

Digital Citizenship

What is Digital Citizenship?

Digital citizenship is the “norms of appropriate, responsible behavior with regard to technology use” (see: <http://www.digitalcitizenship.net>). Being a good digital citizen means having a firm grasp of digital ethics and etiquette — the communication, social, and decision-making skills to act responsibly and safely online.

Why is Digital Citizenship important to cyberbullying prevention?

Parents may make every effort to monitor their children’s online interactions, but the digital world is complex and constantly changing. There will always be new social media sites on which teens become active well before parents and schools are aware of them. Monitoring your child’s online communication, and intervening in negative situations, are very important for keeping kids safe, but are not enough. Children also need to learn how to protect themselves.

That is why teaching digital citizenship is so important. With the skills to use the internet appropriately and responsibly, youth will know how to act in positive ways on any social media platform they are using. Digital literacy, ethics, and etiquette will guide children in communicating responsibly online. As more and more youth learn how to be responsible digital citizens, the social norms of online communications will become more positive, and cyberbullying will be less common.

Why is Digital Citizenship important to cyberbullying intervention?

Being good digital citizens doesn’t just mean being careful about what youth post themselves, but also being active bystanders when it comes to cyberbullying. In the digital world, hundreds or even thousands of youth can become involuntary witnesses, or “bystanders” to cyberbullying within seconds of an incident. These youth have a responsibility to demonstrate that bullying behavior is wrong and won’t be tolerated within online communities.

How can you teach children to be good digital citizens?

With online communication changing constantly and new sites popping up all the time, the best way to protect children is by teaching them how to use the internet appropriately and responsibly. This will protect them regardless of what site they are on, now and in the future. Here are some important ideas to convey when teaching children about digital citizenship:

- **If you wouldn't say it in person, don't say it online.** Sending a hurtful comment can be easier when you're not face-to-face. Even comments that aren't meant to be hurtful can be taken that way without the normal social cues that people give each other during in-person conversations. Encourage children to communicate kindly and respectfully online, every time.
- **What a child does online can last a lifetime.** Anything posted on-line is difficult to "erase" completely. Caution children to think carefully before sending or posting anything online, because what they say can be shared quickly and easily, and can become part of their lasting online reputations.
- **Build empathy and resilience in children.** Good digital citizens stand up for themselves and others online, rather than letting negative behaviors go unchallenged. Ask children how they would feel if hurtful comments were posted about them and whether they would want others to step in and support them. Encourage them to stand up for others who are being bullied and show them that they care.
- **You don't have to be cyber-savvy to keep children safe.** Technology trends seem to change almost weekly in the teen world. Teach children the skills to interact appropriately and responsibly in the digital world rather than focusing all of your energy on trying to keep up with changing technology.
- **Teach by example.** You should model the online behaviors that you would like to see in children. Be a good digital citizen so children can follow in your footsteps.