



Teacher's Guide Herd Mentality Online

Adapted for the DepEd Alternative Learning System




e-CITIZENSHIP LEARNING PACKET

**This e-Citizenship Learning Packet covers the following learning competencies
of the DepEd ALS K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum**

Code	Learning Competency
LS6DL-DE-PSF-JHS-13	Digital emotional intelligence – practice self-regulation and empathy, and build positive relationships using digital media. This includes being sensitive to the needs of self and others while online, and not being judgmental online or yielding to herd mentality.
LS6DC-DE-PSE-AE/JHS-6	Demonstrate safe and ethical practice to reduce and manage risks.
LS6DL-DE-PSE-JHS-10	Digital communication – communicate with others with humility and respect, and in a constructive manner.



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<i>Topic</i> Herd mentality online	<i>Designed for developmental stage(s):</i> Adolescence
<i>Activity name</i> Be Heard, Not Herd	<i>Recommended for ages:</i> 13 to 16+ years old

Rationale

Friends interact and stay connected on social media. They show approval by way of likes, shares, and follows. Young people may be motivated to create posts to get more likes and shares from friends, and thus tailor their content to whatever they think their friends approve of. Conversely, young people may shy away from voicing out their opinion on certain issues on which majority of their friends might have an opposing view. This need to identify with a group intensifies at the onset of puberty. As these young people are still going through the process of forming their identities, their need for acceptance from peers may prevail over their personal principles. Young people may then engage in behaviors online that they would otherwise not engage in. We see that the need for belongingness extends to the digital lives of young

people. More specifically, this means that the risks that come with attempts to gain approval or acceptance from peers are also present online.

This lesson is designed to help students reflect on how they interact and handle themselves in online communities such as Twitter and Facebook, particularly on their ability to make decisions and advance opinions in the face of peer pressure and what is known as “herd mentality.” More specifically, the lesson explores the tension between the pressure to conform to a group’s thought and/or action and the importance of standing by one’s personal values and choices, while still maintaining responsible and respectful behavior online. The lesson aims to help students overcome herd mentality and avoid falling victim to it.

Prerequisite Knowledge and Skills

- ✓ basic communication skills
- ✓ social skills
- ✓ reflective thinking skills
- ✓ online social networks
- ✓ social media account/s

Lesson Overview

The lesson begins with an introspective activity where students think back to an instance of herd mentality in their personal lives. The activity is followed by a discussion on what students experienced (thoughts, feelings, and behavior) and some reflection on how students can respond appropriately to similar situations online. The lesson ends with simple acts of self-affirmation.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the session, the learners will be able to:

- ✓ explain the concepts of herd mentality in the context of the digital world;
- ✓ recognize signs of herd mentality in online and offline interactions; and
- ✓ demonstrate strategies to positively manage behavior indicative of herd mentality and ways to appropriately respond to social pressure online.

Integration Points

This learning episode could be included in:

- ✓ **social studies:** lessons on democracy, elections, the majority, governing bodies and majority votes (such as congress), politics, principle of *vox populi vox dei*¹
- ✓ **communication:** intrapersonal communication, personal voice, fact versus opinion, and echo chamber
- ✓ **literature:** works with characters that display herd/mob mentality, like George Orwell's novel *Animal Farm*, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, or Shirley Jackson's short story *The Lottery* (electronic)

¹ Vox populi vox dei directly translates to English as "the voice of the people (is) the voice of God." (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

copies of these works may be obtained for free or for a minimal fee at www.gutenberg.org or <https://books.apple.com/>)

- ✓ **media and information literacy:** social media, netiquette, online shaming
- ✓ **character education:** self-expression, identity, personality development

Resources Needed

- ✓ copies of social media message box (See Annex A)
- ✓ computer (preferably with access to the Internet)
- ✓ projector
- ✓ copy of the YouTube video *How Mob Mentality Gets Worse Online* by Seeker at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bV5ngreR7Hk> (if Internet is not available)
- ✓ papers
- ✓ writing materials

Summary Matrix

[The highlighted keywords give an overview of the learning packet's main themes and intended age group.]

Orientation of Lesson	Risk	Opportunity										
Development Stage	Early childhood	Middle/late childhood	Adolescence									
Theme of Cyber Wellness (Singapore)	Cyber use	Cyber relationship	Cyber citizenship	Cyber identity								
Pillar of Digital Citizenship (iKeepSafe)	Balance	Relationships	Ethics	Reputation	Online security	Privacy						
Component of Value-Based Digital Intelligence (Park)	Screen time management	Digital empathy	Critical thinking	Digital citizen identity	Cyber-security management	Privacy management	Digital footprints	Cyberbullying management				
Behaviour of Digital Citizenship (Ribble)	Etiquette	Communication	Responsibility	Rights	Security	Safety	Education	Access	Commerce			
Digital Kids Asia Pacific Framework	Digital Literacy	Digital Safety and Resilience	Digital Participation and Agency	Digital Emotional Intelligence	Digital Creativity and Innovation							
Recommended for Ages	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16+

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www.seameo-innotech.org/mt4t

Background Information

What is Herd Mentality?

Herd mentality refers to the inclination of people to think and behave similarly with the rest of their groups (Cherry, 2018). Human beings have a great tendency to imitate other people's behaviors especially when there are many of them doing the exact same thing. Other terms used to describe this situation are group conformity, groupthink, and mob mentality.

Young people who may lack experience in forming their own opinions are especially prone to acting on suggestions coming from their peers. Talking, dressing up, and behaving like their peers to fit in are not uncommon for adolescents who are still exploring their self-identities. They may be motivated to conform by their desire to gain approval or avoid judgment from their peers. Of course, following what other people in a group say is not always unhealthy. When a group of friends talks someone out of an academic misdemeanor, like cheating, that person will arguably benefit from obeying such a reasonable demand. Group conformity is harmful when it impairs critical

thinking and hampers self-growth by consistently submitting to the opinion of the majority. Even more harmful is when youngsters abandon their values and give in to social pressure in order to maintain relationships and avoid being singled out.

Herd Mentality on the Internet

The dangers of thoughtlessly following what everybody does (herd mentality) become more pronounced because of increasingly connected communities on the Internet. Online, young people get in touch with their friends, learn about what their friends are up to, and access popular contents. All of which can be done quickly and easily using social media. Situations will arise where young people may have to deal with whatever is popular in their online groups. It could be something as harmless as using a trendy catchphrase to something as serious as joining in on an instance of cyberbullying. The pressure to maintain good rapport with peers by going along with what the majority does may prevent young people from making sound judgments. They may be forced to do something without realizing its effects (Bhatia, 2017). When this happens often, young people are put

at a great disadvantage. They miss out on opportunities to practice their creativity and critical thinking skills, and discover their self-identities.

In social media, for instance, young people may feel pressured to give in to conformity for fear of being the subject of online bashing – even more so when friends and family share the same views as the online community. Dealing with herd mentality and group conformity can be a very stressful challenge for young people.

Steering clear of herd mentality is rendered more challenging by the kind of information made available on the Internet. The forms of computer programming (also known as algorithms) used by social media are designed to update internet users about peers and family members they frequently interact with, and to feed them content tailored to their activities and presumed interests online. This type of computer algorithm allows for constant reinforcement of particular ideas and behavior in online communities. The danger presented by such technology is in its potential to trap young people in what is known in mainstream news media as an “echo chamber.” In a loose sense, echo chambers are manufactured realities marked by similarity of ideas (Grimes, 2017). In such echo chambers, a person’s exposure and access to information are limited to those that align with her or his existing views. This can happen by choice, as in when people choose to block content that offer alternative ideas. In a very subtle manner, echo chamber also happens as a result of algorithms that feed internet users content that coincide with their interests. When diversity of information and opinion is hindered, people, especially impressionable adolescents, run the risk of being escorted toward the direction of the majority, wherever that is headed.

To help young people avoid mechanically following the herd, they should be trained to spot the telltale signs of herd mentality, regularly practice ways to avoid group conformity, and think independently.

What are Some Signs of Herd Mentality Online?

Herd mentality happens in a variety of scenarios online. Learning how to tell when herd mentality is happening is important so that necessary steps can be taken to refrain from it. Here are some signs to look out for:

1. **Being a copycat.** Just because something is trending on social media does not mean that one should be in on it. For instance, on the Internet, netizens are constantly surrounded by reminders of what society considers to be physically beautiful, and this can heavily influence their behavior. Following celebrities online who share about different weight-loss diets may have an impact on young people’s lifestyle choices. Similarly, learning about the body enhancement and skin treatment that famous people receive can negatively influence youngsters’ body image and self-esteem. Young people should learn that every action and every decision should be thought through, be it online or off. Decisions to be made and their consequences should be weighed against personal interests, opinions, values, and beliefs.
2. **Fear of expressing unpopular opinion.** If one still feels compelled to defer to the opinion of the many after arriving at a carefully thought-out decision only to avoid causing tension, then that may be a sign that one gives higher importance to the values of the crowd over one’s own set of values and principles. Online, this becomes evident when people are unwilling to share controversial facts and opposing viewpoints on social media for fear of stirring up an unfriendly discussion or becoming the subject of online bashing and other forms of cyberbullying.
3. **Changing one’s opinion or behavior to conform.** On social media, some people may give in to the pressure to like and share posts about hot topics even when they don’t agree with the opinion of friends and relatives who urge them to pass on certain messages online. This lack of confidence to stand up for one’s personal choice discourages uniqueness, individuality, and independence in favor of herd mentality. Although group conformity may have its rewards, especially in terms of sense of belongingness, it may cause one to lose her or his unique ideas, identity, and dignity in the process. One then needs to find ways of reflecting, appreciating, and expressing one’s self-worth to strike a balance between conformity and individuality.

How Can Young People Positively Manage Herd

Mentality Online?

Positively managing one's tendency to conform to what the majority thinks or does requires a journey inward—that is through self-reflection. This will hopefully enable one to grow in strength, and stand one's ground in the face of pressure to conform. Below are helpful tips on how students can begin to think more independently.

1. **Know oneself.** “The only way to differentiate oneself from the group is to develop one's identity” (Hankel, 2015). Online, young people are afforded with platforms where they can express their identities. A lot can be told about someone just by checking one's social media feed. The stories, articles, pictures, music, videos, and other online content that young people share reflect so much about who they are. In a sense, the Internet watches over and reveals aspects of people's identities. By realizing this, students can be made more aware about the kind of personal image that they project on the Internet. They should strive to make an honest assessment of whether what they see online about themselves are aligned with their self-perception, and most importantly their values and beliefs. Only by getting a stronger sense of identity built on clear and committed values can the youth be empowered to resist the pressure to conform.
2. **Form an opinion.** Making a conscious effort to form a personal opinion on even the most trivial of things is a good practice to avoid herd mentality. Ask students to start by seriously considering whether what they like, share, and post online truly reflect what they think and feel. It is also important that they take advantage of the accessibility of information available on the Internet by seeking to learn about every side to a story or issue before forming an opinion. Lastly, young people should be reminded that there is nothing wrong with differing opinions. Coming to terms with the fact that people are intellectually and culturally diverse will hopefully give young people the courage to express themselves freely.
3. **Have the courage to act.** It can be scary to do or say something unpopular in the context of a social group. This is especially true on the Internet, which

can reveal what other people think with just a quick search. Young people should do their best to remain firm with their opinions, values, and beliefs when presented with something that contradicts their personal truths. Remind students to take every instance of disagreement they find themselves in as an opportunity to respectfully and tactfully respond in line with their values.

Tips for Young People on How to Deal with Insistent Peers Online

Discuss with students the following suggestions on how to act toward online influencers.

1. **Humor the herd.** Uncomfortable interactions with peers online can be threatening to many young people. When they are faced with decisions to make immediately, advise students to cough out a joke related to the conversation. Instant messaging applications offer so much opportunities to do just that. Entertaining video clips, pictures, and GIFs (graphics interchange format) can turn even the most discomforting conversation into something light and cheery.
2. **Divert or put off the discussion.** If students are completely clueless about how to react to something, advise them to introduce an alternative topic. Talking about something else will allow them to avoid any possible confrontation that may lead to a misunderstanding. Doing this in online chats is easier since everyone gets equal chance to speak. In case their peers are particularly unlistening, disengaging from social media and messaging apps offers an easy way out. Of course, remind students to do this politely by excusing themselves.
3. **React with respect.** Being able to express one's thoughts online in an increasingly unfriendly situation is incredibly brave, but one should always keep in mind to always do this with respect. In messaging and social media apps where other people will have to rely only on the text of the message, intended meanings are more likely to be misinterpreted as inhospitable or rude. The additional layer of meaning from nonverbal cues is absent in most conversations that happen online. Thus, students should be reminded to be very careful with their words. They can even add a smiley face or a GIF to convey warmth and

openness. When one reacts or responds respectfully, she or he will be able to invite the same respect.

Learning Plan

Pre-Activities

Print enough copies of the social media message box (see Annex A) for the activity. Distribute the printouts to the class before the lesson begins. Alternatively, draw the social media message box on the board and ask the class to copy it into their notebooks.

Activity: *Be Heard, Not Herd*

Ask individual students to think of an instance in the past when they felt pressured to agree with or conform to the group in order to avoid being singled out or to gain their friends' approval. Give them about a minute or two to think, and then tell them to write a brief account of their experiences using the social media message box templates handed out to them or the ones they copied into their notebooks.

Once all students have finished writing down their experiences, ask them to break out into triads (groups of three). Students will then share what they wrote with other members of their group and talk about how they feel about their experiences. Remind students that your classroom is a safe space to talk about their feelings and encourage them to show empathy and respect to their classmates in their discussions. Also, tell them that the values of respect and empathy are some of the hallmarks of responsible behavior online and in the real world. Finally, instruct students to go back to the plenary after ten minutes of group sharing.

Call on select students to share the highlights of their group discussion with the rest of the class. Before proceeding to the next part of the lesson, commend students for having the courage to talk about their experiences and for maintaining a respectful class discussion.

Analysis

Begin a class discussion by encouraging students to be honest in sharing their thoughts, feelings, and behavior as they analyze their experiences in dealing

with herd mentality online.

Ask the following questions to process the activity and the key ideas the lesson intends to discuss.

1. In the experience you shared, how did the presence of a group influence your thoughts, actions, or decisions?
2. Would you have thought, acted, or decided differently if you were alone?
3. Looking back, what would you have done differently?
4. Do you observe the same behavior in yourself when interacting with others online in a similarly demanding context? Share your experiences.
5. What do you think is the entire activity all about? (Lead them to the term *herd mentality*)
6. How do you project yourself on the Internet? Do you think that this accurately reflects how you perceive yourself?
7. How do online contents influence your behavior? Do you find yourself copying or following ideas that are trending on the Internet?
8. How do you respond to invitations from friends to take part in online trends? Do you get to decide freely about joining?
9. Compared to face-to-face interactions, how easy do you find it to express a different opinion online amidst pressure from your peers to go along?
10. How has the Internet changed your behavior in dealing with herd mentality?
11. In an ever-growing digital world, how do you deal with herd mentality and preserve your sense of self?

Feel free to add/omit/revise the questions above. Remember to relate their answers to their roles and responsibilities as digital citizens, and the key points being elicited in this lesson (see the Abstraction section for guidance).

Finally, before moving on to the next part of the lesson, show to the class a YouTube video called *How Mob Mentality Gets Worse Online* by Seeker at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bV5ngreR7Hk>. Relate the ideas presented in the video to the insights drawn from the students in the earlier discussion.

Abstraction

Using the accompanying presentation slides, explain the concept of herd mentality and group conformity to the class. Then, reinforce the following key learning points in relation to the activity:

1. Your image online forms a part of your self-identity. A lot can be discovered about what things and which people influence your life just by looking at your profile on social media, posts, blogs, photos, and activities online. Take time to reflect on whether how you appear online accurately reflects your idea of yourself. An eroded sense of self can make you more vulnerable to groupthink. Remember that the first step to resisting the pull of conformity is to develop a strong sense of identity.
2. Group conformity is not always bad. There are groups which are formed to perform or work toward a specific goal. An example of this would be a basketball team composed of individuals with different skills. They follow a set of rules or group norms which are explicitly stated so that everyone knows what is acceptable or not, and which everyone should follow to ensure a winning team. The same is true when we turn to people who are more knowledgeable or far more experienced for advice, we obey when we learn a better way to act or think. In the examples, we see that group conformity can be advantageous. However, when we mindlessly and constantly conform to what other people think or say, we run the risk of weakening our critical thinking skills and compromise our self-growth. Disagreements and constructive discussions serve the purpose of sharpening our critical thinking skills. In extreme cases, we can even put ourselves in physical danger when we are quick to jump on the bandwagon. Recall stories of young people who were seriously hurt in attempting to do popular online challenges. Just a few years ago, teenagers in the U.S. put themselves at risk of being poisoned by deliberately ingesting laundry detergent pods that looked like candies. A report said that these teenagers did this to gain more views and following on social media (Forbes, 2018). It is evident then that much guidance is necessary to ensure that young people behave safely and responsibly in the

digital world.

3. Ideas online are as diverse as the people who are on it. You should learn how to be comfortable with differing opinions. By realizing that everyone thinks differently, hopefully, you will feel empowered to express yourself as genuinely as you can. Turn every uncomfortable encounter online into a learning experience. Practice how to express yourself without forgetting to be respectful. This way, you get to be your real self and maintain healthy relationships as responsible digital citizens.
4. Take advantage of the wealth of information available on the Internet. Do your research and consider every side of a story. This way you gain more confidence to avoid following whatever's popular, exactly because you are better informed.

Before moving on to the next part of the lesson, quickly go through and explain the Eight (8) Digital Life Skills by Park (2016). Give emphasis to the skills that are more related to the key learning points of the lesson (e.g., critical thinking, digital citizen identity, etc.).

Application

The following activity may be given to your students as homework if time is limited. Otherwise, proceed to this part of the lesson right after discussing the key learning points outlined in the previous section.

Have students review their online behavior—chat activity, group messages, threads, social media accounts—and activities for the past month. Ask them to reflect on the quality of their thoughts and interactions as expressed online. Lastly, require them to prepare reflection paper with no less than ten sentences answering the question: how can you avoid herd mentality online?

Assessment

To cap the lesson, ask learners to pair up for a 2+2+2 exit session. Ask them to talk about the following with their partners:

- two (2) things they learned from the lesson;
- two (2) discoveries they found out about themselves; and

- two (2) things they promise to do to avoid herd mentality (e.g., practicing independent and logical thinking, practicing skepticism, taking responsibility for their actions).

Ask some pairs to share their answers to the entire group.

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SEAMEO INNOTECH would like to acknowledge the technical inputs of Cynthia Grace L. Diaz and James Patrick P. Trinidad in the development of this learning packet.

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Annex A


Social Media Message Box


 Create Post





 Tag friends:


Feeling:


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 Create Post





 Tag friends:


Feeling:

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