



Script: Jeremy's Friend

School sucks, no one understands you and your parents don't seem to care.

Meet Jeremy. He's having a hard time at school, his parents are always nagging him about something and life is pretty miserable. But he can escape it all in cyberspace. He's a gamer with friends all over the world who understand him and all the crap going on in his life. And then one day, he decides to meet one of his online friends.

This clip tells the truth about Jeremy's friend.

Jeremy:

I've always been into online gaming... pretty much every day I'll come home from school and log on to Sleepywood or RuneScape or whatever. Weekends too.

During Term 3 last year I was pretty unhappy at school, I don't know, it was just a bad time for me, I didn't do as well as usual with my school work, and playing online games with other people made me feel good. My parents kept telling me to study more and spend less time on computer games – but, you know, it was a way to escape all the crap going on in my life.

Most games allow you to send messages to other players, and sometimes you'll start a private chat with other players to discuss cheats, tips, strategies, you know that kind of stuff.

I got to know this guy who was pretty much obsessed with RuneScape like me. He lived in a different city but we became mates and we'd meet in private chat rooms quite regularly cos I told him how I was a bit depressed about stuff. And it just felt nice having someone who knew how I felt, and respected how I felt about school and how the kids were giving me a hard time.

We got to know each other pretty well, and we exchanged mobile numbers and email addresses. So if Mum and Dad would kick me off the computer or make me go to bed, I could still text him. He started to ask me some really personal things and, to be honest, I didn't think it was that strange because we'd become such good mates. I guess it just felt nice having someone who knew how I was feeling.

When the school holidays started he suggested we should finally meet. He asked his Mum if I could stay over and she said it was fine and that she'd buy the plane ticket. His parents seemed so cool compared to mine.

I packed an overnight bag and went to the airport without telling my parents. When I got off the plane at the other end he texted me to say I should meet him at this hotel instead. I didn't even stop to think it was weird but I should've.



Script: Jeremy's Friend

Luckily I never made it to the hotel because I was intercepted by the police – my parents had worked out what had happened and called them straight away. It turned out my friend who I thought was the same age as me was actually a 40 year old man.

Looking back on it all now, I realise how crazy what I did was. I should have never have assumed that this guy was who he said he was, and I should have been more careful about how much personal information I gave him about myself. You wouldn't tell a stranger in the street that sort of stuff, so telling someone online is no different.

The good thing about making online friends is that you always have the power... If you don't like what someone says or if a conversation becomes dodgy, you can ignore or block them, or report them to the chat room administrator, or just log off altogether.

And if you ever feel worried about anything, there are people that you can call that can help you. There's the Reach Out counsellors, or the NetAlert Help Line.

At the time when I met my so-called 'friend' online, I was so angry about the things going on in my life that I didn't even stop to think about why he was so nice to me or that he could be a 40 year old man. But no matter how you're feeling, you've always got to stay tuned to the other people in a chat room, the sort of questions they're asking and why someone might show extra interest in you.