

Lesson Plan: Youth and Digitally Mediated Intimacy

Course: Family Dynamics 120	Grade: 12
Unit: 3	Lesson Title: Online Dating
Curriculum Connections	
<p>General Outcomes:</p> <p>3.1 Students will explore forming relationships in the 21st Century</p> <p>3.3 Students will explore the challenges of maintain a committed relationship</p>	<p>Specific Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analyze the changing nature of interpersonal relationships - Examine why and how people form romantic relationships - Analyze how effective communication contributes to positive interactions
Facts for Educators	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increases in personal technology ownership have changed the way young people build relationships and undergo sexual exploration. Social media and dating apps have become popular spaces for youth to develop sexual relationships, experiment with sexual play and flirting, discover pornography, hook up, and begin dating (Lykens et al., 2019). - Intimacy can operate at any distance (Berlant, 1998). - Even though dating sites have rules against minor use, under 18 youth are still using them to develop friendships and begin romantic relationships (Lykens et al., 2019). - Online dating can be especially useful for youth who may have difficulty establishing in-person relationships (Korchmaros, Ybarra, & Mitchell, 2015). - 2SLGBTQI+ youth are more likely to think highly of online dating as a space to meet others and build relationships (Lykens et al., 2019). - Youth—particularly those living in isolated areas—frequently turn to online spaces to build sexual relationships (Lykens et al., 2019). - Most youth use social media, rather than traditional online dating sites, to initiate online dating (Lykens et al., 2019). - Sexting involves the exchanging of sexual messages including texts, photos, and videos. Some people sext to connect with or seduce a partner, and some do it because it is arousing. There are certain risks involved with sexting, including legal issues (owning or sharing a sexual image or writing involving someone under the age of 18) and the lasting digital legacy of a sexual image (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CjYhXUR9p0&t=3s). - Teens can also use digital technologies to monitor, stalk, and/or attempt to control their partner (Patchin & Hinduja, 2011). - Around four in 10 young Canadians have sent a sext and more than six in 10 have received one (Bresge, 2018). - Many young people perceive online dating as a positive and ordinary thing to do (Flug, 2016). - Young people do not use online dating exclusively to hook-up (Flug, 2016). - Social distancing during COVID-19 resulted in less partnered sex for most young people due to increased parental monitoring and diminished privacy (Lindberg, Bell, & Kantor, 2020). - Digital spaces can offer a safer alternative for 2SLGBTQI+ youth looking build meaningful relationships, as they can control their visibility and experiment with self-expression on their own terms (Fox and Ralston 2016). - Online dating communities can also pose unique challenges for 2SLGBTQI+ youth, who can be much more susceptible to harmful online victimization than their cis-gendered, straight peers (Peter et. al., 2021). 	

Inclusivity for 2SLGBTQ+ Students

- Include discussions of how online safety varies between 2SLGBTQ+ youth and their cis-gendered, straight peers.
- **Disrupt:** Online dating may be a safer alternative for queer students who feel isolated in their communities or who are not yet 'out' at school.
 - **This:** Some folks build meaningful long-term and short-term relationships—whether romantic or platonic—with others online. What are some ways to control personal safety when meeting new people online?
 - **Not This:** It is much safer to meet someone from your own community rather than to meet someone online.
- Include discussions around a variety of online dating platforms, including those which are trans-centric.
- **Disrupt:** Not all dating platforms are queer and trans- accessible, and many are tailored towards a male-centric experience.
 - **This:** The 2SLGBTQ+ community might not always sort partners into binary categories (man or woman), and instead might define them in a range of terms that touch on gender (non-binary), expression (femme), and sexual preferences (asexual). **What makes a dating platform inclusive?**

Popular Media

BBC Stories: 'Thank U, Next': Are dating apps messing with our heads?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccSlmbu0a-0>

BuzzFeed UK: Using Dating Apps As A QPOC <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZxiF0Yue5U>

CBC's About Sex: Sexting <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CjYhXUR9p0&t=3s>

CBC's About Sex: Romantic Feelings <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXk0wmMTD9U>

CBC's About Sex: Flirting and Seduction <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3N23henkII>

Topics to Explore with Students

- Online dating platforms versus social media platforms
- Setting boundaries for online dating
- Sexting
- Consent
- Flirting and seducing online
- Online youth sexual cultures

Questions to Ask Students

- Do you think online dating is unique from conventional offline dating? Do you think it can lead to better romantic outcomes?
- Are online profiles authentic? How might they complicate the dating process?
- What online platforms do youth use to meet other people? Are some platforms better than others?
- Are virtual relationships real?
- How might online dating present opportunities for folks living with disabilities (wheelchair users, people who are blind, people with an intellectual disability, etc.)? How might it present challenges?
- How do you know if others are receptive to your online/text flirting?
- What do you think are important boundaries to set for yourself during online dating?
- What is some advice you have to others when it comes to online dating?

Activity Suggestions

We suggest tackling the topic of online dating after a lesson on sexual consent! Also, while it is deeply important to draw attention to the risks and legalities of sexting (sending and receiving sexual images and writings) with your students, we suggest framing parts of your inquiry around the positive aspects of online youth cultures as well!

Activity #1: Here is some information you might consider using to jumpstart the lesson! You can drop these statements into a PowerPoint, for instance, and generate some discussion around them:

- Social media platforms have become an integral part of many people's daily lives, including how relationships are formed and maintained. Social sites allow folks to see a person's friends, posts, messages to others, follows, shares, interests, locations, videos, and photos. **How do social media platforms function as a "digital neighborhood" for your own life?**
- With over 800 million monthly users, TikTok is particularly popular with youth—13- to 24-year-olds represent 69% of TikTok's user base (Sehl, 2020)—and plays a significant role in both reflecting and shaping youth culture (Willingham, 2020). **How do you use Tik-Tok in your own life? How has it impacted the relationships you have with others?**
- Social media can satisfy youth needs relating to belonging, identity experimentation, self-expression, and social connection (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019). On the flip side, social media also brings up particular risks, including privacy issues and adverse effects on self-esteem (Hodkinson, 2017; Vaidhyanathan, 2018). **How does your online life impact your day-to-day routines and relationships? Is your online life (social media, gaming, internet browsing, shopping, etc.) just as important as the life you live in person?**



Activity #2: Plenty of Fish

Drawing from the Canadian online dating service—Plenty of Fish—this activity is perfect for inspiring group discussion around online dating. Prepare discussion questions by cutting out the fish templates provided (see attached) and putting them all in a fishbowl or container. Divide your class into groups, with each group receiving a fishbowl with their discussion questions. Students can take turns 'fishing' questions out of the bowl to generate discussion within their groups.

Activity #3: Online Dating Beyond Sexting—Setting Boundaries and Having Fun!

In this assignment, students (re)learn about the legalities around sexting within the Canadian context and brainstorm alternate ways to express intimacy and affection using other digital means:

- Have students watch **CBC's About Sex: Sexting** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CjYhXUR9p0&t=3s>)
- Have students watch **CBC's About Sex: Flirting and Seduction** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3N23henkII>)
- Get groups of students to come up with a top ten list of ways to flirt, seduce, and be affectionate (consensually and safely) online without sexting. This would be fun to do using Google Docs! Some examples students might come up with include:
 - Sending GIFS and emojis

- Friending them on a social media platform
- Responding to an Instagram story
- A “this reminded me of you” text and sending a song or a photo (not a nude!)
- Sending a private Spotify list
- Being clear that you want to flirt and sending some consensual flirtatious messages
- Sending funny TikTok videos
- Making a Tik Tok video for them
- Sending compliments (not just on physical appearances)
- Flirting or chatting with them in person, if possible.
- Have groups share their lists and generate some discussion: **How do you know if someone is responsive to your online flirtations? How do you handle rejection? How can we think about consent as it relates to online seduction and flirting? How can emojis set the tone for flirting?**
- Have students think about setting some online dating boundaries for themselves. Send students to the following link to help generate some ideas: (<https://www.minkaguides.com/setting-boundaries-in-dating/>).

Activity #4: Most youth in romantic relationships assume that they and their partner(s) will check in with each other regularly throughout the day (Lenhart, Smith, & Anderson, 2015). Show students the following ways youth commonly communicate with their partner(s) and have them rank what they guess are the most to least common methods of communication. Be sure to mix the statements up and cover the percentages!

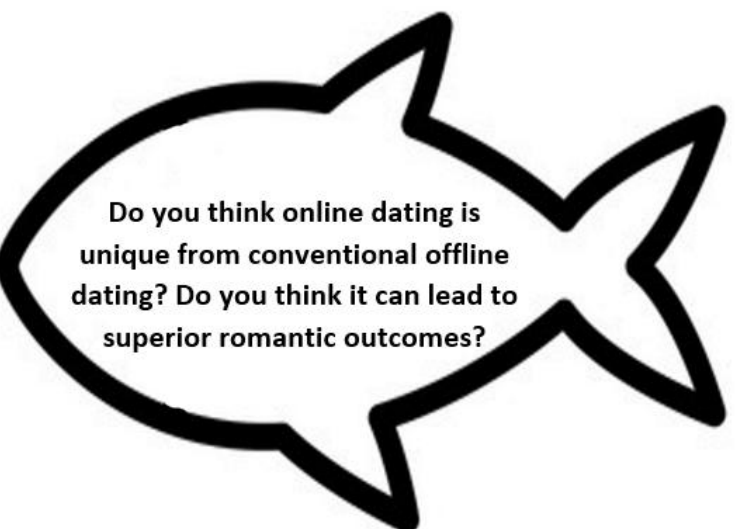
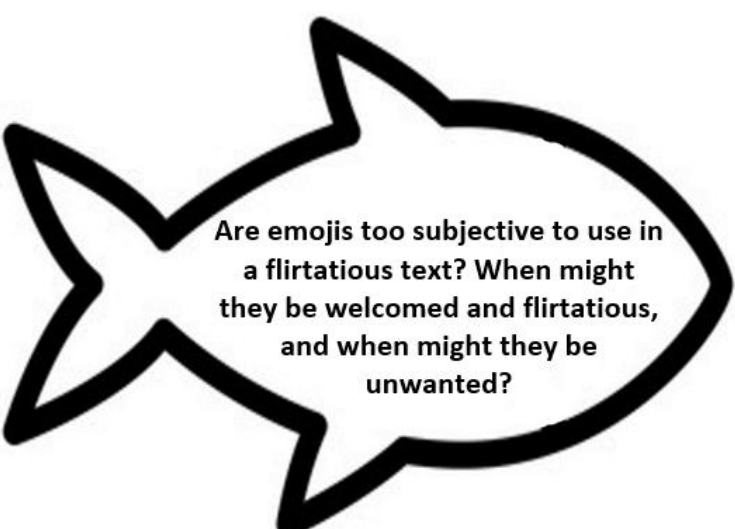
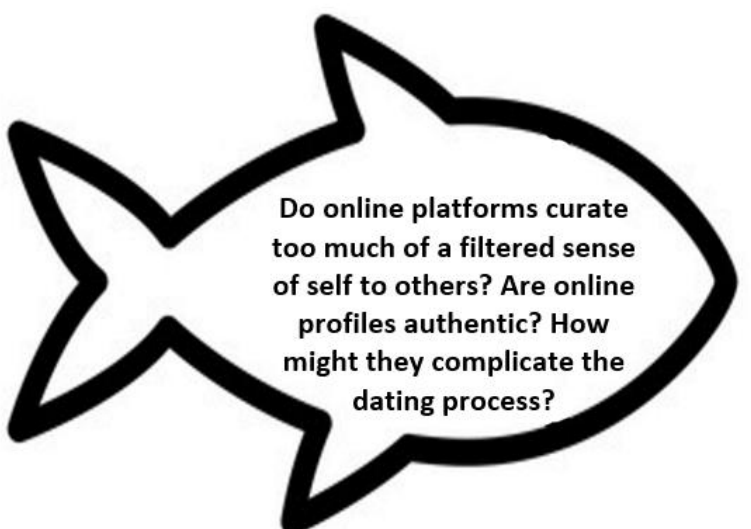
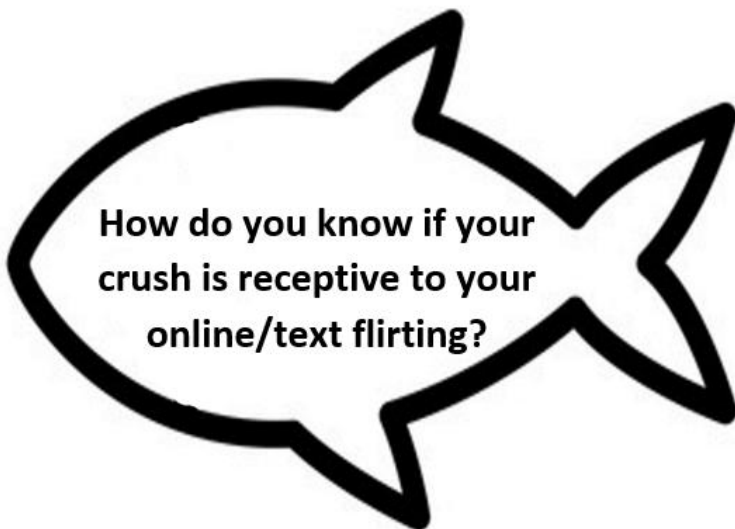
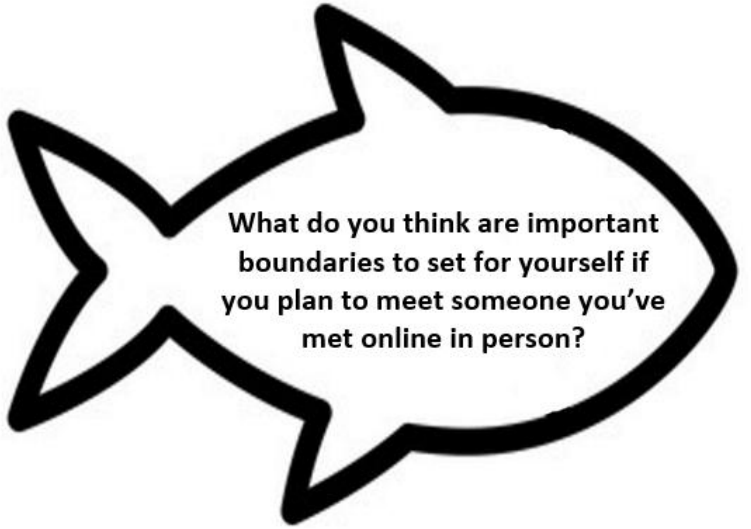
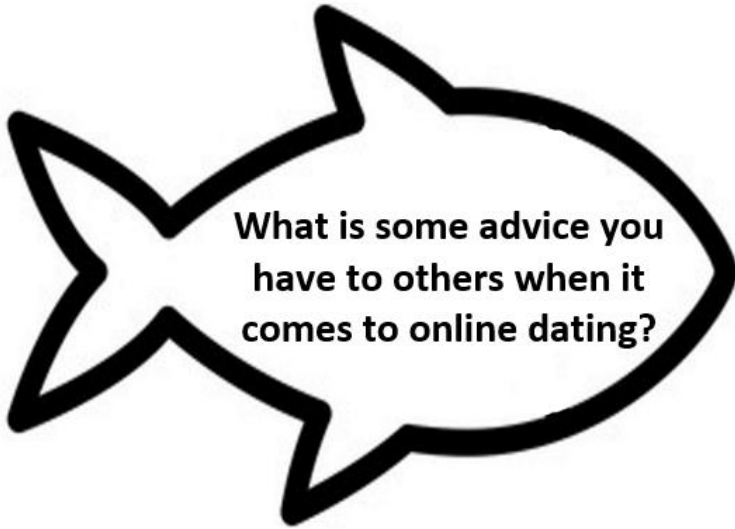
- **Text messaging** – 92% of teens with romantic relationship experience have spent time text messaging with their partner at least occasionally.
- **Talking on the phone** – 87% have spent time talking on the phone with their significant other.
- **Being together in person** – 86% have spent time together in person, outside of school hours.
- **Social media** – 70% have spent time together posting on social media sites.
- **Instant or online messaging** – 69% have spent time with their significant other using instant or online messaging.
- **Video chat** – 55% say they have spent time with their partner video chatting.
- **Messaging apps** – 49% have used messaging apps to stay connected to their partner.
- **Email** – 37% have used email to spend time with a significant other.
- **Talk while playing video games** – 31% talk with their partner while playing video games together (Lenhart, Smith, & Anderson, 2015).

Reveal the results to your students after they have had time to rank the statements. **Did anyone’s answers match up 100% with the results? Do some students’ personal experiences differ? Are there any other ways students communicate with their partners that were not included in this study?**

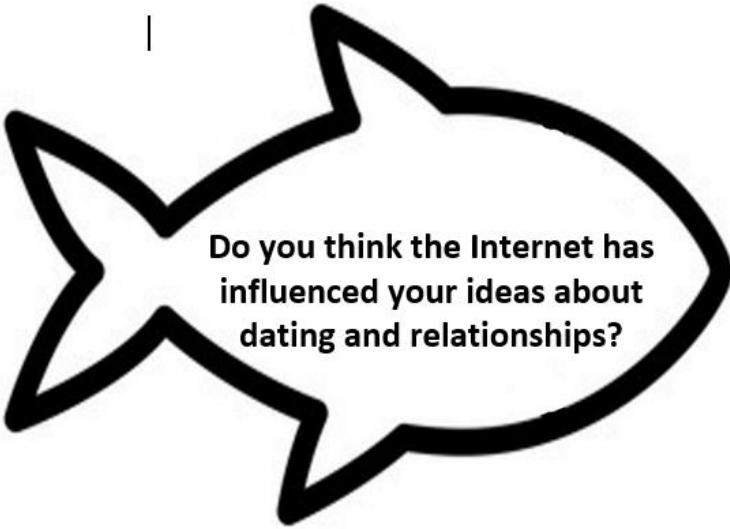
Activity # 5: Online Dating Choice Board

Students work through a choice board containing 9 mini-assignments (see attached choice board).

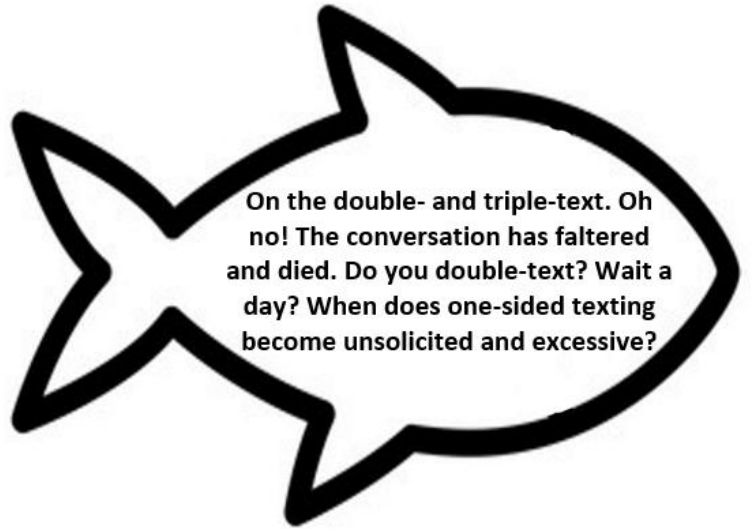
Activity #2: Plenty of Fish



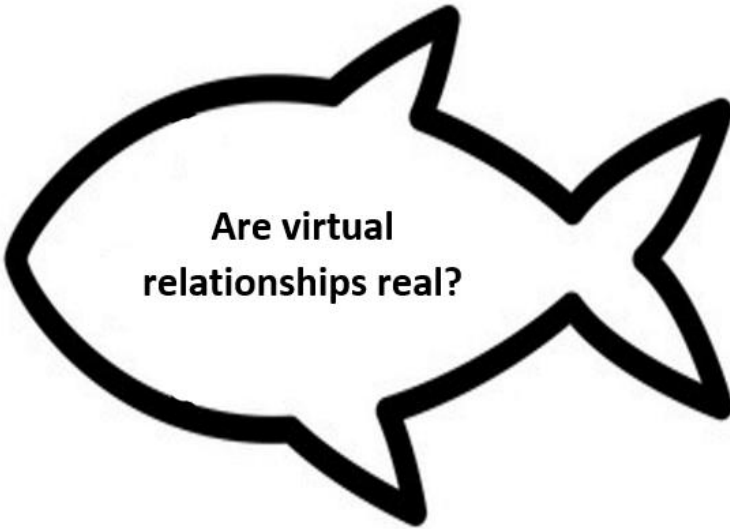
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Do you think the Internet has influenced your ideas about dating and relationships?



On the double- and triple-text. Oh no! The conversation has faltered and died. Do you double-text? Wait a day? When does one-sided texting become unsolicited and excessive?



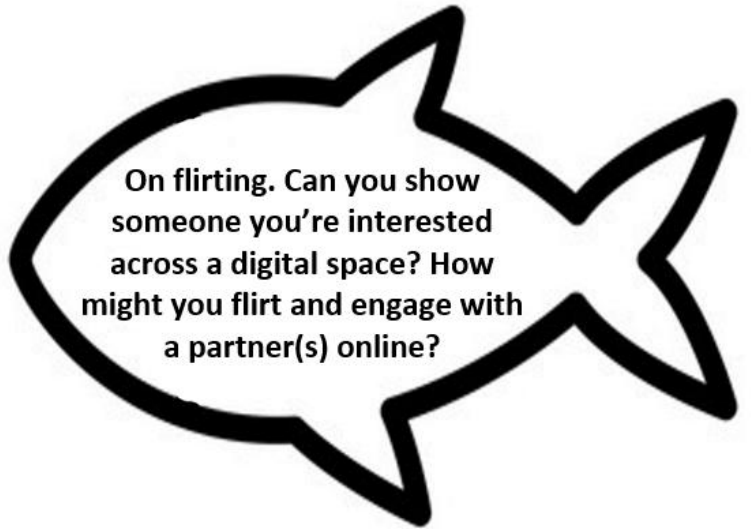
Are virtual relationships real?



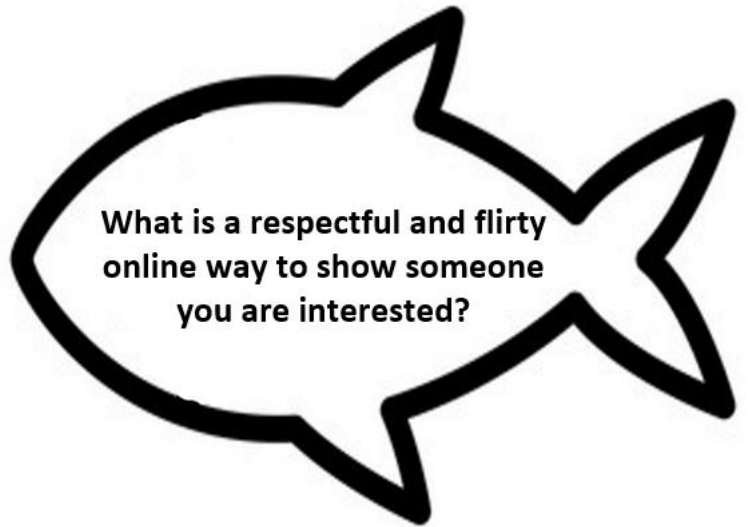
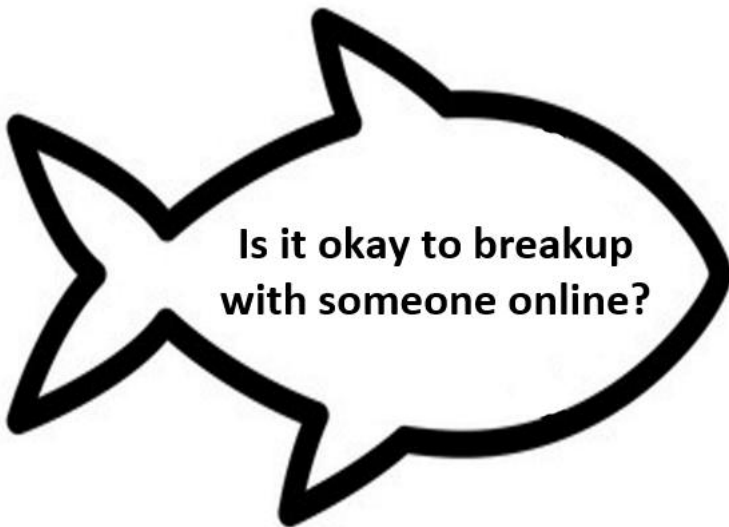
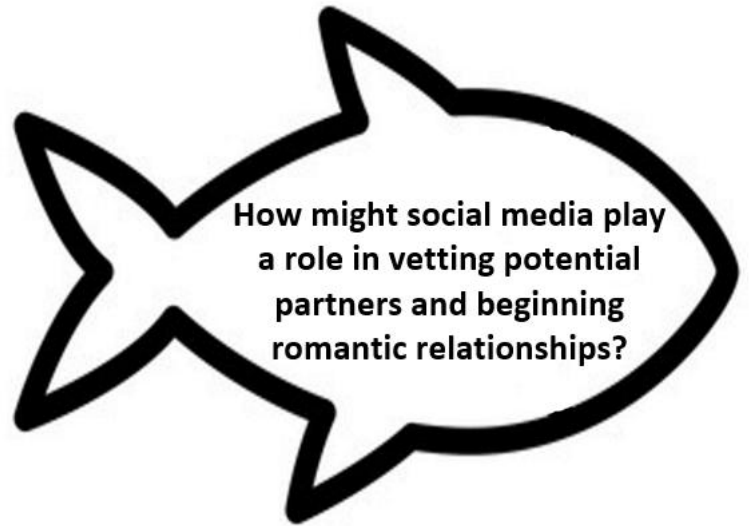
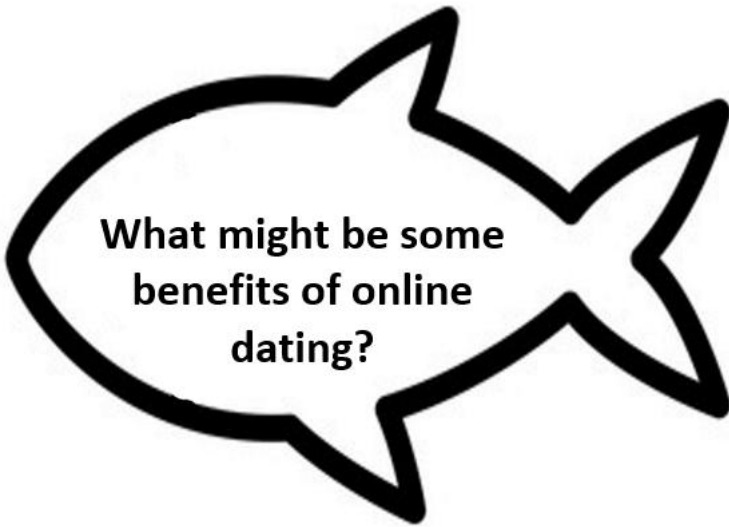
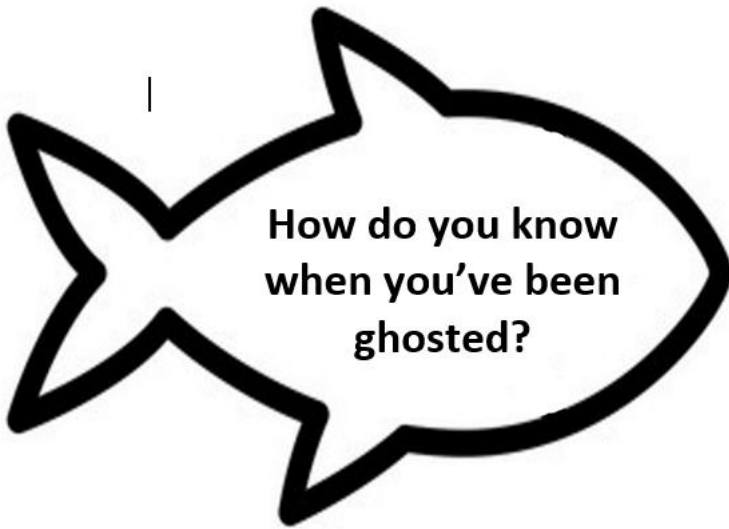
What online platforms do you use to meet other people? Are some platforms better than others? Rank them from best to worse!



What advice do you have for others when it comes to handling online rejection?



On flirting. Can you show someone you're interested across a digital space? How might you flirt and engage with a partner(s) online?



Activity # 5: Online Dating Choice Board

<p>Emojis between friends 😊 and flirty emojis between partners 🍷. Which ones do you send to friends and which ones do you send to a partner? Make a top ten list of each. Then, pick five and describe their deeper meanings! How do you know flirty emojis are okay to send to someone? When might they be unsolicited? Are some seen as too rude?</p>	<p>Where are five places in your own community an individual could safely meet up with someone they've met online? What would make these spaces safe meeting points? Is there anything that makes these spaces unsafe? What boundaries does someone need to set before meeting someone new?</p>	<p>Swipe, Right? Is Tinder's platform of "swipe right" to like or "swipe left" to dislike other users' profiles too superficial? Or is it an authentic way to meet new people? In other words, do you think it mirrors the criteria you set for meeting potential romantic interests irl (in real life)?</p>
<p>Check out the social media platforms of these folks: @_rubyrare, @maxxfennin, @drjenniferlincoln. They are all champions of sex-positive and inclusive sexuality education for young people. Watch some of their videos and browse through their posts. List 10 interesting, provocative, or sex-positive things you learned during your browsing.</p>	<p>Online Dating Dictionary: Research the meaning of the following terms and create an 'Online Dating Dictionary:' Doxing, Revenge Porn, Social Media Stalking, Deepliking, Sliding into someone's DMs, Benching/Breadcrumbing, LOR (Left on Read), Ghosted, Curving, and Cookie-Jarred. <i>Then, add 3 other terms/definitions to your dictionary! These might be ones you already know, or you might have to go research some!</i></p>	<p>Watch another CBC About Sex video. This one is about Romantic Feelings! After watching, create a modern-day love letter (a.k.a. a text message) using mostly shorthand text and emojis. Make sure your love letter asks for consent! Can other people decipher your message? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXk0wmMTD9U</p>
<p>Take a character from a TV show/book/movie/video game and create a fake dating profile for them based on everything you know about their personality, appearance, preferences, sexuality, etc.</p>	<p>Explore the settings of different social media platforms and rate their accessibility for the 2SLGBTQI+ community. Which platforms seem the most inclusive? Which platforms seem the least inclusive? Be sure to check those filters which limit gender or orientation—which can work to misgender folks or limit their ability to see the people they might be attracted to!</p>	<p><i>"In many ways, you really can learn more about sex on TikTok than you ever could in school."</i> Discuss the truthfulness or falsity of this statement.</p>

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