CyberSmart!

# Play It Safe with Cyberpals

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## Overview

Exploring the concept of anonymity in cyberspace, students learn that cyberpals remain strangers to them and that they must ask a parent or guardian before revealing private identity information or planning to meet.

## Objectives

- Distinguish between cyberpals and face-to-face friends
- Explain the rules for being safe when dealing with cyberpals

## ISTE® National Technology Standards

- Performance Indicator # 3

## Site Preview

- No Internet site is used in this lesson.

## Online Resources

- Visit sites providing background information on Cyberpals.

## Materials

- Activity sheets (2)

## Introduce

- Discuss with students what it means to be anonymous in cyberspace. Explain that a sense of anonymity (knowing that others don't know who you are or where you live) can have positive and negative aspects.
- **Ask:** *What is good about being anonymous in cyberspace?* (It may be easier to share personal thoughts or problems without the fear of judgment from face-to-face friends. It provides an opportunity to meet people who share their particular interests from all over the world. People cannot judge others by their appearance.)

- **Ask:** *What is bad about being anonymous in cyberspace?* (The visual cues you have in face-to-face communication are missing. People can easily hide or misrepresent themselves and pretend to be what they are not. You can never really be sure that the identifying information provided is accurate. Revealing private identity information could result in a potentially threatening situation.)

## Teach 1

- Distribute Activity Sheet 1.
- Have students complete the sheet and share their responses. NOTE: Postpone discussion until students have read and applied the information presented on Activity Sheet 2.

## Teach 2

- Distribute Activity Sheet 2.
- After students read and discuss "Cyberpal or Face-to-face Friend" and "Be CyberSmart!" have them return to their responses on Activity Sheet 1 and make changes or additions. Guide students to consider the following in their discussion:

  **Jasmine and Nicole exchanging information:** A cyberpal is still a stranger and they should not give out private identity information without permission of a parent or guardian.

  **Benefits of meeting:** They might make a new face-to-face friend and have a good time.

  **Drawbacks of meeting:** They might not like one another. The other person might be very different than they were led to expect. If they do become face-to-face friends, Jasmine may lose out on some of the benefits of anonymity. Furthermore, in some situations, meeting a stranger could be dangerous.

  **Whether Jasmine should meet Nicole:** The safe answer is no, not without asking permission of a parent or guardian and taking one of them along to the meeting.

  **When Jason should hear alarm bells:** Students should know what information may reveal their identities. When Jason's cyberpal asks about his school and teams he plays on, he may be trying to get information that will allow him to find Jason, opening Jason to a potentially dangerous situation. On the other hand, he might just be a friendly person. You just don't know.

  **Ways Jason can stay safe:** He could say "I'm not comfortable with telling you this information. It's not safe." Jason can also block the person from communicating with him, change his character in the game, and logoff. He should also tell his parents or guardian that someone wants his private identity information. NOTE: Sometimes such a request is due simply to ignorance about good manners in cyberspace.

## Teach 3

- Have two students role-play being in a chat room for the class.
- Suggest that the two students have met online, like one another, and follow the same musical group. They may want to role-play actual experiences they have had in cyberspace.
- As the role-play progresses, and the cyberpals get to know one another, have one cyberpal ask for the other's real name and phone number.
- Have the class suggest responses that will keep the cyberpals safe.

## Close

- **Ask:** *What are some differences between cyberpals and face-to-face friends?* (You never know for sure who a cyberpal is, even though you may have shared intimate feelings. There is a safety issue at stake that is not the case with your face-to-face friends because a cyberpal is still a stranger.)
- **Ask:** *What are two safety rules for dealing with cyberpals?* (Never give them private identity information or meet a cyberpal face-to-face without permission of a parent or guardian. If a parent says yes, take them along to the meeting.)

## Extend

The following activity can be added for students who completed this lesson in a previous grade.

- Have students review the content of this lesson and then convey the "Be CyberSmart!" safety rules in a fun poster or in a recorded public service announcement for radio or television. Encourage them to create their own scenarios, either fictional or based on their own experiences, which present a safety issue involving cyberpals.


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