CYPHER Learning®

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP TEACHING GUIDE

The no-nonsense introduction to digital citizenship in schools

Content outline

CYPHER Learning®

Digital citizenship in the current digital landscape

The digital landscape provides an expanding volume of differing, and at times conflicting inputs. Today, more than ever, young people **need guidance** on how to navigate the online world: to reflect on the discrepancies between their **online identities** and **real selves**, to identify their own and others' biases, and ultimately find a way to think for themselves.

Schools that do not prioritize lessons that help students to navigate the digital landscape risk falling short of producing young adults that are able to critically assess their **online experiences** and make **responsible decisions**.

That's because it's antiquated to speak of technology as a distinct category of life experiences. **Digital citizenship** isn't distinct from everyday citizenship. Young people, in particular, don't distinguish between the two, so schools should pay more attention to building up **civic reasoning** online.

DIGITAL
CITIZENSHIP

CYPHER
Learning

The consequences of not teaching digital citizenship in schools

Digital citizenship is no longer just about making technology more accessible to young people. It's a **proactive approach** to dealing with problems that students currently face and will face in the future.

There's a whole **range of issues** that can be avoided or solved through prioritizing educating students: online safety, **cyberbullying**, the proliferation of **fake news**, a lack of **digital wellness**, and **participating safely** in online communities, among others. It will also be a **critical skill** to have after graduating from K-12 or Higher Ed.

Examples of good digital citizenship behaviors include:

- Use technology legally
- Use content legally
- Use technology in a positive way
- Don't troll or abuse others online
- Don't post pictures of others without permission
- Think critically about online information

CYPHER
Learning®

DOs and DON'Ts of teaching digital citizenship

Digital citizenship is an important part of any **school curriculum**, even in schools that have a moderate to a small amount of digital teaching. It's possible to naturally and seamlessly blend these lessons into the existing curriculum. Let's have a look at the **DOs and DON'Ts** of teaching digital citizenship.

Here are the things educators should do:

DO… Follow your own guidelines

Before you can "lecture" on good digital citizenship be sure your social and other profiles follow your own guidelines. Ensure also that your **professional profiles** are open and transparently available. Be clear in your mind of what your **communication boundaries** are. From day one make it clear to both students, and most importantly to parents, when and how you prefer to be contacted.

DO… Get offline

Much online misbehavior is driven by a **lack of empathy**. The "other person" online is often seen as little more than a digital object. Any lesson in digital citizenship should address the function and value of **empathy, diversity, and community** the same way any anti-bullying campaign should address how a student's behavior online is as impactful as their behavior in the real world.

DO… Acknowledge that students have online "lives"

It is important to recognize that your students **conduct so much of their lives online**, from researching, reading, socializing, and shopping. To them, there will be almost **no distinction** between **life and online life**. Accept that the online world is blended with the real-world lives of most students, and begin your discussions from there.

Here's what educators shouldn't do when it comes to teaching digital citizenship:

DON'T Have an actual digital citizenship class

This may sound counterintuitive but it may make sense, in your particular environment, to add a digital citizenship **module or learning outcome** per lesson. Providing a **guideline on safe and acceptable online behavior** whenever you ask students to go online, will reinforce the approach in a more organic way.

DON'T Simply hand out guidelines

A better method of developing guidelines is in a flat-structure rather than handed down "from above". Allow students – this works particularly well at the beginning of the school year – to discuss and **develop their own guidelines** for a broad-based buy-in from students.

DON'T Distinguish between digital and real-world citizenship

Encouraging **good citizenship** should be the ultimate goal of any digital citizenship process. A great way to do this is to direct your students (perhaps even design a semester-long project for it) to **online resources** where they can actively participate in programs and activities that **build communities** for the greater good.

The elements of Digital Citizenship students need to know

While some schools have already adopted a digital citizenship curriculum, any teacher can include the following elements in their lessons, which can be adapted to the students' age and interests.

Digital etiquette

Digital etiquette encompasses a set of behaviors that allow students to **respond positively** rather than negatively to online content. As they **assume responsibility** for everything they do online, this positive attitude transfers into the real world and vice versa.

Digital security

Students have to **understand the implications** of using a device at school or at home and be aware of problems such as cyber-attacks. Teachers should explain how to **protect their devices**. Moreover, all students should be aware of the dangers of giving out personal information or any other actions that could potentially endanger their safety.
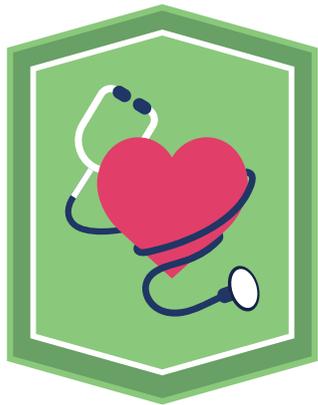
Digital communication

Miscommunication happens frequently online so there is a need to know what and how to communicate in a virtual setting. Since anyone can use the internet to express themselves and have a voice, students can benefit from learning how to **react appropriately** and empathically.

Digital literacy

Digital literacy is the ability to find, evaluate, and **produce information on digital platforms**. A comprehensive digital literacy education means incorporating a variety of platforms and devices, including smartphones. Without the ability to identify their biases and **distinguish between real and fake content**, their chances of fully participating in the digital space are diminished.

Health and online wellness

Digital wellbeing is about learning how to spend quality and not quantity time when using technology. The end goal is a **healthier relationship with technology** that will serve them for a lifetime, not just during classroom hours. **Setting boundaries** for device use, learning how to manage time spent online, and involving the students' families are a few things teachers can do for a good start in this direction.

Digital rights and responsibilities

Students should be aware of their responsibilities such as following **copyright laws**, for example, and how to credit someone for their work. However, they should also **know their rights**, how to identify a potentially dangerous situation, and how to report any misconduct in the virtual environment.

Conclusion

Educators have an important task ahead: to equip students with the **skills and knowledge** they need to learn, develop, thrive, and stay safe in this digital age. That's why taking the rights steps from the beginning is a better, **proactive approach** towards **developing digital citizenship**.

For a good start, schools can choose the right tools to use anytime and anywhere, such as a **learning management system (LMS)**.

CYPHER Learning is an LMS that makes it easy to manage all learning activities, whether it's building online classes, assessing students, enhancing collaboration, or tracking student progress.

With an intuitive design and powerful features, CYPHER Learning has all the features schools and universities need for a great learning and teaching experience.

www.cypherlearning.com