

Know! Tip Special Edition: Introducing 27 Minutes

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About 27 Minutes

27 Minutes is an educational campaign created by Bridgett Bajorek, Samantha Happel, and Audrey Williams, three students at Olentangy High School in Central Ohio. The campaign focuses on educating parents and guardians about the dangers and issues of social media. In the coming six weeks, Special Edition Know! Tips will be released on topics related to sextortion, depression, anxiety and self-esteem, personal safety, addiction to social media, and Ohio's Social Media Parental Notification Act. These tips will be written by teens, for caring adults everywhere.

On October 17, 2021, Braden Markus, a 15-year-old, was targeted on social media by a predator. After images were sent to who he believed to be a teenage girl, it quickly turned into a ransom. The predator threatened to post the pictures unless Braden paid them \$1800. The messages continued back and forth for 27 minutes and resulted in Braden feeling so helpless that he took his own life.

In 27 minutes, everything can change. As a classmate of Braden Markus's, I have seen what social media can be responsible for. The district and school were emotionally shocked when the news came out that Braden had passed. The days following his death were silent school, and Braden's friends did not go to classes. Braden's impact on people and the school continues to live on two years later. When the news was released that it was an outcome of sextortion, I realized that there needs to be more awareness surrounding social media and that it could lead to a life-or-death situation.

I got social media at the age of 12. In those years, I have been in contact with strangers and thought nothing of it, seen how people hide behind a screen and feel as though their actions are not related to them, gone to an anonymous chat room, and talked to strangers twice my age, and been contacted by old male predators through a direct message without warning.

There are no limits on social media and being exposed to it at a young age has affected me. I've matured faster, feel like I'm more addicted to my phone than ever, and I've learned how to navigate being contacted by strangers. No 12-year-old should be used to talking to strangers online. People on social media are oblivious to what they are involved with. Communicating with strangers is completely normalized, and people partake in it without being aware of the impact it could have. One person, one message, one minute is all it takes.

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Social media started as chat rooms and then progressed to Facebook. Since then, talking to strangers has played a large role in the experience created. People are able to create accounts under a completely different age, name, and location. Since the beginning of social media, people can lie about different aspects of themselves. Which raises the problem: You can be anyone you want to be.

Ohio is implementing the Parental Notification Act on January 15, 2024. This Act:

- Requires parents/guardians to give children under the age of 16 consent when getting social media.
- Attempts to limit the effects of social media

There are still ways for children to get around the Parental Notification Act. As said before, it is easy for people to lie on social media. While they hide behind a screen, any identity is possible.

Our campaign, 27 minutes, aims to educate parents on the dangers of social media, the Bill that is going into place, and increase parental involvement within children and teenagers accounts. Parents need to increase their involvement and be educated to protect and potentially save their children. No child should have to experience the 27 minutes Braden did.

Written by Bridgett Bajorek, current Senior at Olentangy High School, working with a group project focusing on the issues associated with social media and teens, and educating parents on Ohio House Bill 33

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