 hours a week. While searching for information is the main reason adolescents gave for using the Internet, social interaction also makes up a large part of the time they spend online (Cefrio, 2009).

Adolescents are indeed very big users of instant communications software (e.g. MSN), chat rooms (e.g. Chat-ados.com), networking sites (e.g. Facebook), photo- and video-sharing technologies (e.g. MySpace and YouTube), as well as online games such as *World of Warcraft* (Delmonico and Griffin, 2008). The *Jeunes et Internet : 2006* survey revealed that 93% of the youth interviewed used MSN, which places it at the top of interpersonal online activities. Young Quebecers use this communications tool mostly as an extension of their existing social lives (Piette, Pons and Giroux, 2007). According to the Cefrio survey (2009), 75% of participating youth aged 12 to 24 chat online, and 62% access Internet social networking sites.

As for chat rooms, adolescents use them to explore identity and sexuality, with sexual communication and searching for an intimate partner being some of these activities (Subrahmanyam, Smahel and Greenfield, 2006). For example, the survey *Young Canadians in a Wired World*, conducted among Canadian students in grades 4 to 11, showed that “Do you look good”, a social dating network centred on physical appearance, was a favourite of young adolescents in secondary 2 to 5 (ERIN Research, 2005).

Finally, use of webcams for sexual purposes, which is worrisome in many respects in terms of the sexual development of youth (Delmonico and Griffin, 2008), appears to be marginal (Duquet and Quéniart, 2009).

Still, seduction activities are pervasive in online interpersonal exchanges. What do the youth reveal of themselves through their online interactions in a context of seduction?



SELF-DISCLOSURE IN CYBERSPACE

Self-disclosing on the Internet varies by sex (see Table 1). Indeed, according to the results of a Québec study, girls talk a lot about feelings and use MSN to discuss everything and nothing, in other words, to chat; boys mostly exchange factual information, such as weekend activities, and their messages are shorter. Both sexes are similar when it comes to romantic relationships (Piette, Pons and Giroux, 2007). An analysis of the personal pages of adolescents aged 14 to 18 revealed that almost one in ten blogs contain messages or images with sexual connotations, and that one in five blogs contains messages or images about romantic relationships, with girls discussing these intimate topics up to three times more than do boys (Stern, 2004).

It is interesting to note that over half of young people (59%) who participated in the Young Canadians in a Wired World survey said they had used identities other than their own on the Internet (ERIN Research, 2005); among them, 52% had changed their age, 26% had given themselves attributes that differ from their own, 23% had attributed skills to themselves that they did not have, and 23%

had changed some of their physical characteristics. Moreover, adolescents filter what they reveal online to give a more pleasant and attractive image of themselves, especially young people who are seeking romantic relationships (Cho, 2007). These two common online behaviours are more pronounced in a context of flirting.

Personal photographs of the body that are posted online are often 'sexy' (Duquet and Quéniart, 2009). Yet, use of webcams for sexual purposes is less common, as we said earlier, and rather poorly perceived by young people. A double standard can be observed, however, regarding perception of exposing one's body on the Internet, with disclosure of the body through sexual photographs or a Webcam being more tolerated when the subject is a boy but judged severely when the subject is a girl. Girls are even called names such as "slut" or "whore" by their peers.

TABLE 1
SELF-DISCLOSURE ON THE INTERNET, BY SEX

	BOYS	GIRLS
Topics for online discussion (Piette, Pons et Giroux, 2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factual information • Romantic relationships • Direct exchanges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings • Romantic relationships • Talking about everything and nothing
Images online considered to be 'sexy' (Duquet et Quéniart, 2009)	Photo of a boy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bare chested • wearing shorts • wearing pants low on the hips, so as to expose the top of his underwear • naked but hiding his genitals 	Photo of a girl: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in a bikini • in her underwear • in a G-string • in a short skirt • taking suggestive poses • in a position that shows her cleavage • kissing another girl • showing her belly • holding her breasts
Adolescents' perception of people who expose themselves on the Internet (Duquet et Quéniart, 2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cool • Not interesting • Normal • Perverse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prostitute • Girl who is easy • Dirty minded • Obsessed with sex • Seeking attention • Lack of self-respect

Table 1 points out that online self-disclosure can be stereotyped and sexualized. Moreover, a survey has shown that conversations in teen chat rooms contain sexual references and profanities (Smahel and Subrahmanyam, 2007). According to a Léger Marketing poll of 439 Québec adolescents and their parents, 34% of adolescents stated receiving a request for personal information and 31% having been exposed to conversations with sexual connotations (Léger Marketing, 2007).

On this topic, another study revealed that, at first sight, only a small number of adolescents reported ever having received sexual propositions in chat rooms; however, after investigation, the number was higher than what had been initially determined (Duquet and Quéniart, 2009). These propositions came from friends as well as strangers, with those coming from friends often taken as jokes. Enticement could be in the form of a request for personal information, a few direct questions about their sexuality, a request for a discussion about sex, for cybersex or Webcam sex. The adolescents interviewed reacted mostly by refusing the request in a variety of ways, and sometimes by alerting an adult. However, some young people, especially girls, did not take the propositions seriously but still played along. We can ask ourselves, then, about the trivialization of sexuality in online relationships in this latter sub-group. The risks associated with these findings will be discussed later. First, let's look at the advantages of teens' using the Internet for interpersonal purposes.

THE INTERNET TO EXPLORE IDENTITY AND SEXUALITY

Internet activities and self-disclosures contribute to adolescents' constructing their identities.

The anxiety and social pressures some young people feel can be alleviated by separating what is real and what is imaginary online—for instance, between real and make-believe identity—as well as by seeing their online relationships as a type of game (Suler, 2004), thanks to the anonymity of cyberspace when surfing the Web (Subrahmanyam, Smahel and Greenfield, 2006).

Thus, young people can create, transform, affirm and test multiple facets of their identity, such as homosexuality or seduction skills, without fearing social repercussions such as stigmatization or rejection. Indeed, self-disclosure allows adolescents to express themselves and to better understand themselves (Stern, 2004). While being judged by others is not absent from online relationships, it is felt much less personally since criticism is directed toward the constructed online identity rather than one's real identity (Hillier and Harrison, 2007). Moreover, the fact of being able to easily quit an interpersonal online relationship, by disconnecting or excluding someone from the list of contacts, for example, gives young people a sense of control and security. Add to this the fact that young Internet users perceive that everyone is an equal, which increases their sense of personal capacity (Suler, 2004).

One study that looked at homosexual adolescents revealed that the Internet helps them overcome situations close to real life and accept themselves as they are, which then makes it easier to deal with similar situations in real life (Hillier and Harrison, 2007). These advantages provide a sense of security to adolescents who are exploring their identity online since this virtual world allows them to discover and express their true identities.

Another possible advantage to Internet use related to intimate and social relationships is that people feel a real attachment to other Internet users with whom they correspond. Secrets they share become increasingly intimate as online relationships evolve (Velkovska, 2002).

“[...] young people can create, transform, affirm and test multiple facets of their identity without fearing social repercussions such as stigmatization or rejection. [...]”.



A Canadian study of young people aged 14 to 18 demonstrated that conversing online with real-life friends or intimate partners through instant communications software increases the quality of friendships and intimate relationships with these individuals by increasing possibilities for communications (Blais et al., 2008). Conversely, online chat room conversations with strangers decrease the quality of relationships with friends in real-life. In addition, social networks, where more information can be posted, are increasingly popular among young people and act as extensions of real life.

In summary, the Internet appears to offer adolescents a world with few restrictions that facilitates sexual and identity exploration while creating a sense of security. They can perceive it as a social laboratory (Delmonico and Griffin, 2008) where they can deepen their intimate relationships and develop skills in this area. Still, these same advantages can also result in youth being in situations with potentially significant negative consequences, in terms of online seduction.

RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH FLIRTING ONLINE

For adolescents, self-disclosure in a context of online flirting presents advantages linked to discovery of their own identities. The quality of self-disclosure and the contexts in which these occur, however, seem problematic for several reasons: their stereotypical and sexualized nature, their real-life repercussions, and the sometimes false identities of Internet users.

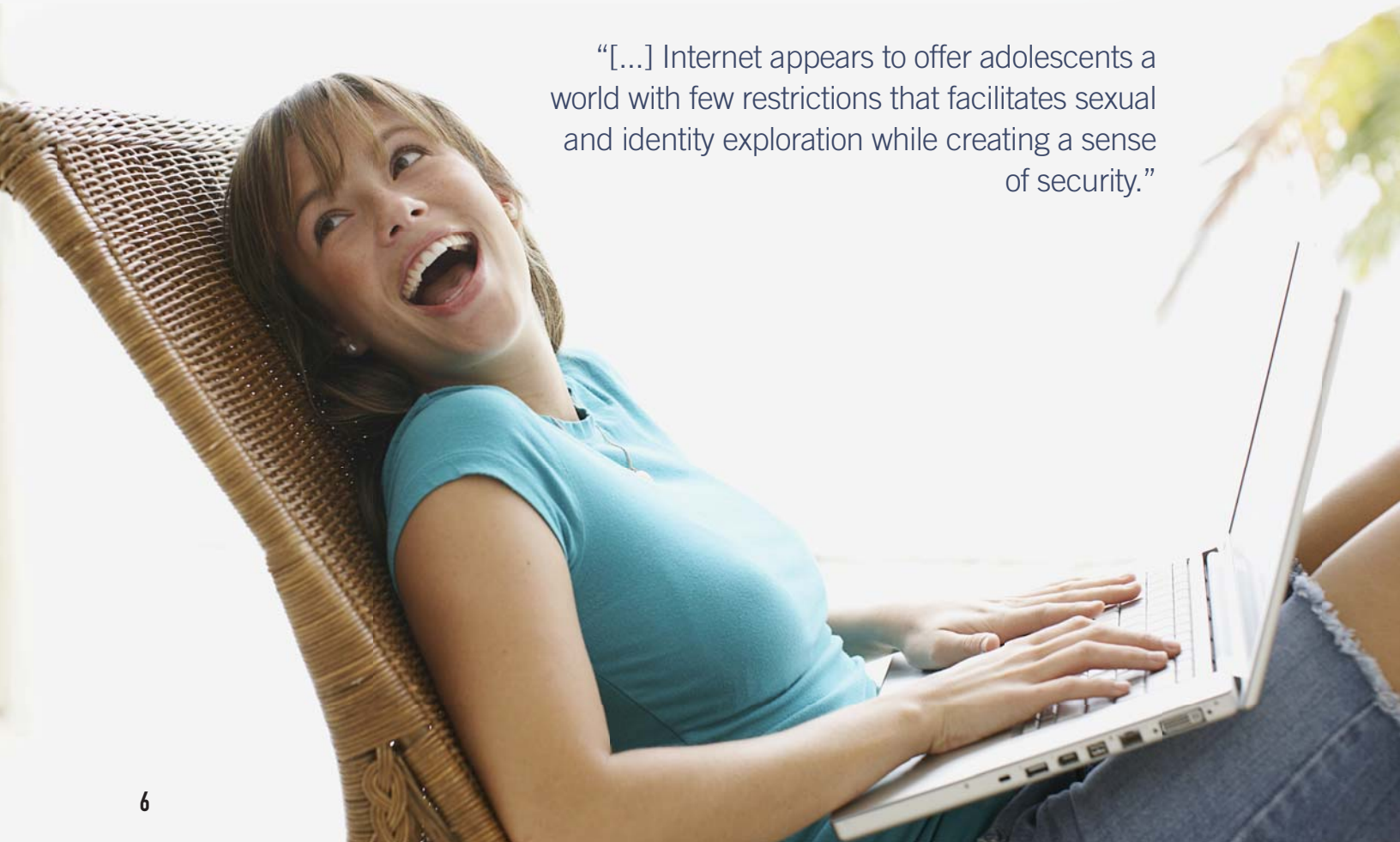
Hence, self-disclosure by young people in a context of online flirting is often stereotypical and sexualized. Online flirting through these kinds of disclosures can be likened to sexual seduction, which has its own set of issues¹. Moreover, some authors consider sexualization of the media, including the Web, and the stereotypes detected there as obstacles and to romantic relationships (Conseil du statut de la femme, 2008).

In addition, intimate disclosures over the Internet can sometimes have real-life repercussions. The fact that many people can access this information depersonalizes it, especially when disclosures are posted on social networks and blogs. Large-scale sharing of this sort—intimate and, remember, sometimes sexual—can have worrisome consequences for young people: humiliation, damage to a person's reputation, meeting people who are only interested in having sexual relations, or even broad dissemination of intimate images against one's will (Duquet and Quéniart, 2009). Despite the fact that they are somewhat aware of possible consequences, many adolescents are indifferent to the long-term repercussions of their online actions (Duquet and Quéniart, 2009) and of online information being disseminated in the real world, as we saw in the scenario presented at the beginning of this issue of *The SexEducator*.

Finally, another problematic aspect of intimate disclosures aimed at online flirting is the sometimes shady identity of other Internet users. While anonymity is one advantage of the Internet when it comes to exploring one's own identity and sexuality without feeling too many constraints, such anonymity means that young people do not always

1. To find out more about sexual seduction, see Geneviève GAGNON (2006), "When seduction amongst adolescents = power, sexual acting out and provocation", *Sexpressions*, No. 5, Winter 2006, p.11.

"[...] Internet appears to offer adolescents a world with few restrictions that facilitates sexual and identity exploration while creating a sense of security."



know with whom they are communicating and sharing photos and videos, nor what are the true intentions of their virtual partners. We should note here that over half of young people (59%) who participated in the Young Canadians in a Wired World survey stated using an identity other than their own on the Internet (ERIN Research, 2005). Although according to one study most young Quebecers chat with their friends on MSN, some contacts are, in fact, people they do not know quite as well and, even if they are aware of the dangers of chatting with strangers on the Internet, they are less wary of people they know (Piette, Pons and Giroux, 2007). For example, the scenario in the introduction presents a young girl who is chatting with a friend of a friend; she doesn't really know him and yet, she becomes infatuated with him.

Some risks of chatting with someone on the Web noted by young people questioned for the survey by Duquet and Quéniart (2009) included the possibility of meeting sexual predators, of "falling" into prostitution, and even of being arrested by the police. So these youths are aware of significant risks associated with meeting people online. Nonetheless, 8% of adolescents surveyed by Léger Marketing reported they had met face to face with someone they had first encountered on the Internet (Léger Marketing, 2007).

Given that young people might reveal very personal emotional aspects of themselves or parts of their bodies in their online conversations, there is good reason to be anxious about betrayals that have occurred on line. Moreover, the meaning that some youth assign to sexuality in the context of online flirting does not appear to contribute to healthy development of identity and intimacy. This is important since adolescents are in the middle of learning about their capacity to develop satisfying intimate relationships.

When all is said and done, flirting online provides some advantages in terms of exploring identity and sexuality. In turn, these advantages bring about risks for adolescents' safety and development of intimacy; nonetheless these risks can be managed.

"[...] many adolescents are indifferent to the long-term repercussions of their online actions and of online information being disseminated in the real world [...]."



ONLINE FLIRTING: NEW CHALLENGES FOR SEX EDUCATION

It is during adolescence that teens develop their identities, learn about intimate relationships, and find that sexuality is central in their lives (Thériault, 2006); online flirting raises interesting challenges regarding sex education.

Given the findings related to seductive behaviour online, it is important to consider the risks of using the Internet for this purpose, from the viewpoint of the psychosexual development and safety of adolescents. We need to give young people the tools to ensure they make wise choices when they engage in online dating; to succeed, we cannot talk to them only about the disadvantages of this communication method. Indeed, 62% of youth who participated in the survey Young Canadians in a Wired World indicate interest in learning from their teachers at school how to protect their online privacy (ERIN Research, 2005).

The activities proposed below can guide young people toward more responsible interpersonal Internet use and encourage them to be more vigilant. It is not about forbidding them to use the Internet but rather to make them aware of this reciprocal relationship: If the Internet is a window on the world, anyone from that world can also look back through the window. What we disseminate on the Internet no longer belongs to us; the body that is revealed and the words that are said are now in the hands of observers. The Internet is an extension of real life, not a parallel life. What goes on online can have repercussions off line. In the perspective of raising young people's awareness, the interventions proposed here aim to foster their autonomy and critical sense when they are alone on the Web, thereby providing a tool for fulfilling need for privacy.

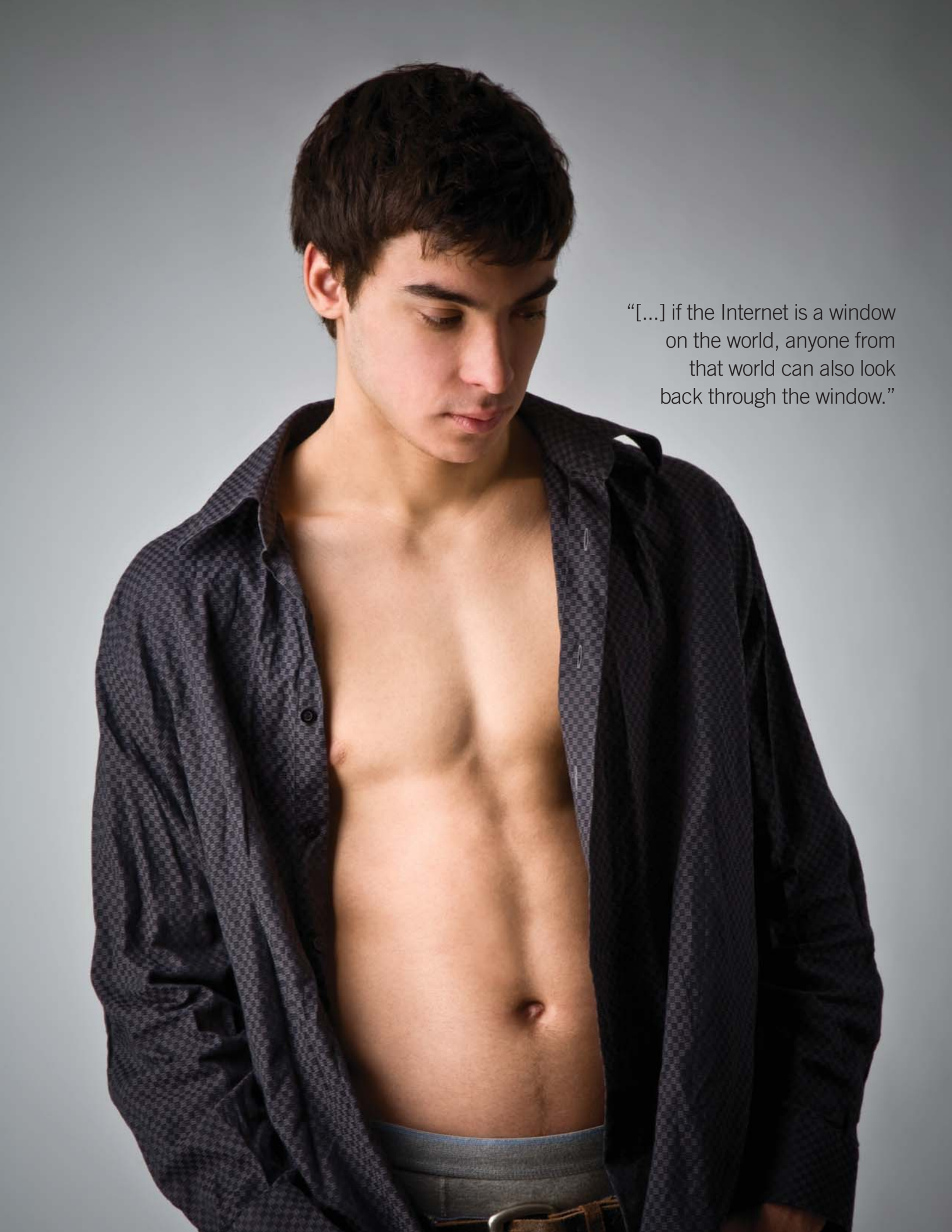
Moreover, reminding them of certain basic rules can help ensure their safety when they float around in cyberspace. Indeed, in 2007, the Royal Canadian Mounted Policy, Sûreté du Québec, Service de police de Gatineau and the municipalité régionale de comté des Collines (Outaouais region) jointly launched Internet 101.ca, a prevention program accessible on the Internet to promote online safety for children and their parents. Table 2 shows the basic safety tips suggested in this program for youth aged 14 to 17.

Some adults cannot see how they can intervene with regard to issues linked to Internet use aside from either prohibiting or controlling its use (Piette, Pons and Giroux, 2008). Indeed, many adults think they have no control over this communication tool. Moreover, adolescents seem to know more about the Internet than adults do, which makes monitoring difficult for parents. It is mostly for these reasons that, in this issue of *The SexEducator*, the learning activities pertaining to online flirting were developed from an angle of personal and social responsibility, and discussions are based in the youths' experiences. Remember that an open-minded attitude, showing interest in the topic and recognizing personal limits are all favourable to learning.

Here are proposals for educational activities designed for young people aged 14 or 15 (students in Secondary II); the activities can be conducted both in community organizations and in schools. The first activity concerns risks linked to online interpersonal activities and provides tips that can help limit these risks. The second activity looks at risks of revealing intimate information on the Internet, especially on personal pages or blogs.

TABLE 2
BASIC SAFETY TIPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE RELATED TO ONLINE FLIRTING

- Never give out personal information.
- Never meet anyone in person who you have met online without telling your parents or without getting their permission.
- Never post anything on the Internet that you aren't ready to share with the whole world.

A young man with dark, wavy hair is looking down. He is wearing a dark, patterned button-down shirt that is open, revealing his bare torso. At the bottom, a grey waistband and a brown leather belt are visible. The background is a plain, light grey.

“[...] if the Internet is a window
on the world, anyone from
that world can also look
back through the window.”

Learning activities

Before organizing an activity, it could be useful to read pages 39 and 40 of the document *Sex Education in the Context of Education Reform*. (available online at <http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/DGFJ/csc/promotion/pdf/19-7048a.pdf>)

The following table indicates how the proposed activities can be integrated into the Québec Education Program and into complementary educational services programs, which are offered by school nurses, spiritual and community facilitators, CLSC social workers or sexologists. These professionals are valuable allies and it is important that they be kept informed of your in-class activities. It is also important to let the adolescents know about the complementary services they can access in school, for instance, if they would like to talk to a professional about their personal experiences with online flirting.

Possible associations with the Québec Education Program and with complementary educational services programs

GOALS OF THE EDUCATION PROGRAM

- Construction of identity
- Construction of a world view
- Empowerment

BROAD AREAS OF LEARNING

Health and Well-Being

Ensure that students develop a sense of responsibility for adopting good living habits with respect to health, safety and sexuality

Focuses of development

Self-awareness and awareness of his or her basic needs

Self-affirmation; respect for his or her physical and psychological well-being; need for recognition and fulfilment; need to express his or her emotions.

Awareness of the impact of his or her choices on health and well-being

Awareness of how behaviour and attitudes influence one's psychological and physical well-being.

Media Literacy

Enable students to exercise critical, ethical and aesthetic judgement with respect to the media and produce media documents that respect individual and collective rights.

Focuses of development

Knowledge of and respect for individual and collective rights and responsibilities regarding the different media

Respect for people's privacy and individuals' reputations.

SUBJECT AREA AND SUBJECT-SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES

Languages: Secondary English Language Arts

- Produce texts
- Communicate orally in a variety of contexts

CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES

- *Exercise critical judgement:* Form an opinion; express a judgement.
- *Communicate appropriately:* Manage the communication process; become familiar with various modes of communication.

Complementary educational services

PROMOTION AND PREVENTION SERVICES PROGRAM

Give students an environment favourable to the development of healthy living habits and skills that will positively influence their health or well-being.

PROGRAM OFFERING ASSISTANCE SERVICES

Help students with any difficulties they encounter.

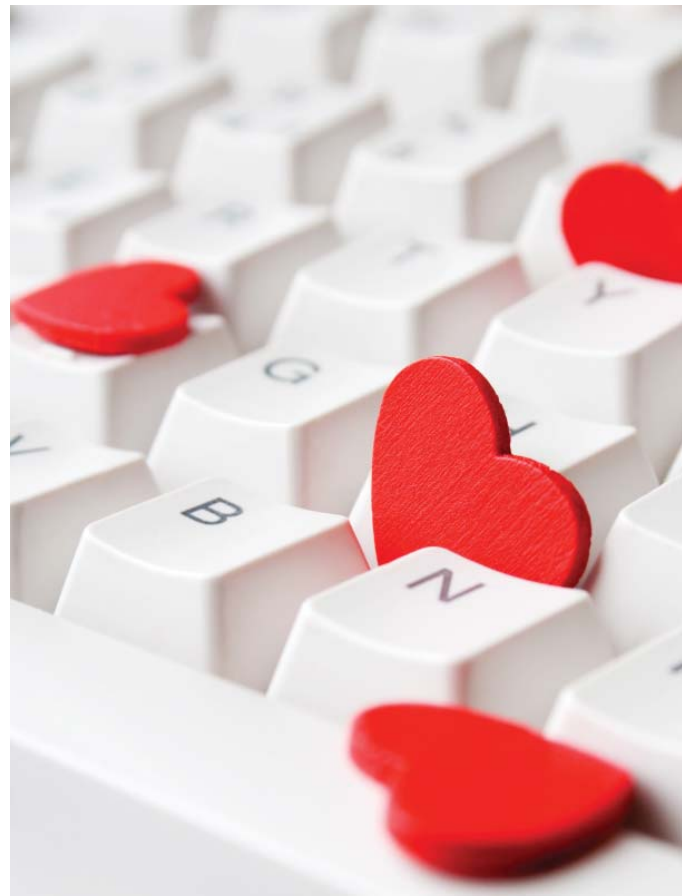
ACTIVITY 1

ONLINE FLIRTING: AT WHAT PRICE?

DURATION	OBJECTIVES	CONTENT
75 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluate Internet use• Know the advantages of using the Internet in the context of interpersonal relationships• Know the risks of using the Internet in the context of interpersonal relationships• Find tips that can help limit the risks of using the Internet in the context of interpersonal relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• @-teen generation (p. 3)• The Internet to explore identity and sexuality (p. 5)• Risks associated with flirting online (p. 6)

PREPARING THE ACTIVITY

Provide a copy of the next page questionnaire for each adolescent participating in the activity.



QUESTIONNAIRE

My use of the Internet for interpersonal relationships

1. Think about your friends list on instant messaging (e.g. MSN) or on a social network (e.g. Facebook):

a) How many of them are people who are part of your circle of close friends?

b) How many of them are indirect or distant acquaintances, or even strangers?

For each of the following questions, put a checkmark in the box that corresponds to your answer.	YES	NO
2. Have you ever put information online that could identify you in real life (e.g. photos, videos, address, phone number, name of your school)?		
3. Have you ever used the Internet to confide in someone you don't know well or don't know at all?		
4. Have you ever tried to attract someone or to test your capacity to seduce on the Internet?		
5. Have you ever exchanged 'sexy' photos or videos of yourself (that show your genitals or show you in a suggestive position, for example) ?		
6. Have you ever been sexually solicited over the Internet (during a chat or webcam session)?		
7. Do you think you can trust someone you've met on the Internet when you've been chatting with him or her for a long time?		

DOING THE ACTIVITY

1

Start the activity by quoting some numbers on young people's Internet use and presenting the goals of the activity.

2

Give the youth copies of the questionnaire to fill out, without writing down their names. Answers are anonymous and confidential. While they fill out questionnaires, divide the board into three sections: Advantages, Risks and Tips.

3

Collect the questionnaires, then ask the teens the following questions. As answers are given, write them on the board under the corresponding section heading.

Question 1

- Some people mistakenly think that they know everyone on their online social network contact lists. Do you think you know all your contacts?
- What are the advantages of chatting online with your immediate circle of friends? What are some risks?
- What are the advantages of chatting online with people you hardly know or don't know at all? What are some risks?

Question 2

- What are the advantages of giving out personal information on line (e.g. address, telephone number, name of your school)? What are some risks?
- In what circumstances is it appropriate to disclose such information?

Question 3

- What are the advantages of confiding, on the Internet, in people you hardly know or don't know at all? What are some risks?

Question 4

- What are some advantages of flirting online? What are some risks?

Question 5

- What are the advantages of putting photos or videos of yourself online? What are some risks?
- What types of photos or videos are appropriate to put on the Internet?
- What about 'sexy' photos or videos?

Question 6

- How do you or would you react to being sexually solicited on the Internet?
- What are the advantages of your reaction? What are some risks?

Question 7

- Can you trust someone you meet on the Internet?
- If yes, why (advantages)? If no, why not (risks)?

4

Ask the adolescents for tips on how to avoid the risks they have mentioned.

5

Ask them to analyze their responses in light of what has been said. Encourage teens who have had risky behaviours to change their habits so they can use the Web more cautiously. Tell them about the resources available at school that could guide them through this process.

6

End the activity by summarizing the advantages and risks of Internet use for personal purposes, and by imparting the following message:

The Internet is a fabulous tool to use to stay in touch with friends, explore the world, and express yourself. Most of the time, we are under the impression that we know well whomever we are chatting with on the Internet; in fact, we don't always know them. Once our words, thoughts or images are online, they no longer belong to us. The consequences are all the more substantial when sexual images are involved (e.g. sending nude photos of ourselves).

The Internet is like a window: while you can look out into the world, the world Internet users also can look in on you. It is important to be vigilant regarding what you choose to send out over the Internet and to think about possible consequences before posting something online. You should also be cautious and check the identities of people you accept to add to your list of virtual contacts. Finally, you shouldn't hesitate to talk to a complementary educational services professional (who differ depending on the setting) to get help if you're concerned with your interpersonal Internet use.

ACTIVITY 2

ANALYSIS OF SELF-DISCLOSURE ON A BLOG

DURATION	OBJECTIVES	CONTENT
2x75 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess elements of blog self-disclosure Write a critique on the topic of online self-disclosure Suggest appropriate behaviours related to online self-disclosure Express one's thoughts in an oral presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-disclosure in cyberspace (p. 4) The Internet to explore identity and sexuality (p. 5) Risks associated with flirting online (p. 6) Self-disclosure on the Internet, by sex (p. 4) Table 2: Basic safety tips for young people related to online flirting (p. 8)

PREPARING THE ACTIVITY

Each team must have a computer. You may have to contact the information technology service to ensure that access to some sites is not blocked.

Give each adolescent a copy of Table 1 (Self-disclosure on the Internet, by sex, p. 4) and a copy of the blog analysis grid on page 15.

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR EDUCATORS

Educators can evaluate this assignment based on the points allotted to each section, according to the quality of a student's understanding and analysis of the blog (15 points). If the analysis is presented orally, 5 points can be allotted to presentation structure and 5 points for quality of spoken language.

DOING THE ACTIVITY



Do a brief presentation on self-disclosure on the Internet.



Ask the adolescents to form teams of two. Each team has to go to a networking site to find the personal blog or profile of an adolescent they don't know (e.g. young person living in another region or a foreign country) and produce a two-and-a-half page critique of the blog or profile, based on the evaluation grid the team was given. Insist on the importance of being respectful in the analysis.

BLOG ANALYSIS GRID

Presentation of the blog (1 paragraph; 2 points)

1. Introduce the author of the blog, without giving this person's name (age, place of residence, activities).
2. Describe the contents of the blog.
3. Present the blog's predominant topic and justify your choice.

Evaluation of elements linked to self-disclosure (1 paragraph; 3 points)

For each element, give an example that supports your argument.

1. Does the blog mention searching for intimate partners?
2. Do the elements revealed by the author respect his or her privacy and those of family and friends? Why?
 - a) Does the author provide personal information about himself or herself or about family and friends?
 - b) Does the author make sexual connotations?
 - c) Has the author posted 'sexy' photos or videos of himself or herself?

You can refer to Table 1 (Self-disclosure on the Internet, by sex) for support.

Critique on the topic of online self-disclosure (1 page; 5 points)

1. How do you react to the personal information included in the blog?
2. What are your impressions of what is said in the blog?
3. What are the advantages of disclosing information about yourself in a blog?
4. What are the consequences of disclosing intimate information about yourself or others, online and in daily life?

Valid recommendations for the author of the blog (1 page; 5 points)

1. If you knew the author of the blog, what suggestions (at least three) could you make to help this person keep his or her privacy and improve his or her safety on the blog?
2. What effect would each of these suggestions have on
 - a) his or her safety?
 - b) his or her perception of privacy?

3

Ask each team to do a five-minute oral presentation about the blog or profile analysis, during a subsequent class period. Comment on the analysis after each presentation.

4

Conclude with the following message:

Blogs or personal pages are tools used to transmit information, express yourself or be part of a social network. They contribute to building a virtual identity that can be transposed to real life. However, as in real life, what you say and what you do can have consequences. What you reveal online should only be something you would reveal in real life. Although it can seem amusing, posting a sexual image of yourself means exposing intimate parts of yourself to anyone wants to see it, and therefore these elements are no longer personal and private.

Finally, remind the youth of basic safety tips related to the Internet (see Table 2).



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