



FTC Critical Thinking for Tweens

Online Focus Group
Discussion Guidelines
(Tweens)



I. Introduction and Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Moderator will introduce himself to the participants and:

- Explain basics of conversation: be honest, speak your opinions, no right or wrong answers, we don't need everyone to agree but we require respect for others, some of my team members will be listening in.
- Ask for participants' verbal approval to record interviews.
- Explain that the purpose of the discussion is to talk about how to increase critical thinking skills about being online for kids their age.
- Have respondents introduce themselves and say one surprising thing they've discovered/become interested in recently.

II. Educational Media (10 minutes)

- What games/apps do you play?
- What are some educational sites or games you've used that you like and that taught you something? [LIST]
 - Why do you really like these?
 - What do they do for you or how do they make you feel?
 - What makes them different?
 - Do they have anything in common in terms of:
 - Approach
 - World
 - Characters
 - Game play
 - Device/platform
- When/where do you play educational games?
- What devices do you use to go online? What devices do you use to go online in the classroom (or virtual school)?
- How has the pandemic changed your use of technology for learning things?

III. Message Believability and Awareness (25 minutes total)

Set the stage for the conversation with this quick review of content areas.

- 1. Privacy and personal safety** (e.g., protecting personal information, location-based services, etc.)
- 2. Spot and avoid scams and find fakes** (e.g., freebies, fake surveys, phishing scams)
- 3. Digital citizenship** (e.g., protecting personal information, using good judgment and treating others with respect to make the online world a more welcoming place for everyone)

Complete the online testing poll to test each of the following messages in terms of believability one message at a time. (5 minutes)

Instructions: I'm going to show you several messages. Tell me how much you believe each one. 5 is "I completely believe this," 3 is "I'm not sure," and 1 is "I don't believe that at all."

- Don't give out your personal information like your social security number, family bank account number, passwords, or address.
- Watch out for "free" stuff. Emails and texts that promise free stuff can hide viruses and malware. Don't download anything unless you trust the source.
- People on the Internet are not always who they appear to be. Some people have bad intentions. They might be bullies, predators, hackers, or scammers.
- If you see content online that makes you feel uncomfortable, or if it looks like you or someone else might get hurt, get help from an adult you trust.
- Think before you share. Once something is posted online, it is nearly impossible to take it back.
- Protect yourself by keeping security software up-to-date.
- Use privacy settings. There are downsides to letting everyone know where you are. Turn off location-based services.

For 11- to 12-year-old groups only:

- Don't share sexual messages or photos. In addition to risking friendships and what people think about you, you could be breaking the law if you create, forward, or even save this kind of message.

Discuss each of the following topics. (20 minutes)

We're now going to talk about some of these ideas one at a time.

First topic: Think before you share.

- **Pictures and content you put on the Internet will be there forever.**
- **Once something is posted online, it is nearly impossible to take it back.**

Discuss:

- Does a group or platform being open or closed change what you are sharing?
- What about your level of sharing changes if you know and trust everyone in the group?
- What would happen if someone in this group broke your trust and posted something you shared somewhere else without your permission?

- What obligations do you have to your friends and members of this group or any other groups you're part of?

Next topic: Watch out for “free” stuff.

- **Surveys that offer a “free” prize but ask for your personal information are scams.**

Discuss:

- Have you ever been tempted by the offer of something free online?
- Have you ever been scammed online? Has anyone you know? How? What did you/they do when it happened?
- Who do scams happen to?
- What questions do you ask yourself when you see something you think might be fake?
- How do you spot a real vs. fake offer in e-mails, texts or websites? (Discuss further if this doesn't come up organically: Do you know that anyone who makes an offer and asks you for a payment by a gift card is a scammer?)
- What's the best way to reject a fake offer? What do you do after you spot one? Do you talk to/tell anyone else?
- What is identity theft?
- What are some other potential rip-offs?
- What advice would you give other tweens to spot and avoid scams or fake offers?

Next topic: People on the Internet are not always who they appear to be.

- Have you ever had an experience online where you thought someone wasn't who they said they are?
- How do you figure out if someone is who they say they are online?
- What do you do when you think someone is not who they say they are? How do you respond? Do you talk to anyone about it?
- What do you want/need to know about protecting yourself from people who are fakes or dangerous online? How would you explain this to your friends?
- What does online privacy mean to you? Is this something you worry about?
- What do you think is okay for a company or others to know about you?
- What are some ways you protect your privacy online? Are there other ways you know about that you don't do? Why? (Discuss limiting location-tracking apps on their phones or by choosing not to

respond to contests or other offers if these ideas don't come up organically.)

Next topic: We all are part of making the online world a better place.

- What does being a good digital citizen mean for you?
- What kind of responsibilities do you feel like other people should have to you online? What kind of responsibilities do you feel like you have to other people online?
- Have you ever been cyber bullied? What was that like? How did you respond? Who did you talk to? What did you do?
- Have you ever seen cyber bullying happening to someone else? What was that like? How did you respond? Who did you talk to? What did you do?
- What do you do when you receive negative or mean-spirited comments online?
- What do you do when you see other people receiving negative or mean-spirited comments online? Is it different if it's people you know/are friends with/care about versus strangers?
- How would you want to respond to these situations? How would you want other people to respond to these situations?
- How have you stood up for kindness and called out bad behavior online when you see it?
- What does using technology in a positive way mean?

IV. Interactive Design (15 minutes)

- If you were going to create an in-class interactive educational/entertaining tool for kids your age, about this subject, what elements would it need to...?
 - Include
 - Exclude
 - Emphasize
 - Explain
- Thinking about those elements, what are some fun ways you could use them with your classmates to explore these topics?
- How do you think you would respond to something like this?

V. Wrap-Up and Additional Questions (5 minutes)

- Questions from participants
- Thanks