

Not everyone on the internet is who they say they are!

Teacher guidance

You can use this resource to help protect learners with autism and other types of SEND from being duped by people assuming **false online identities**.

It also provides opportunities for learners to develop and practise their **English skills** including:

Reading

- Read short phrases on cards
- Read online or paper-based articles
- Read content/interpreting images on a social media profile page

Writing

- Write individual words or short phrases to describe a person from their profile page

Speaking and listening/communicating

- Follow the narrative on a TV programme
- Follow simple instructions
- Listen to others in a discussion
- Contribute to a discussion
- Give simple explanations

Introduction

Anyone can be duped by a catfishing scam but many learners with autism and other types of SEND are particularly at risk because they

- tend to take things at face value and do not suspect that other people may be attempting to deceive them
- find it difficult to differentiate between normal social interaction and something untoward
- may spend more time online than many of their neurotypical peers
- find it easier to connect with other people online than face-to-face
- have no idea that 'catfishing' is a thing!

While catfishing is more commonly associated with sexual or financial exploitation, it can also be used as a grooming technique in the context of radicalisation. People involved with extremist groups can pretend to befriend young people on the internet, gradually exposing them to extremist ideologies and influencing their thinking, and even leading them into parting with money or getting involved in illegal activity.

This resource takes the form of a card sort activity which will help learners recognise the signs that someone they are engaging with online is not who they say they are.

An [online version](#), created in Wizer, is also available.

You may need to adapt elements to suit the particular needs of the learners you are working with; the notes for teachers below include some suggestions for how to do this.

Task 1: introducing the catfishing concept

Depending on the abilities of your learners, you might start by:

- showing them extracts from the TV documentary series Catfish on YouTube
- sharing an article on catfishing which includes actual examples
- putting up a randomly-selected profile page, including photos, from a social media site that will be familiar to your learners, or creating an authentic-looking page yourself. Ask learners to tell you what they know about the person from what they see, e.g. it's a woman; she has children; she is young; she goes on lots of holidays. Then put a photo of someone who looks completely different, e.g. an old man, and tell them that this is the person posting all these photos and messages. Discuss their reaction together.

Where appropriate, you could go on to explore why some people take on a fake identity on the internet. Reasons include:

- it can be fun – more exciting than ordinary life; it's a type of story-telling – like having an avatar in an online game
- people sometimes pretend to be someone else if they don't like their real self or real life
- some people do it to trick other people into doing something like giving away their money or sharing sexually explicit photos or videos
- some people do it so that you think they are your friend, then they use that friendship to try to persuade you to believe things that aren't true (like all people with a certain skin colour are bad) or do something bad (like spray racist graffiti).

Task 2: recognising the signs of catfishing

Create sets of cards from the chart below. Depending on your learners' abilities, you may want to restrict the number of cards you use or just choose some of the simpler ones, such as the first group of seven. Ask learners to work individually or in small groups to sort them into two piles under the headings: 'That's okay' and 'Warning sign'.

Alternatively you could access this [online version](#) created on Wizer. Or you could take the content from the cards below and create your own online version using a different platform.

Talk to learners about the sorting decisions they have made. Ask them why they have sorted the cards as they have. Were any of them difficult to decide on? Which are the most obvious signs? Correct any misconceptions identified through any 'wrong' answers.

Task 3: reflective discussion

The nature of the discussion will depend on the abilities of the learners but could include the following observations:

- Most people who you make friends with on the internet will be who they say they are
- Just a few people might not be who they say they are
- Sometimes people pretend to be someone else so they can get you into trouble
- It's important to stop and think before you start sharing too much information with someone online
- It's difficult to be absolutely certain about someone you have never met but there are some things that should make you wary
- If you have a bad feeling or are unsure about someone you are talking to online, talk to a parent, teacher, or other responsible adult about it.
- If you do decide to meet up with someone you've met online, do it in a safe way, like taking a friend with you, meeting in a public place or telling people where you are going and who you are meeting.

Follow-up activity

You could reinforce the learning from this activity by working with your learners to create a piece of drama or a video on the topic. You could then use it as a resource to share with other learners.

WARNING SIGN 	THAT'S OKAY 
Will not meet in person	Happy to meet up in a safe place
Has never video-chatted	Likes to video chat
Has only shared one or two photos	Shares lots of photos
	Happy to speak on the phone

Talks about something very exciting they have done every week	Chats about the game you are play
Promises to upload a selfie but never does	Talks a lot about football and films
Says they will video-chat but their camera is never working	Has lots of friends or followers on social media
Agrees to meet up with you but then cancels	
Asks to borrow money	

Looks really good in all their photos

Has the same three photos of themselves on every social media site they use