

Digital Citizenship Activities

Ten Ideas to Encourage Appropriate Technology Use Among Students

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1. VOICING YOUR OPINION. Ask your students what they think “digital citizenship” is, and how it should affect their attitudes and actions online. This gives them a chance to voice their opinion, and many will grow in their understanding of what is right and wrong as they consider their peers’ perspectives when controversial topics are verbalized and discussed. Go around the room until you think your class has communicated enough to demonstrate what they believe comprise its main principles. Use the conversation as a teachable moment to convey and reinforce the correct attitudes and actions, and take the time to work through those that are inaccurate by discussing why they are not the best thing to do.

2. GOOGLE YOURSELF. Ask your students to use Google (or other search sites) to see what they can find about themselves. Have each student present in class what they found, and if any of the content they discovered was unsettling or alarming. Remind them that future employers, college admissions offices, and scholarship committees are increasingly looking, and will find that content and judge them by it. They need to deeply comprehend that their digital reputation can make or break them. There are plenty of cautionary tales online of teens just like them who are now dealing with tremendous regret, stress, headache, and heartache – ask your students to find some. Discuss how those teens could have done things differently to avoid such problems. Finally, encourage students to clean up their social media accounts and any other sites that may undermine others’ perceptions of their character, integrity, and maturity.



3. BEING WISE WITH YOUR PHONE. We all know that some teens misuse their phones by taking sexually suggestive or explicit pictures or videos of themselves, and then send them to others. Despite the headlines, students often do not fully appreciate the consequences of that behavior. For example, they could be found guilty of creating and distributing child pornography according to the formal letter of the law. Their images could go viral, and their reputation ruined for months or even years. Sexting pics of minors also can end up circulating in child pornography rings. Get students to research the sexting laws in your state, and also find stories online of where sexts sent privately between two people have become very, very public. Is it ever an okay idea to take and send these pictures or videos?

4. STOP CYBERBULLYING. Cyberbullying remains a very relevant topic for teens. Most haven’t been targeted, but many have seen it happen to someone they know or care about. They have probably heard about the suicides linked to bullying and cyberbullying in the media, and so they can conceive of the “worst case” scenario. They need to understand that the school won’t tolerate it, there will be consequences, it may be illegal, that what is said in cyberspace cannot be trivialized or laughed off, and that it seriously messes up lives. Have your students write a two-page paper explaining what they are seeing happen among their peers online, how best the school should respond to those who bully others (online or off), and what the school can and should do to prevent the problem from getting out of hand. They should also include research findings from their online searches about the extent of cyberbullying among teens, and be encouraged to share any personal stories from their own experiences.

5. PROTECT YOUR PRIVACY AND BE CAUTIOUS OF ONLINE STRANGERS. Show YouTube videos depicting the dangers behind connecting with strangers online. Students should know that they cannot trust everyone they meet, friend, or follow on social media. There are weird, creepy, and perverted people out there who could be grooming them and setting them up for harm behind what seems to be a harmless persona or social media profile. Students need to be very cautious about what they share and who they trust. Those who have been kidnapped, sexually assaulted, or otherwise victimized probably never thought it would happen to them—but it did. Students need to understand that they should not take any chances when it comes to opening up themselves and their lives to those they really don’t know.

6. DON’T OD ON TECHNOLOGY. It is an awesome privilege to be able to use the Internet at any time and from nearly any place, but there is such a thing as overdosing on technology. Too much time with their devices can affect a student’s physical, psychological, and emotional well-being, and also compromise other areas of their lives. Help students to understand this, and determine if they need more balance. Get them to develop a creative way to know when “enough is enough.” Challenge them to log off for a specified period of time each day (say, from 3-5pm) for a week, and then discuss how it went.



7. GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE. It's so easy to use pictures, videos, and text that students find on the Web or social media for their classwork, homework, and other projects outside of school. Many times, though, students are unknowingly engaging in copyright infringement and plagiarism. In addition, students often find and download movies, music, software, books without appropriately paying for them. This is illegal, and considered intellectual property theft or digital piracy. Have youth write an anonymous list of things they have done that might be illegal, and then collect them and read them out loud. As you go through them orally, take the time to discuss with everyone why certain actions are popular and easily rationalizable, but wrong. Spell out the consequences for getting caught, and brainstorm appropriate alternatives.

8. SHOW YOUR CREATIVITY. Similar to science fair projects in which many students are required to participate, run a Digital Citizenship Fair. Have youth tap into their creative side to construct a submission. These could involve posters that display a painting, drawing, digital creation, cartoon or comic, essay, poem, rap, photo, or anything else to raise awareness of a digital citizenship issue. See if you can make it a huge event that the entire school knows about, and give prizes and accolades to the best of the best!

9. DISCUSS SCENARIOS. Engage your students in a healthy dialogue and debate about specific examples of misuses of technology. After splitting students up into groups of 3-5 each, give each group one of the following scenarios:

- a. Raj hides in a girls' bathroom stall at school, uses his phone to take pictures without their permission, and posts them on Instagram under an anonymous name.
- b. LeBron hacks his teacher's school laptop so that when she clicks on an icon to load her PowerPoint presentation, it loads up a porn site in her web browser instead. The teacher lost his job for displaying pornographic images to minors.
- c. Billy is at the movies when he sees his friend's girlfriend kissing another girl in the theater. Billy quickly takes out his phone, records a video of the two kissing, posts the video online on YouTube, and broadcasts a link to the video on Twitter.
- d. Kyle is obsessed with Fortnite. Immediately upon returning home from school, he hops online and plays for hours on end. His only group of friends are those online who play with him, and are known as his "gang." One day, Kyle went on a rant while annoying all of his friends while playing with them in Playground mode. His friends got really upset, and threatened to kick him out of the gang. In the coming weeks, Kyle was continuously tormented and belittled by those friends which, again, are all he has.
- e. Naveen is taking a test and needs help with two questions, and so he decides to text his best friend Matthew to have him search online for the correct answers.
- f. Mei Ling really wants the new Drake album that just came out, but cannot afford it. So, she gets on BitTorrent and downloads it for free.
- g. Angelina is jealous of her ex-boyfriend's new girlfriend, so she anonymously spreads a nasty rumor about her on Snapchat in hopes of him deciding to then break up with her.

Have each group analyze their situation and present their ideas for how to prevent and respond to the whole class.

10. PRODUCE PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS. Assign the students into groups so they can brainstorm and work with each other to create a public service announcement (PSA) video on digital citizenship. They can tackle any area; just make sure that students across your class choose a variety of subtopics. This video should be around 30-90 seconds in length. Build a contest into the assignment as well - that way the students will have an incentive to take this seriously while also having fun. When they are finished, watch them all as a group, commend and reward each participant in some way, and jointly discuss the "take home" points of each. Also consider sharing them across your school community with the help of the administration!

