

HANDOUT: STALKING SARAH

Stalking Sarah**Debriefing:**

Work through this handout with a partner or individually. Be prepared to talk through your answers with the rest of the class.

In this case study, Sarah says:

'I can log on to Messenger or a chat room and communicate with family and friends or other people who are anywhere in the world.'

Do you use Messenger or chat rooms? What do you do and how do you keep yourself safe?

Sarah says:

'People think that just because there's a screen in front of them then you're safe and people can't hurt you.'

What does Sarah mean by this? What insight does it give you into safe behaviours and risks?

Sarah talks about chat rooms:

'I use chat rooms a lot and I'm always careful who I talk to, but I was shocked at how easy it was for someone to stalk me based on the tiny little pieces of information I'd revealed about myself. It's scary.'

With a partner or individually, discuss/note down what type of information could lead a cyberstalker to someone? What sort of information about yourselves do you share on the internet? What will you change as a consequence of reading this story?

Sarah describes how she uses chat rooms regularly, and how things can go wrong:

'I use chat rooms and website discussion groups quite frequently, both socially and for study and research. There was one particular chat room that I'd use on a regular basis and there was this guy that I got to know who seemed really nice, we had the same interests, sport and music, stuff like that.'

I told him how I played for my local netball team and we also discovered that we both had tickets to the Big Day Out, which was only a few weeks away. After a few conversations, I gave him my email address, everything seemed fine and normal.

Anyway, the next time we were chatting he started asking me really personal and gross questions ... I realised he was a real loser and I ended the conversation straight away, plus I blocked him from sending me messages. But then he started harassing me with disgusting emails and attaching explicit pictures of himself. When I told him to stop it he sent even more abusive messages and graphic photos.



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My parents contacted my ISP and changed my email address, as well as blocking him from sending more messages. But even though I'd blocked him from contacting me online, he knew the chat rooms that I used regularly and posted messages there saying false and abusive things about me.

Suddenly, I started getting threatening text messages from an unknown mobile number. The messages were saying how this man was going to find me and do all these terrible things to me. I was really upset and told my parents, and we finally reported it to the police.

The police discovered that there were various pieces of personal information about me on the internet that would've helped the man to track me down. For one thing, I had posted my name, age and photo in my chat profile, which can be viewed by anyone, but on top of that my netball team had a website that listed when and where all our games were, and my mobile number had been posted online because of a charity event I was organising.

With just a few tiny things I'd told this guy about my life, he was able to find out heaps about me. He found out what my mobile number was and, worst of all, he knew where I would be at certain times of the week when I played sport. I never knew how easy it was for someone to use the internet to track a person down in the real world, but since this happened I learnt there are a number of things you can do to protect your identity online.

As much as possible, you should try to stay anonymous—use an online name that is different to your real name and one that doesn't reveal your age or gender. Avoid posting personal information about yourself in public chat rooms and blogs, and if you're using a real photo of yourself be really careful where you use it and make sure you never reveal your surname on it.

If you do get messages or emails, or you have conversations that are threatening or harass you in any way, always be sure to save them because they can be used as evidence when situations like the one I was in occur. It may not seem like a big thing, but all the little pieces of information that we leave behind on the internet can lead to potentially dangerous situations. And when you put a piece of information or a photo of yourself out there, you can never get it back.'

1. What advice does Sarah give on actions to take to avoid being cyberstalked?
2. Identify what you would change or do differently in your own life using technology as a result of watching this case study.