

Me & My BFF:
Staying Safe Online
Instructional Game - EME 6415

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Topic

According to a recent Girl Scout Survey of young US girls between thirteen and eighteen, 30 percent reported that they had been sexually harassed in a chatroom, including receiving explicit photos and requests for personal information (“Internet safety news”). Young girls in middle school, “tweens”, are like most adolescents beginning to come of age- they want to explore and find the limits of their freedom. Several studies have shown that this group can be particularly vulnerable when online. “Me & My BFF – Staying Safe Online”, is an instructional game that intends to explore and educate tweens on the risks and responsibilities of online activities. Since children can easily wander onto the Internet from nearly anywhere: home; school; library; or, in the community with their friends; online safety issues are explored in these zones as players in the game travel around the board and answer questions to hopefully educate themselves and others about safe online activities.

Learner Audience, Learning Objectives and Goal

The learner audience for this game are young girls in middle-school or junior high who are roughly between the years of eight and twelve. This group of young people is often the target of marketers as they are consumers who are leaving childhood behind, but are not yet part of the saturated consumer group of teenagers.

The learning objective in the game is within the cognitive realm and is predominantly declarative in nature, though, one could argue that choosing to engage in safe online practices reaches into the affective domain, as well. The learners in the game will be able to recognize safe and unsafe online practices given scenarios and examples. A secondary objective is that outside of the game

these learners will choose to avoid unsafe activities and engage in safe online activities.

Questions and scenarios are organized into four categories: “POS – Help parents thrive online”; “Cyber sleuthing- Find the danger”; “411 – Terms and acronyms”; and, “Your .02 – What would you do?”.

The goal of the game is for the learner to work with their BFF to navigate through the four online zones on the board to correctly answer questions and work through scenarios regarding online safety. Working through the game to correctly answer questions and describe appropriate actions given a scenario helps establish successful achievement of the learning objective and goal of the game. In order to win the game, participants must answer enough questions to travel around the board and reach home again.

Learner Interaction, Feedback and Control

Learner interaction in “Me & MyBFF” involves interacting with the system to navigate the board and answer questions. The game also requires two types of social interaction. There is social interaction between the two members of each team. They must work together to answer questions and progress toward the goal and they also have social interaction with the other teams as sometimes they are asked to switch places with the team in the lead or the team in the rear-based on card selection.

Learner feedback consists of text on the four categories of cards. Symbols and text are used to provide the correct answer, for scenario assessments and to describe random occurrences that require learner action. This game has a fairly simplistic win-lose state, though the rules do

require that consensus be reached when answers are given that may allow for interpretation.

There is no real interaction built into the game to change the level of complexity or difficulty as players near the goal.

Finally, learner control is rather limited in the game. One bit of flexibility and control is built in, however, which allows a team to select any card from one of the four categories, if a team lands on a set of orange flowers. If a team feels particularly confident about the information in one category over others, they can then choose to answer questions from that card stack- given their roll landed them on the orange “wild flowers”.

Motivation

Principally, motivation is addressed in the game by attempting to grab the girls’ attentions and immerse them in a fun environment that focuses on their interests. Several magazines aimed at the learner audience were purchased and researched to help illuminate relevant topics of interest; hone in on their vocabulary; and, in the overall understanding of the needs and wants of this unique segment of the US population. The use of color and graphic symbols, such as flowers and emoticons, were designed to engage this particular age and gender group. Finally, engineering the game to allow the girls to play in teams with their BFFs attempts to add another level of relevance and motivation since this age group generally spends a good deal of time with their friends and is just beginning to explore dating and other “coming of age” situations.

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