



LESSON PLAN

Level: Grades 4 to 6
Duration: 1-2 hours
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The lesson is part of the [Stay on the Path: Teaching Kids to be Safe and Ethical Online](#) lesson series.

Behaving Ethically Online: Ethics and Empathy



This lesson is part of USE, UNDERSTAND & CREATE: A Digital Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools: <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.

Overview

In this lesson, students are introduced to the idea that “hot” emotional states such as anger or excitement can make it harder for them to control how they act. They also discuss the concept of empathy and look at the ways in which digital communication can make it harder to feel empathy for other people. Students then read scenarios that portray two sides of an online conflict and consider how to resolve them, using their discussion to build a list of tools for emotional management and conflict resolution online. Finally, students create a media product that explains and reminds them of one of those tools.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- learn to identify “hot” emotional states and their effects on decision-making
- practice extending empathy to the online context
- identify differences between online and offline communication
- explore moral dilemmas relating to online communication
- learn skills for managing emotions during online interactions
- practice preventing and managing conflict during online interactions
- create a media product

Preparation and Materials

- Review the backgrounder *Ethics and Empathy*
- Photocopy the handout *Ethics and Empathy Online*



Procedure

Start by asking students to write down on a piece of paper three things people have done that have made them happy recently and three that have made them mad. (These can be either online or offline.) Tell them to think back to those moments and try to remember how they *felt*: how long did they stay angry or happy? What did feeling that way make them do? What did it make them *want* to do? (These questions are for students to reflect on, not for sharing with the class.)

Tell students that happiness and anger are examples of “hot” emotions that can be hard to control and can make us do things we normally wouldn’t. Ask students to name some other “hot” emotions (examples might include fear, excitement, frustration and jealousy). Next, lead a short class discussion on the following points:

- Do we always know when we're feeling these hot emotions? What might be some times when we're feeling them without realizing it? (For example, if we get scared, that fear doesn't stop right away even when the thing we were scared of does – or even if it turns out that it wasn't really scary.)
- How do we feel when we're happy or excited? What are the ways our body shows that we're feeling a hot emotion? (Your heart beats faster; your muscles may feel tense; you may shiver; you may hold your breath without realizing it.)
- How does being in a “hot” emotional state affect how we think and make decisions? (It's hard to think clearly when we're feeling a hot emotion. Hot emotions make it harder to slow ourselves down: when something triggers a hot emotion, we usually want to do something about it *right away*. We also often take things a lot more personally when we're feeling hot emotions, so we may react more strongly to things – which can make what we're feeling even stronger.)

Ask students if they know what the word “empathy” means. Explain that it actually has two meanings – *feeling* what other people feel (like when you get sad because something bad happens to your friend) and *recognizing* how other people feel (like when you're able to tell your friend is angry even if she doesn't say anything). What are the clues that tell us how someone is feeling? Ask students to remember a time they knew that a friend was mad and think about *how* they knew that: the look on their face; the tone of their voice; if they seem to be preoccupied with something. What are some things that might happen if we don't realize that we are, or someone we're with is, in a hot emotional state? (We can do things without thinking about them; react differently to things than we otherwise would; provoke a reaction in someone that they otherwise wouldn't have.)

Start a chart on the board with the headings OFFLINE and ONLINE. Ask students how talking to people online (through things like video games, social networks, texting and instant messaging) is different from talking to people face-to-face. Make sure to include the following points:



OFFLINE

We can see them

We can hear their tone of voice

They can see you

They can hear you

Things you say disappear (except in memory)

Only people who are there hear you

We can see how people react to what we say

ONLINE

We can't see them

We can't hear them

They can't see you

They can't hear you

Everything you say can be read later

People can read what you say

We don't see how people react to what we say

Remind students of the ways that we can tell if someone else is in a hot emotional state: which of these do we have when we're online, and which don't we have? How might this affect how we respond to things that make us feel hot emotions when we're online?

Distribute the handout *Ethics and Empathy Online*. Read the scenarios on Side A and then have students discuss the following questions as a class about each one:

- How would you feel in this situation?
- What would you do to resolve this situation?
- Who would be affected by what you do?

Have students form pairs and read the scenarios on Side B (on the other side of the page). Each of these scenarios revisits a scenario from Side A from another point of view. After they have read each one, students consider the same three questions. When students have completed their work on these scenarios take them up as a class, and ask the students if they would change any of their answers from side A based on what they now know. Discuss the students' solutions to the scenarios and which strategies they think would be most likely to work. (Use the backgrounder *Ethics and Empathy* to make sure all of the key tools and strategies are included.)

Have students (either still in their pairs or in larger groups) develop a list of tips and techniques for managing emotions and preventing/managing conflict when online. When they have completed that list, have them pick one of their tips and create a poster, comic strip, skit, video or similar media product that explains and illustrates it in a clear and entertaining way.

Assessment and Evaluation: Students may be assessed or evaluated on the content and presentation of their media product and the understanding displayed of empathy, emotional regulation and conflict resolution.



Ethics and Empathy

Here are some tips to help youth avoid empathy traps online:

- Remember that the people we talk to and play with online are real people. Even if you don't know them offline, try to imagine a person sitting next to you before you say or type anything.
- Don't respond right away. When something happens that gets you upset, take some time to let the first rush of anger or fear fade away.
- If you can, talk things out in person rather than online. Remember that other people can't tell how *you're* feeling online either, so it's easy for drama to blow up.
- Talk to your friends and family about how you're feeling. Kids consistently say that just having someone listen to them is one of the most effective ways of dealing with online conflict [1]. If you can't talk to someone you know, you can turn to helplines like Kids Help Phone (www.kidshelpphone.ca).
- Don't ask your friends/posse to back you up. Research suggests that getting the same message over and over again – even if it's from your friends taking your side in an argument – can make angry feelings a lot more intense [2]. It can also make the drama spread and turn into a much bigger conflict.
- Keep an eye on how *you're* feeling! It's hard to make good decisions when you're mad, scared or embarrassed. If your heart is racing or you're feeling tense, it's time to get offline for a while.

1 Youth Voice Project. <<http://stopbullyingnow.com/the-youth-voice-project/>>

2 Englander, Elizabeth Kandel. *Bullying and cyberbullying: what every educator needs to know*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Education Press, 2013.



Ethics and Empathy Online

SIDE A

Scenario 1:

Even though they've never met offline, Nathan and Jeremy are best friends who spend a lot of time playing Realms of Chivalry together online. They have a lot of fun fighting monsters as well as joking together and teasing each other. When they meet a War Hound, a kind of giant dog, Jeremy runs away instead of fighting it and asks Nathan to leave it alone too. Nathan wants the War Hound's treasure so he fights it and makes fun of Jeremy, saying he's sorry that Jeremy was so scared of the little puppy dog. Jeremy doesn't say anything but a few minutes later his character attacks Nathan's, and after the two fight for a while both of them log out of Realms of Chivalry. Nathan doesn't understand why Jeremy got so mad.

- How would you feel if you were Nathan?
- What would you do to resolve this situation?
- Who would be affected by what you do?

Scenario 2:

Ella likes to play with Sky Giants, action figures that come with codes that let you control that character in the Sky Giants virtual world. One afternoon while playing with her friends online she sees that Oscar, a classmate of hers, is being teased for playing a female giant called Valorica. She and Oscar aren't really close friends but Ella doesn't like to see anybody being bullied, so she tells the other players to leave Oscar alone and that there's nothing wrong with playing a female character – it's just a game, after all. To her surprise, though, Oscar gets mad and tells Ella to leave him alone.

- How would you feel if you were Ella?
- What would you do to resolve this situation?
- Who would be affected by what you do?

Scenario 3:

Maria is checking her social networking page when she notices that she's getting a lot of weird comments on a photo that's been tagged with her name:

"Nice hair"

"Tintin lives"

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

She finds out that her friend Jennifer posted a photo of the two of them in which Maria's hair is standing up in the front. Maria doesn't even remember when the picture was taken and she definitely didn't want it to be posted! She feels



especially mad because she doesn't know of any reason why Jennifer would be so mean to her.

- How would you feel if you were Maria?
- What would you do to resolve this situation?
- Who would be affected by what you do?

SIDE B

Scenario 1:

Jeremy lives on a street where there aren't any other kids to play with, so he spends a lot of time playing Realms of Chivalry. He's made some good friends like Nathan, but they don't talk much about their offline lives. When he's offline, he spends a lot of time with his dog Gus. A few weeks ago Gus started getting sick and Jeremy is very worried about him. He knows it's silly, but he didn't want to fight with the War Hound on Realms of Chivalry and when Nathan fought with it he felt like he was going to cry. He knows he was wrong to get mad at Nathan but he's afraid that Nathan will make fun of him if Nathan finds out why he was upset.

- How would you feel if you were Jeremy?
- What would you do to resolve this situation?
- Who would be affected by what you do?
- Does this change how you felt about this story when you heard it from Nathan's point of view?

Scenario 2:

All of Oscar's friends have Sky Giants, but his mother says she just can't afford to buy him such an expensive toy. One day his mother brings home a surprise: someone she works with has a daughter who quit playing Sky Giants and gave away her Valorica figure. Oscar's friends tease him a lot when they play, but it's better than not playing at all. He makes a joke out of it because he doesn't want his friends to know his mother couldn't afford to buy him a new Sky Giant toy. One day Ella, a girl from his class that he doesn't usually play with, starts yelling at his friends to stop bullying him. He doesn't want to have to explain why he plays Valorica. It's so embarrassing!

- How would you feel if you were Oscar?
- What would you do to resolve this situation?
- Who would be affected by what you do?
- Does this change how you felt about this story when you heard it from Ella's point of view?

Scenario 3:

Jennifer is looking at the pictures she took on her phone and deciding which ones to post. She finds one of herself that she thinks looks really good but her friend Maria is also in it, with her hair standing up in a way that makes her look silly.



She knows that Maria will be upset if anyone they know sees the picture. Because she and Maria have a lot of the same friends, she knows that if she posts it people will see Maria in it and tag it with her name so that everyone she knows will see it. If Jennifer doesn't post it, though, none of her friends will see it.

- How would you feel if you were Jennifer?
- What would you do to resolve this situation?
- Who would be affected by what you do?
- Does this change how you felt about this story when you heard it from Maria's point of view?



Assessment Task: Media Product

	<i>Learning Expectations</i>	<i>Achievement</i>
<p>Use</p> <p>Skills and competencies that fall under “use” range from basic technical know-how – using computer programs such as word processors, web browsers, email, and other communication tools – to the more sophisticated abilities for accessing and using knowledge resources, such as search engines and online databases, and emerging technologies such as cloud computing.</p>	<p>demonstrate strategies for the management of a range of feelings and emotions</p> <p>demonstrate a knowledge of the appropriate strategies for sharing and expressing feelings and emotions</p> <p>use electronic networks in an ethical manner</p> <p>demonstrate responsibility and respectfulness in his/her online communications and communities</p>	<p>Insufficient (R);</p> <p>Beginning (1);</p> <p>Developing (2);</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>
<p>Understand</p> <p>Understand includes recognizing how networked technology affects our behaviour and our perceptions, beliefs and feelings about the world around us.</p> <p>Understand also prepares us for a knowledge economy as we develop information management skills for finding, evaluating and effectively using information to communicate, collaborate and solve problems.</p>	<p>demonstrate understanding how it feels to be cyberbullied, how cyberbullying is similar to or different than in-person bullying and strategies for handling cyberbullying when it arises</p> <p>demonstrate understanding what it means to be responsible to and respectful of his/her offline and online communities as a way to learn how to be a good digital citizen</p>	<p>Insufficient (R);</p> <p>Beginning (1);</p> <p>Developing (2);</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>



	<i>Learning Expectations</i>	<i>Achievement</i>
<p>Create</p> <p>Create is the ability to produce content and effectively communicate through a variety of digital media tools. It includes being able to adapt what we produce for various contexts and audiences; to create and communicate using rich media such as images, video and sound; and to effectively and responsibly engage with user-generated content such as blogs and discussion forums, video and photo sharing, social gaming and other forms of social media.</p> <p>The ability to create using digital media ensures that Canadians are active contributors to digital society.</p>	<p>identify an appropriate form to suit the purpose and audience for a media text they plan to create</p> <p>identify conventions and techniques appropriate to the form chosen for a media text they plan to create</p> <p>communicate ideas and information in a variety of oral, print and other media texts, such as short reports, talks and posters</p> <p>create original digital works as a means of personal or group expression</p> <p>use own experiences as a basis for exploring and expressing opinions and learning</p>	<p>Insufficient (R);</p> <p>Beginning (1);</p> <p>Developing (2);</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>

