DIGITAL FRIENDSHIP

From strangers to best friends? Many friendships are made online every day. What value do digital friendships have?

#TAKEPART-Stories – an initiative of Deutsche Telekom AG
Facilitator’s guide for a workshop (approx. 90 minutes)
NOTES FOR MULTIPLIERS

In the course of this workshop, the phenomena of “digital friendship” and “digital loneliness” will be examined in more detail. Based on the question “What is friendship?” the participants get to know friendships and the possibilities of digital friendships better. Apps and platforms will be presented (e.g. Woe-Bot or Invisible Friends). The areas of “false friends on the net” (cyberbullying and stalking) and “loneliness” will also be addressed during the workshop. Getting to know digital possibilities helps to reduce doubts. In this way, people can decide for themselves which model of friendship (analog or digital) is fulfilling for their lives.

The key messages of the workshop are therefore:

1. Digital friendships are no worse than analog friendships. They can replace them or complement them in a meaningful way.

2. Apps and platforms help to strengthen existing friendships and make new contacts. There are digital friends who are not real, but seem like true friends. This also opens up new perspectives for lonely people.

3. Digital friends can also be false friends. It’s not easy to see through them. But there are ways to help.
DIGITAL FRIENDSHIP

PROCEDURE
“dabei-geschichten.telekom.com addresses various issues from the digital world. For the next 90 minutes, we will be talking about ‘digital friendship’.”

TASK
“On social media, countless friendships are made every day – or are they just pseudo friendships?”

POSSIBLE SOLUTION
“Digital friendships can also be real friendships.”
WHAT IS FRIENDSHIP?

PROCEDURE

“The yearning for true friendships is as old as mankind itself.”

TASK

“What do you think? What makes a true friendship, whether analog or digital?”

POSSIBLE SOLUTION

“I think true friends have to be able to talk about everything. I only have a few true friends.”
WHEN IS A FRIEND A FRIEND?

PROCEDURE

“There are many definitions of friendship. Some researchers see it as a voluntary, personal relationship based on support, trust and sympathy. The chemistry has to be just right. Sometimes a few similarities such as the same age, similar situations, origins, attitudes or interests are enough. They make us feel like we are on the same wavelength as someone else.”

TASK

“Which features link you to your best friends?”

POSSIBLE SOLUTION

“Same age, same town, same hobbies...”
WHAT IS DIGITAL FRIENDSHIP?

PROCEDURE
“Digital friendship is a special type of friendship. It can of course complement an analog friendship or keep people, who do not live in the same place and rarely see each other, connected. But there are also digital friendships between people who never see each other and who, for example, are only connected by a specific topic. That feeling of intimacy or closeness doesn’t have to be different from what we have when we know a friend personally.”

TASK
“Do you maintain digital friendships? How did these friendships evolve?”

POSSIBLE SOLUTION
“I have some digital friends who I met via a shared Facebook group.”
A SUBSCRIPTION FOR LOVE?

PROCEDURE

“On the Internet, you can find friends who are not real, but act just like real friends. Invisible Girlfriend and Boyfriend are apps that simulate a real relationship – including messages, greeting cards, and gifts that the app organizes and sends. As a user, you select the basic conditions such as age, gender, etc. and your fake friend is ready.”

TASK

“What do you think about this kind of service? Are there situations where it could be useful?”

POSSIBLE SOLUTION

“Especially when you are not in a relationship at the moment, services like this one can be useful. This way, you can avoid people constantly asking about your love life.”
“The Woe-Bot is a chat bot, which means it is not a real human, but a programmed robot. It was specially developed for people with depression and anxiety and can even be prescribed by doctors and therapists. Its aim is to stimulate positive thinking and, for example, help when someone cannot sleep. Then it counts sheep, reads stories or whatever you need. An interesting fact: Studies show that it actually works, even though users know it’s a bot. They actually feel better, less lonely and more secure.”

“What do you think about the Woe-Bot?”

“The Woe-Bot is a good tool for first-aid, but it cannot replace a therapist.”
SHARE YOUR WORRIES

PROCEDURE

“If you want to share your worries with real people you can do that by either calling the ‘Nummer gegen Kummer’ or using the chat from the Telefonseelsorge. There users can anonymously confide in an expert and share their fears and worries”

TASK

“Have you ever confided your worries to an expert?”

POSSIBLE SOLUTION

“Yes, I called a hotline once.”
FRIENDSHIP – AT FIRST CLICK?

PROCEDURE

“Every fourth German has looked for a partner on the Internet. Well-known examples are apps such as “Tinder” or “Lovoo”, but also “parship”, where a single person falls in love every 11 minutes, or “Elitepartner” for academic partners. On unverblümt.de one introduces oneself per video, in contrast to other offers. “Schatzkiste” (“Treasure Chest”) is a dating service for people with disabilities.”

TASK

“Why are dating platforms so popular? What do you think?”

POSSIBLE SOLUTION

“Dating platforms make it comfortable and easy for people who are like-minded to get to know each other.”
MAKING FRIENDS

PROCEDURE

“On this page you will learn about various applications that can help you make new friends.”

TASK

“Which applications were you already familiar with? Which were new for you?”

POSSIBLE SOLUTION

“I already knew the application ‘Spotted’.”
MEETING NEW PEOPLE SAFELY

PROCEDURE

“Unfortunately however, there are also people on the Internet who do not always mean well and it is not always easy to recognize that immediately.”

TASK

“Do you have an idea what “Meeting new people safely” could mean? What would be your advice to someone who is meeting a person they met online for the first time?”

POSSIBLE SOLUTION

“- Tell someone, for example a good friend, about the date.
- Do not pass on any information about your place of residence, or upload photos with clues about where you might live.
- When you chat, use a pseudonym (fake name) and not your own name at the beginning
- Make sure that your online contact is not a fake by for example, video chatting or talking on the phone
- Meet in public places at the beginning...”
FALSE DIGITAL FRIENDS

PROCEDURE

“The situation really gets bad if you make contact with the “wrong” type of person. Not just on a dating platform, but anywhere on the Internet. We are talking about cyberbullying and cyberstalking. Both also exist in the analog world, but in this workshop we will concentrate on the digital one.”

TASK

“Let’s have a look at Cybermobbing. Do you know what is meant by the term?”

POSSIBLE SOLUTION

“Cyber-Mobbing is a digital version of bullying.”
DIGITAL BULLYING

PROCEDURE
“Cyber-Mobbing or Cyber-bullying is when someone repeatedly bullies or harasses others on social media. The bully benefits from the anonymity of the Internet and also from others liking and commenting on their bullying. The first occurrences are often quite banal. And often there is no actual problem between the victim and the perpetrator. The police speak of “a new form of violence” and offer advice on websites.”

TASK
“What can you do and where can you find help if something like this happens to you or someone you know?”

POSSIBLE SOLUTION
“You can pay attention to the Cyber-Mobbing prevention tips in this module, such as: keeping calm, documenting attacks, blocking/deleting bullies, etc.”
DIGITAL STALKING

PROCEDURE
“Cyber-Stalking means stalking and harassing someone on the Internet and in reality. Unlike bullying, the attacker is concerned with being as close to his victim as possible. Bullies often like to attack their victims publicly, but stalkers tend to look for more intimacy.”

TASK
“What can you do against Cyber-Stalking and who can help here?”

POSSIBLE SOLUTION
“You can pay attention to the Cyber-Stalking prevention tips in this module, such as: deactivating your GPS, not posting private information, etc.”
WHAT IS LONELINESS?

PROCEDURE

“Let us look at loneliness and what it is all about. How can the digital world keep us from being lonely, and where does it do just the opposite – make us lonely?”

TASK

“What exactly is loneliness?”

POSSIBLE SOLUTION

“Loneliness is the negative feeling of being separated and isolated from other people. People who are lonely often feel excluded, isolated and unloved.”
“And what about digital loneliness? Digital loneliness is even more complicated. It is the feeling of being networked 24/7 and thus, never really alone, but at the same time, feeling unhappy and alone.”

“Complete the sentence: This can for example happen, when…”

“...you do not get the intimacy you are looking for through digital friends, e.g. when you are feeling down.

...you digitally follow how people meet and go out with each other in person, but you yourself are not invited.

...you are explicitly excluded such as, for example, in the case of cyberbullying.”
PHUBBING

PROCEDURE
“Have you experienced this? You go out with others, but everyone just sits there and types on their smartphones? Or you want to tell someone at home something that is really important and instead of listening, they start answering an e-mail? This phenomenon is called ‘phubbing’.”

TASK
“What can you do in situations like these?”

POSSIBLE SOLUTION
“Digital-Detox: Interesting in this context are applications like ‘Face it down’ and ‘Forest’ which help to put your smartphone down and leave it there.”
READING EMOTIONS DIGITALLY

PROCEDURE

“The last example is something completely different. It is about people who have difficulty approaching others and understanding their moods. This app helps autistic people read and practice emotions, such as translating facial expressions into feelings, and helps them make contacts and friends.”

TASK

“How can an application like this help make new friends?”

POSSIBLE SOLUTION

“Apps like this can help people with autism to understand others and their feelings, which is an important feature when trying to make lasting friends.”
WHATSAPP AND RELATIONSHIPS

PROCEDURE

“Carolin (27) and Jonas (29) have been together for almost two years. A tiresome, controversial issue in their relationship is often WhatsApp. Jonas is often online and active in many group chats. That is why his smartphone rings almost every minute. Carolin is annoyed and feels neglected by Jonas. She wants him to leave some of the group chats.”

TASK

“What do you think about leaving groups? What can Jonas do to improve the situation? And how can he leave the groups without hurting his friends’ feelings?”

POSSIBLE SOLUTION

“I think this is something that has to be dealt with diplomatically. Jonas could, for example, politely inform his friends about the reasons for his leaving the groups.”
“Those who spend a lot of time in social media do not have as much time for personal contacts. In addition, some social media posts can trigger feelings of being excluded. Especially when many other friends can be seen on the pictures. This can even endanger long-lasting friendships. It is precisely because most posts always make such a perfect impression that some people feel under pressure. However: Digital media connects us. It has never been so easy to communicate with people all over the world. Our smartphones make us accessible all the time. Whether early in the morning, in the afternoon or in the middle of the night – thanks to smartphones, we are never alone. And: Through digital media, relationships often develop that would probably never have come about in the analog world. Digital tools offer many opportunities to meet new people, especially for people who are shy.”

“Are there other aspects that need to be considered? Can you think of any?”

“I think the most important aspects were mentioned. Digital media offers great opportunities to meet new friends or even partners if you use it properly.”
I AM NOT LONELY!

PROCEDURE

“Digital relationships are not worth less than analog ones. They can complement and even replace them.”

TASK

“What was new for you?
What will you tell your family and friends about what you have learned?
Which questions still need to be answered?”

POSSIBLE SOLUTION

“Fake-friends, examples like ‘phubbing’, etc.”