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Introduction

A Footprint Worth Following

In a time where students spend a large portion of their waking hours online, they must know how to behave, connect, communicate, and represent themselves in a way that builds their online reputation. As youth technology use increases, our children are exposed to an unfathomable amount of content that is not developmentally appropriate. Although technology has its advantages, such as learning, creating, and connecting, it also has drawbacks, such as exposure to bullying, posting inappropriate content, oversharing information, and privacy issues.

From an early age, youth begin using devices. It's not uncommon to see a small child being pushed in a stroller holding a smartphone, playing a game, or watching a show. Rather than learning from their immediate physical environment, they often learn from a pixelated screen inches away from their face. Early on, children begin a relationship with technology but often don't get the education to use the device, and there is frequently a lack of oversight.

Think about it: most of us wouldn't hand over our car keys to a kid who's never driven and tell them to take a spin on the interstate. Yet we give the "keys" to a device that can expose them to identity theft, pornography, predators, and bullying. We must teach our kids to hit the brakes before responding, to drive cautiously, and to follow the safety signs and rules when navigating the information superhighway.

Sadly, the internet does not have a delete key, and much of what has been deleted is still accessible. Poor online decisions made in childhood can haunt someone well into adulthood. These irreversible choices are what make our role as educators increasingly important. We need to teach our students about appropriate technology use because many don't get these lessons from home. Here is some advice for students about making good decisions while online, "If you wouldn't want your grandmother seeing what you're doing or posting, then don't do or post it. Remember, just because you're behind the screen doesn't mean your actions aren't being seen."

Beyond the scope of online behaviors, other, more severe physical and mental health issues are associated with too much screen time. For example, high levels of screen use have contributed to sedentary behaviors,

including an increased risk of obesity. There is also a link between excessive screen use and youth depression, suicidal ideation, and death by suicide. Youth with poor self-esteem who use the internet as a primary source of social connection are at an even higher risk of these issues. In addition, for many children, being online can become addictive, and they can become so hyper-focused that they neglect essential activities like schoolwork.

In this book, we do not want to vilify the use of technology—quite the opposite. As counselor educators in higher education, Angie and I have taught in synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid environments, so we know firsthand how instrumental and practical technology can be for students and teachers, both within and outside the classroom—take, for example, interactive smartboards, Wi-Fi-connected tablet computers, and much more. You may relate to our experiences because you, too, may have relied on technology to reach your students during the mass shutdowns of the pandemic. Online accessibility was the only way many schools and businesses sustained, survived, and sometimes thrived.

The internet can be an excellent source of innovation and collaboration. Still, just like most things, we must learn how to use it appropriately, responsibly, and in moderation. Since technology is ever-evolving, we must view our educational efforts as a journey rather than a destination. Online identity and digital citizenship should be intertwined into every course and curriculum because it's the wave of the future, and we need to teach our students how to be responsible users and consumers.

In this book, we explore the advantages and disadvantages of technology, including the emotional risks for some youth. We address a wide range of timely topics by citing current facts and statistics, weaving in relatable stories, presenting practical hands-on activities, curating helpful resources and definitions (see the Glossary for a complete listing of terms), and more. We want to celebrate and showcase technology's benefits while addressing its drawbacks. We hope to provide you with the tools you need to teach your students how to make intelligent decisions, have meaningful interactions, and be aware and knowledgeable about what they do online. More importantly, we want to help you assist your students in understanding what it means to be a digital citizen in the twenty-first century—a person who is kind, productive, responsible, and who leaves a footprint worthy of following!

Thank you for investing in our young people,
Raychelle & Angie



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Online Identity and Digital Citizenship

Technology is nothing. What’s important is that you have faith in people, that they’re good and smart—and if you give them tools, they’ll do wonderful things with them.

– Steve Jobs

No surprise here; screen use among young people is increasing. Our young people love their devices, especially smartphones, computers, and gaming consoles. According to a survey by Common Sense Education, the overall screen time among tweens (ages 8-12) and teens (ages 13-18) increased by 17% between 2019 and 2021. With tweens, screen use jumped from 4 hours and 44 minutes to 5 hours and 33 minutes, and with teens, it jumped from 7 hours and 22 minutes to 8 hours and 39 minutes.¹ Pew Research Center reports that almost all U.S. teens (95%) have access to a smartphone, and 45% state being “almost constantly” online.² The data show that young people spend a lot of time on social media, scouring the internet, uploading pictures, creating digital profiles, shopping, streaming movies, binging shows, chatting with friends, and playing games. The pandemic contributed to the hike in screen time, with many youth taking classes virtually, but now that life has returned to a new state of normal, we continue to see a spike in youth screen use—and there is no sign that it’s slowing down. With so many young people online, it’s becoming increasingly vital that we teach them about their online identity and how to become upstanding digital citizens. You know, it’s been said that *WWW* doesn’t just stand for the *World Wide Web*, but rather the *Whole World’s Watching*. If only our students knew the truth behind that phrase. Well, let’s teach them!

What is Online Identity?

What our students do on the internet forms their online identity, the information created from virtual communities and websites visited. Everything they do online leaves behind a trail of information known as an electronic footprint, also called a digital footprint or digital shadow. The following is an explanation of how this information is collected.

Personally identifiable data (PII) is saved when students visit a site. Examples of PII include a residential address, date of birth, email address, phone number, social security number, driver's license number, and a picture, video, or audio file containing a person's image or voice. Have you ever had a company reach out, letting you know that they had a data breach? That notification was referring to PII data.

Aside from PII, online behavior can also be tracked through cookies. We're not talking chocolate chip here, but rather small pieces of data stored within a browser that collects user information and browsing history. Cookies capture all kinds of information, such as browsing history, websites visited, device information, and online purchases. Have you ever seen a pop-up image similar to the one below? If so, the site operator was letting you know they were collecting your data. How often have you replied "yes" to the statement without learning more about what was being saved? Yep, we've done that, too!

This site uses cookies to offer you a better browsing experience. Find out more on [how we use cookies and how you can change your settings](#).

I accept cookies

I refuse cookies

Forming Your Online Identity

As mentioned, everything we do (and even what others post about us) online creates our digital or online identity. Some of us spend more time in specific areas than others (*hello, online shoppers*). The following diagram illustrates just a few things we do online that create this identity.

Bottom line: Our online identity sets the stage for our digital citizenship.



What is Digital Citizenship?

You may find various definitions on the internet for digital citizenship. For example, Ann Collier of NetFamilyNews defines **digital citizenship** as “Critical thinking and ethical choices about the content and impact on oneself, others, and one’s community of what one sees, says, and produces with digital media, devices, and technologies.”³ We’ll simplify this definition as online behaviors and decisions that impact self, others, and the community. Our online identity impacts our **online reputation**, which comprises the things we comment on, promote, watch, buy, like, and share, and also what others have shared about us.

Here are some questions to think about as we begin our journey together:

- How much do your students already know about digital citizenship?

- Why is developing a healthy “online identity” essential for students?
- To what degree do you think your students have already built one?

A School Counselor’s Story

I was working in my school office when a student walked in and asked if I could talk. She said she had heard a teacher telling her class about being smart online, not clicking on pop-ups, and not posting anything on social media she wouldn’t want others to see. She didn’t think any of that applied to her personally because she considered herself responsible. But then, one day, she filled out a form on a website advertising a free pair of headphones, including personal details like her name, phone number, age, and school name. The next thing she knew, she was receiving scary texts telling her the sender knew who she was and that she needed to give them even more information, or they would come to her house and make her parents pay them money. Naturally, she was shocked and frightened. She told her mom, who helped her block the unwanted messages and change her online passwords. She just wanted to talk because she felt nervous at school that day. One thing she said will always stick with me: “I thought what the teacher said was for other kids. Not anymore. I know it can happen to anyone.”



Creating a Digital Footprint

Students will learn about their online identity and the digital footprint they leave behind. They will also understand the importance of being an upstanding digital citizen by being aware of what they say and do online.

Time Required:

30-45 minutes

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the importance of having a good online identity.
- Learn how one's digital footprint can impact their online reputation.
- Explore what it means to act responsibly online and be an upstanding digital citizen.

Supplies:

Footprint worksheet – Option 1 is for younger students, and Option 2 is for older students. (See the Downloadable Resources.)



Following Your Digital Footprint

Note: The language can be modified to accommodate your students' grades and developmental levels.

Introduce the topic by saying: *Today, we will discuss what it means to be a good digital citizen and examine your online behaviors by following your digital footprint (sometimes called a digital shadow).*

Engage students in a conversation by asking the following questions.

Ask: What is digital citizenship?

Response example: Digital citizenship is using the internet responsibly, ethically, and safely.

Ask: What is an online identity?

Response example: An online identity is what you do on the internet. For example, postings on sites, information downloaded, sites visited, etc.

Ask: What is a digital footprint or digital shadow?

Response example: A digital footprint or shadow is the trail of information you leave behind when you visit a site.

Discuss with the class the importance of having a good online reputation and leaving behind a footprint worth following. Explain that how they behave online is important. Good choices create a good reputation (a big word for what others think about you), and poor ones can adversely affect their reputation. Remind students that just because they are on the other side of a screen doesn't mean their actions can't be seen.

For younger students, discuss the importance of not sharing any information about themselves online or clicking pop-ups to make them go away if they come up on a screen during a game or show. Also, discuss the importance of being kind online, even during gaming. You have a good reputation when others think of you as being kind.

Note: Ask younger children to share sites they like to visit online. Find out what they do on their devices, and write these sites down so others can see them.

For older students, discuss how colleges, scholarship committees, recruiters, and future employers often conduct internet searches on candidates and what they find may affect their decisions. Explain that when they visit a site, they may not be aware of the data trail they're leaving behind. For example, completing an online form, making a purchase, posting a comment, creating a public playlist, or uploading a photo all lead to data collection. When they leave behind a trail, they also leave behind cookies. Cookies are small traces of data that collect information about them. Explain that they should regularly clear the cookie history in their device settings. Share with them that some browsers keep a record of their passwords and visited pages, even after they close and log out of the site. So, they should clear their cookies whenever they use a public computer. Rule of thumb: Use privacy settings, and always read the fine print.

Note: You can put students in groups and have them visit a few sites. When the cookies message pops up, have them click the link to read about what information the site is collecting and share it with others in the class.

Engage the class in an activity discussing the trail they leave behind when they are online. This activity can be facilitated individually or in small groups.

For younger students, provide the Following Your Digital Footprint (Option 1) worksheet. Inside the footprint, have them write down or draw the activities they engage in online. Here are some examples:

- Play games (have them share what games they like to play).
- Watch shows (have them share their favorite shows).
- Look at funny videos (have them share an example).

For older students, provide the Following Your Digital Footprint (Option 2) worksheet. Have them write a list of their online activities. This list may include things such as:

- Streaming shows
- Listening to music
- Posting comments

- Sharing videos of self and others
- Uploading pictures
- Sending text through social media
- Sending emails
- Researching information for school projects
- Browsing the internet
- Doing homework
- Reading articles
- Engaging in chat rooms
- Playing games
- Purchasing items

Next, provide the following prompts:

1. For each item, list some sites used to do these activities.
2. Ask them to circle any sites on which their information is public, such as social media sites, playlists, channels, or profiles.
3. Ask how many read the pop-ups or site conditions before going onto the site.
4. Ask them to put an asterisk next to any listed sites with the information they would not want a college admissions representative or prospective employer to view.
5. Discuss ways to improve their online appearance, so others won't see content they don't want to be shared. These ideas may include the following:
 - Set privacy settings.
 - Turn off location access when taking pictures or uploading content.
 - Clear cookies regularly from settings immediately after using a computer at a public site, like the library.

Conclusion: Have students share the importance of being a good digital citizen, having a reputable online identity, and leaving behind a digital footprint worth following.

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**QUESTIONS
to
CONSIDER** ???

1. What results of the Digital Footprint activity above surprised, concerned, or encouraged you?

2. How do you include appropriate technology use in your class activities?

3. Based on what you've read so far, what step(s) could you take to increase your students' awareness of their online reputation?

**KEY
POINTS**

- Digital citizenship is using the internet responsibly, ethically, and safely.
- We should teach our students to clear their cookie history, especially if they've been on a public computer, like at a library.
- To monitor our online presence, we should search for our information regularly. This will allow us to see what others may know about us, especially since employers and colleges are researching prospective candidates.
- An electronic footprint can consist of uploaded photos, information "liked" online, and chats shared with friends.
- Our IP address is a unique identifying number that identifies when we are online.