

HOW TO BE A RESPONSIBLE DIGITAL CITIZEN IN 3 EASY STEPS

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Preface

Who is a digital citizen? Anyone who uses the Internet is a digital citizen and there are specific guidelines that are becoming more and more important to follow in order to be a responsible digital citizen.

People who identify themselves as digital citizens are those who use information and communication technologies (ICTs) regularly and extensively.

In a short amount of time, the Internet has become the principal way we communicate, entertain ourselves, socialize and do our work. With the availability and use of mobile devices, adults, teenagers and young adults will spend more time on the Internet than watching television.

It is important that everyone practices the guidelines in this article to be an effective and responsible digital citizen.

Step 1: Communicate Respectfully

Communication is a daily activity. We are always sharing thoughts, ideas and events ... everything. Being a responsible digital citizen means we need to communicate effectively and respectfully in an online world.

The flip side of this is to be disrespectful, which often leads to online bullying; cyber-bullying. People who engage in cyber-bullying post direct harassment messages, or intimidate others online, or publish misleading or malicious content. What you post online matters and it can greatly affect a person, especially younger people.

Someone who is a responsible digital citizen will know which digital communication tool is the most appropriate for the task on hand and will have the knowledge and skills to use it respectfully. Having good communication skills means you will know how to create your message to suit the particular audience. You will also know what information to include and what to discard.

What Is Okay

- Using social media to share photos and useful information is encouraged.
- Learn more about your friends and family by looking at a person's profile.
- Post meaningful comments about news websites and blog posts.

- Join online communities of people with like interests and contribute to the discussion.

What Not To Do

- Do not slander other people, especially teens and others who are easily moldable. Teenagers can feel trapped if a nightmare comes alive through Facebook, Twitter or other social media sites.
- Do not post embarrassing information or photos of others online.
- Do not encourage name-calling and make sure that people know you are just joking.
- Do not fuel disagreements through social media sites. Too many people have attacked others through disagreements and everyone else can see the content online. Airing your public laundry only distances people from you and creates a hostile environment.

Think about what you post before you post it. If you would not say something to a person's face, then don't post it on social media sites. The same goes with sending emails. It's best to deal with any issues directly with the person or over the phone. This sets an example for younger generations and you can make a difference by posting content that is uplifting and encouraging.

Step 2: Protect the Privacy of Others

How many times have you heard of major family news through a post on Facebook or Twitter? The first thing you may be thinking is, “Is this true?” and “Why didn’t anyone call me!” Yes, most of us have experienced this by now and it only leads to more questions, especially if someone asks you about what was posted and you don’t know the details. Respecting the privacy of others is very important.

Let’s backtrack a bit first. Being a responsible digital citizen means you critically question your own technology use. Be safe online when exploring, communicating and sharing information. Protect yourself and others when online.

How to Respect a Person’s Privacy Online

There are many ways of respecting someone’s privacy online. Here are a few:

- Ask if it’s okay to post a person’s photo, especially if it includes children. Parents have the right to know what is posted about their kids since they are legally responsible for keeping them safe.
- Don’t spill the beans of an engagement, pregnancy, divorce or other major life-changing event for a person or family member.

- Don't ask for details about a horrific event publically. Call the person or send a private message.
- Don't post a person's phone number, address or other personal information online.
- Don't post about an individual's stressful job situation. Their boss or other coworkers may see the post and it could create a hostile situation for your friend or family member.
- Read all information giving consent to a website or app before allowing them to post information on your behalf. They may be asking to post information on the profiles of your friends and family.
- Don't post personal information of others in articles published online, in forums or blogs. Information can become viral very, very quickly.

Use common sense and know that your audience is always much larger than your immediate friends and family online. If you maintain a blog, you may have followers around the world. It's great to assume that everyone reading your content wants the best for you, but this is not the case. People are targeted all the time and identity theft is becoming an increasingly challenging problem.

Step 3: Don't Steal Media or Content

Basically, a responsible digital citizen respects copyright.

What is copyright? A simple definition is that someone owns certain creative works like words, artistic works, music, computer programs, sound recordings and films. You should not reproduce or copy the owner's work without their permission.

In most countries, copyright protection is automatic. In other words, as soon as the owner publishes it or puts it into a material form, like being written, filmed or recorded, it is copyrighted.

Photos

More people have started posting their photos online. It's very easy to download a photo and repost it to your social media page, blog or website without paying for it or giving the proper credit. Many photographers are more than happy to allow you to repost their photos, but you have to ask permission first. Google search and other search engines make it easy for companies and individuals to find their images on other websites and have terms in place to charge large fines if used improperly. Before you assume, remember to pay for the image, ask permission and post where the image came from.

Music and Movies

File sharing websites are still common, but many have setup payment programs to ensure files are not shared illegally. Do not download programs or files that you have not paid for or are not

free for everyone. Some musicians will release free singles of their music and it's usually through iTunes. Services like Pandora and iTunes Radio allow you to stream music for free, but you do not own the music. The same is true of movies and television shows. Always pay for your media. Make sure you don't get caught for digital piracy.

Plagiarising Content

Plagiarising is when you imitate or paraphrase someone else's work, words, thoughts, ideas, expressions and then claim them as your original work.

It is important to learn how to find and select reliable and relevant information and not just copy and paste. Always endeavor to write your own content. You can quote and reference sources, but do not steal content and label it as your own. It is okay to correctly reference ideas and content.

Teachers and lecturers in academia have access to tools and services to identify plagiarism. It is crucial that students develop the skills to critically examine information they find, especially on the Internet, so they can select what is relevant to their research task and capture the main points in their notes.

They need to think carefully about how they will use this information they find and how to organize their thoughts and ideas, in their own words, to create the final work or project.

Don't ruin your chances of success by passing off another's works as your own.

Conclusion

Being a responsible digital citizen is not difficult and it mostly requires common sense once you understand the issues that come from being irresponsible.

Communicating respectfully is one of the major issues online. You can degrade someone else very easily and it discredits your name. Potential employers may see what you have posted and decide not to employ you.

Always aim to protect the privacy of others through content, images and videos you post online. Let others share their own news and announcements and check with parents before posting photos of their kids.

Steer clear from stealing any type of media online, which includes photos, music, television shows and movies. It's easy to trace it and you could end up in court with high fees to pay.

Practicing being a responsible digital citizen will emphasise the importance to those around you and teach younger generations what is and is not okay to do online. It becomes easy when you are mindful of what you are doing!