ASD Cyber Safe

Cyber-Sécurité

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steps

**CENTRE DE RESSOURCES
ET DE FORMATION
RESOURCE AND
TRAINING CENTRE**

INTRO

The purpose of this curriculum is to first, empower autistic individuals to use the internet to achieve their goals, whether those are social, gaming, work or study-related, or financial (banking, taxes, shopping), while protecting their personal information and making wise decisions independently.

The second goal is to teach parents and educators about the various ways autistic people may be using the web, which can often be with a different focus than neurotypicals, and to honour those differences and understand them. In the end, ensuring the safety, but also respecting the agency of the individual is an important balance to find.

The text is written to directly address autistic people, with notes for caregivers and educators to consider and expand upon as needed.

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PRIVACY AND
PERSONAL INFORMATION

Some things need to be kept private. There are certain times and places where we need to share our personal information, but on the internet, we don't usually have to share personal facts and we often shouldn't. Why? Because people can actually steal information and use it to take our money online.

When you are accessing a service, like going to a bank in person, or seeing a doctor or a dentist, those are some examples of when we give our personal information freely. You might be asked for your address and your Medicare card, for example. Or you might be asked for a credit card to pay. Those cases are perfectly fine.

But when we're online, you should not be giving out your home address, phone number, passwords, bank info, SIN card, or any financial info even if the person asking you seems honest. If a bank or any service should need this

information they will ask you to come in person or send you a letter.

Don't share the name of your school and sometimes it's even wise to not give out your real name - for yourself and any members of your family.

You can make up an online identity using a nickname and use that any time you sign up to a chat group or new app. What name would you like to use online?

SECURITY AND PASSWORDS

Many sites and accounts require a username and password to access them. Your email account or bank account are good examples.

It's important to keep your password for a site secret so that nobody else can use it to log into your account. If your password is very simple (for example if it's a word in the dictionary) people can break into your account by making a computer guess thousands of passwords per second. The best way to avoid this is to use a password that's long (at least 12 characters) and has uppercase letters, lowercase letters, numbers, and special characters (like !@#$) in it. Also don't use any personal information in your password, like your birthdate or home address.

Criminals can also learn passwords from websites by breaking in and stealing all the passwords used on the site. So it's important to use a different password for each

account, especially very important accounts like bank accounts or credit cards. Otherwise criminals could steal your password from a less important site that's easier to steal from, and use it to log into an important site.

Using a different complicated password for each web site is a lot to keep track of. A good way to do it is with a password manager. Many web browsers like Chrome or Firefox have password managers built in, or you can add an extension like LastPass or 1Password. A password manager will create a random password for each site and store it inside the password manager, so you don't have to remember it yourself. You just need to remember the password to your password manager.

If you receive a notice from a business or website that your password or personal information has been leaked, it's important to follow their instructions and change your account password right away. Check your account to see if anything seems different. If you think you have concerns, you should contact the website.

WHAT MAKES A SITE SAFE?

In the end, you have to use your own judgement about what you feel is a safe site. It's more about how you behave online that will help keep you safe. Just like walking down the street can be safe or dangerous, if you do things that help keep you safe, like looking before crossing the street and obeying traffic signals, you'll probably be fine. Here are some extra things you can look out for to judge whether a particular site is safe for you to enjoy:

- if you are about to purchase something or are on the site of a financial institution, you should see https: in the URL at the top of your browser and a little padlock icon (🔒)

- the site should be easy to view; there should not be tons of flashing ads or pop ups making it difficult to read.

PHISHING

Phishing sounds like fishing because it is. It's when criminals are looking for victims (fish). They try to lure (just like fake fishing lures) people into getting caught in their lies. These criminals (or thieves) try to get your personal information, like your banking info or social insurance number. You may get a fishy looking email asking you to login to your account for verification purposes. It's usually best to go directly to the website by typing it in your browser yourself and checking if they really were contacting you for real. You can flag fishy emails as spam, so that eventually you will stop seeing them in your inbox.

It's important to remember that the government and your financial institutions will never ask you for your social insurance number or banking info via email or text message. If there is something you must absolutely know, they will mail you a letter.

CHAT ROOMS/APPS

Chat rooms can be in dedicated sites, but also in games or apps, or watch parties. Chats can take place over voice, text, or video. Some examples of apps for chatting in realtime are Skype, Google Hangouts, Facebook Messenger, Signal, WhatApp, and HouseParty. All of those also offer the option to do live video chat so you can talk instead of type. Other social media platforms, like Twitter, or Instagram, allow you to put your thoughts out into the world using text, video or pictures, and others can interact with your content by leaving a comment. These conversations or interactions are much slower and you don't usually get immediate feedback. These platforms also allow people to send private messages (PM) to each other or direct messages (DM). In this case, it functions more like a real time chat room with only you and one other person.

Group chats can also be created. You should check who is a member of the group chat each time you start to chat. If

there is someone in the group you don't recognize, ask them to confirm who they are. If you don't know them, you get to decide how much or little information you want to share. Or leave the group chat if you are not comfortable.

Spaces that can seem safe and private might not be, depending on the rules of entry into the chat room/space, and the level of anonymity granted. Imagine it like being in your room: you can invite one person into your room and close the door. It's a private conversation between you and one other person. With a group chat, there are a lot more people in your room, so many people are sharing in the same conversation. A public chat means everyone is in your room and the door is open for more to walk by and listen or comment.

When you are on the internet, you need to be aware of what you are saying or commenting, who is in your room, and if your door is locked or open. The difference between real life and the internet is that what happens on the internet can stay there forever.

That's why even though It's fun to chat with friends, we still need to keep certain important things to ourselves. Just like real life, we don't show people our private parts (parts

of our body that are covered by our underwear: breasts, buttocks, penis, vulva). So when we're on the internet, we don't send pictures of our naked or nude (no clothes on) body or of our private parts to anyone, ever. If you get sent one, do not share it or show it to others. Tell a parent or someone you trust.

> *Some things just do not*
> *belong to the internet.*

For Educators/Caregivers:

It's important to read the terms of service of each app or website your child is using. For many social media accounts, like Facebook and Instagram for example, the minimum age is 13 years. While this can still be circumvented by an adult, it's best to respect the age requirements set by the company.

DATING AND RELATIONSHIPS

Some apps (**hiki** is one example) have been created specifically for autistic people to find friendship or romantic relationships, but we still have to be cautious. People can lie and pretend to be someone they are not - sometimes people might pretend to be older or younger. They may pretend to be male when in fact they are female. They may say they have a lot of money or nice things and that they will give you some. Or they might lie and say they are autistic, just like you, when they are in fact not. We cannot rely on websites or apps to verify each person is telling the truth.

There are people who also find joy in tricking people into believing their lies. It's called "catfishing." They will try to make you like them or fall in love with someone they are not - they may even send fake pictures of themselves to make you believe their lies. Why would anyone do this? Often it's because they are lonely or they don't believe anyone would like the real them. They are lacking

confidence in themselves. Or sometimes they are just people who can't stop themselves from lying.

It's important to respect yourself and your time, and if you feel like something is not quite right about a person or situation, or if you ask the person questions and their story keeps changing, it might be a situation that you get outside advice on. A "STICKY" situation like this means you should turn to one of your trusted friends for advice.

See worksheets: Sticky Situation and Trusted Partners

We may develop strong friendships and feelings with people we meet and interact with often online. In some cases, romantic or sexual feelings may develop as well. It is important to take your time and not rush into anything. You shouldn't feel pressured to meet someone. If you are uncomfortable at any time, you can stop and say 'no'.

If you do choose to meet someone in person that you only met online, here are a few things you can do to stay safe:

- Arrange to meet the person in an open public place, like a restaurant or a bookstore.

- Tell your friends and family where you are going and who you are meeting.

- If you change locations, let someone know.

- Bring a friend along and tell the person you're meeting to bring a friend, and make it a group date.

- Make sure you have transport back home or are able to make it back home on your own. Do not rely on your date to bring you back home.

- Have an exit plan in case you stop having fun during your date.

The privacy and intimacy we can feel when we form close connections online can also be an outlet to express our sexuality. However, there are some laws we have to understand. It is against the law to have any nude or sexual pictures, videos, or sound files of anyone ever the age of 18. It doesn't matter if they tell you they are over the age of 18 and send them to you, you can still get in trouble (be arrested, go to a court trial and go to prison for up to 14 years) if they are lying. For this reason, it is so important to never take or send any nude or sexual pictures to anyone, ever.

For Educators/Caregivers:

Many autistic people have better success and feel more comfortable with online relationships rather than real-life. Text-based relationships allow people time to think before they respond, and to not be judged for awkward social behaviours. Many will form intimate friendships with both autistics and non-autistics alike, without ever having met in person.

It is important not to deny these relationships because they can often break the social isolation many autistic people feel. The support they can receive and give from sharing their experiences and niche interests can supersede in-person friendship experiences they have had in terms of acceptance and importance. While these may not conform to neurotypical norms, they are still valid, and being restricted from internet access or a communication device can have dire consequences on mental health. With physical distancing practices now becoming the norm around the world, everyone is starting to see the value in maintaining online relationships.

That said, being cautious about online relationships is still extremely important.

SEXUALITY AND LEGAL ISSUES

For Educators/Caregivers:

Online forums are sometimes the only place we can find other people like us who understand our gender identity or sexual orientation. Children may be introduced to concepts you have not introduced them to. In addition, since we cannot always confirm the age of the people we are interacting with, this opens up a whole can of worms. Add to the fact that many autistic people are happy to have friendships with people significantly older or younger than them. Emotional maturity levels may differ.

What we don't want to see is a teen or young adult being charged with possession of child pornography, whether consciously or not, which is why we are advocating for complete abstinence of the sharing of nude or sexual images.

While people may want to explore their sexuality with images and videos, to be on the safe side, it is better to teach people that the internet is forever - even "disappearing" images/videos can be recovered.

Also keep in mind that [70% of autistic people identify as LGBTQ+](#). A discussion of the terminology surrounding homosexuality, transgender, queer, aromantic, asexual will help autistic people put words to their feelings. Don't be surprised if you find them in online LGBTQ+ community chats or dating apps. Even if they are not LGBTQ+ themselves, it's highly likely their fellow autistic friends are, and they may feel more comfortable socializing in that environment.

BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING

Before talking about what bad friend behaviour is, let's look at what makes a good friend, or good friend behaviours.

Good friends accept you for who you are.

They don't suggest you change something about yourself: your clothes, your hair, your religious beliefs or sexual orientation. Instead, they support and encourage you to be exactly who you are. This doesn't mean they never suggest ways you can improve, but when it is done, it should be done with care for your feelings and in privacy. (Someone pulling you aside and whispering in your ear, "hey, your fly is down!" is trying to prevent you from embarrassment. Someone who yells out in a big group of people, "hey, you're gay and your shoes are stupid!" is trying to hurt you.)

Good friends are trustworthy.

If you tell your friend something in confidence (a secret), they do not tell other people. You should do the same for them. Even if the friendship ends, you still keep their secrets safe.

If your friends make you feel bad about yourself, call you names, tell you to do things you know are not right or could get you in trouble, or tell others lies about you, they are not good friends and you should ask for help from a Trusted Partner. You deserve to have good friends and to feel good about who you are.

White Nationalist Sites/Racism

Some white nationalist groups have been known to prey on vulnerable people, and in particular, autistic males. These groups purposely "love bomb" socially isolated or lonely people, and then build up their confidence by telling them the rest of the world is against them and their problems will be solved if they believe in the same things and become part of the group. For some people, this is the first time they feel truly accepted and the beliefs start to become very convincing. The need for acceptance and group pressure can be so strong that they start doing things they would not normally do. Chat rooms and even gaming sites can be

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places where white nationalists will befriend and try to recruit people.

For Educators/Caregivers:

It's important to speak openly with children about your values and to name issues surrounding sexuality and racism in plain but correct and explicit terms. If they have already been watching TV or on the internet, they have likely heard many terms and may know more than you might imagine, but if you don't talk to them about it, they won't know your values and opinions and will guess and come up with their own conclusions. If you do not speak about homosexuality at all, they may conclude it is taboo and will hide from you. If you don't talk about racism, they may believe some races are better than others. You may think they know your opinions, but many autistic people do not infer or pick up subtleties.

In some cases, these open conversations, while sometimes hard and uncomfortable for adults, end up being enlightening, will bring you closer, and may even serve as suicide prevention.

Supplemental Resources

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https://www.getsafeonline.org/

https://www.commonsensemedia.org/

https://www.wbez.org/shows/wbez-news/cps-teacher-develops-toolkit-to-fight-white-nationalism/11ba8fdb-ef4b-4f40-866f-60fc30831b98

https://www.wizcase.com/blog/internet-safety-guide-for-people-with-autism-spectrum-disorders/