

Digital Citizenship

Staying Safe Online and on Social Media

In today's world, digital citizenship is no longer an optional skill. Students spend significant portions of their lives online, whether they are learning, communicating with friends, creating content, or exploring new interests.

Digital citizenship involves understanding how to use technology appropriately, ethically, and safely. It empowers students to navigate online spaces with confidence while protecting their privacy, reputation, and well-being.

What is Digital Citizenship?

Digital citizenship refers to the responsible use of technology and digital platforms.

It includes:

- Online safety and security
- Digital communication and etiquette
- Privacy protection
- Media literacy and critical thinking
- Respectful online behavior
- Understanding digital footprints
- Ethical use of information and intellectual property

Strong digital citizens know how to make smart decisions online while contributing positively to digital communities.

Why Digital Citizenship Matters

Students today are growing up in a world where online and offline experiences are deeply connected. A social media post, comment, or shared image can have lasting consequences. At the same time, digital tools offer incredible opportunities for collaboration, creativity, and learning.

Without guidance, students may face challenges such as:

- Cyberbullying
- Online scams and phishing attempts
- Misinformation and fake news
- Identity theft
- Privacy breaches
- Harmful online interactions

Teaching digital citizenship helps students recognize risks and develop the skills needed to engage safely and responsibly online.



Key Online Safety Practices for Students

1. Protect Personal Information

Students should understand that not everything belongs online. Personal information such as home addresses, phone numbers, passwords, school schedules, and financial information should never be shared publicly.

2. Understand their Digital Footprint

Every online action contributes to a person's digital footprint. Posts, comments, photos, and likes may remain accessible long after they are shared.

Students often underestimate how digital footprints can affect:

- College admissions
- Scholarship opportunities
- Employment prospects
- Personal relationships

3. Manage Privacy Settings

Many students create social media accounts without reviewing privacy settings.

Educators can encourage students to:

- Regularly review privacy controls
- Limit public access to profiles
- Restrict location sharing
- Carefully manage friend and follower requests

Understanding privacy settings helps students maintain greater control over their online presence.

Classroom Activity

Have students analyze example social media profiles and identify information that should remain private. This activity helps students recognize privacy risks before they encounter them in real-world situations.

Classroom Activity

Have students consider different kinds of social media posts and answer this question:

"Would I be comfortable if this post were viewed by a future employer, teacher, or family member?"

Explain to students: If the answer is no, it may be best not to post it.

Classroom Activity

Provide students with information that could be found on social media. Have students identify what information should be public, private, or shared only with trusted connections.



Key Online Safety Practices for Students

4. Recognize Online Manipulation

Students should learn that not all online interactions are genuine. Fake accounts, scammers, and bad actors often target young users.

Teach students to:

- Verify identities before engaging
- Avoid sharing personal information with strangers
- Report suspicious behavior
- Seek help from trusted adults when needed

5. Understand their Digital Footprint

Online communication often lacks facial expressions, tone, and body language. As a result, misunderstandings and conflicts can happen quickly.

Teach students to:

- Pause before responding emotionally
- Communicate respectfully
- Disagree without attacking others
- Consider different perspectives
- Practice empathy online

The same behavioral expectations that apply in classrooms should extend to digital spaces.

6. Combat Misinformation

One of the most important digital citizenship skills is evaluating information critically. Students are exposed to vast amounts of content through social media, videos, blogs, and online communities. Not all information is accurate.

Teach students to:

- Check multiple sources
- Verify authors and organizations
- Examine publication dates
- Distinguish facts from opinions
- Identify biased or misleading content

Classroom Activity

Have students analyze examples of online messages, advertisements, social media posts, and emails that may contain manipulation tactics. Working individually or in teams, students identify warning signs and determine whether the content appears trustworthy.

Classroom Activity

Ask students:

"How would you feel if someone posted that comment about you?"

This simple question can help students develop empathy and better understand the impact of their online actions.

Classroom Activity

Present students with several articles and social media posts. Ask them to evaluate credibility using a checklist that includes:

- Source reliability
- Evidence provided
- Author expertise
- Potential bias



Preparing students to navigate the digital world responsibly is one of the most impactful investments educators can make. Digital citizenship goes beyond avoiding risks. It equips students with the skills to think critically, communicate respectfully, protect themselves online, and positively contribute to digital communities.

By embedding digital citizenship into everyday learning experiences, educators can help students become informed, ethical, and resilient digital citizens who are ready to thrive in an increasingly connected world.

Additional Resources

Click on the following resources for lesson plans, articles, and more information about digital citizenship.

<https://www.commonsense.org/education>

<https://www.iste.org>

<https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com>

<https://www.poynter.org/mediawise>

