Menu   **Apply Now** ⧉

Digital Citizenship and Netiquette: A Teacher's Guide

The purpose of this resource is to provide teachers and parents with a guide for teaching digital citizenship and netiquette to students. Here, you'll find the definition of "digital citizenship" as well as its application in the classroom and beyond. You'll learn how to teach safety and privacy in an online learning environment, and about cyberbullying and how to prevent it. Furthermore, we'll cover digital property and copyright laws, with an emphasis on preventing plagiarism and encouraging fair use online.

The internet can be a dangerous place for students, where mistakes can have grave consequences. Alternatively, the internet can be a great place for students to learn, get a jumpstart on the future, and connect with each other.

With proper education on the issues covered in this guide, students can learn about internet safety and may be better prepared to reap its benefits, while steering clear of the potential pitfalls.

As a teacher or parent (or both), you know that an interactive dialogue with students is essential to education. Students learn when they are engaged and thinking critically about the material. To teach kids about digital citizenship, you must spark their interest and engage

them in a dialogue. Fortunately, kids are usually intrigued by the internet. Educating a child on digital citizenship is a matter of relating the interest they already have with your knowledge on this important subject.

What Does 'Digital Citizenship' Mean, and How Does It Apply to the Classroom?

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 media, devices, and technology."

As it applies specifically to the internet, digital citizenship is the set of best practices that describe how a person can navigate safely, ethically, and appropriately on the World Wide Web. This includes efficacy — a digital citizen who adheres to best practices is able to use the internet effectively, for whatever lawful purpose, without compromising their security and that of others.

A good digital citizen knows which types of websites, apps, and online interactions to stay away from, as well as what types of websites are reliable sources of information. They also know what a digital footprint is, and that visiting certain websites and downloading certain files compromises it.

When it comes to cyberbullying and privacy, a good digital citizen follows something akin to the golden rule of the internet: when you engage with others online, treat them the way you want to be treated. This brings us to netiquette.

What Is Netiquette?

Netiquette is a portmanteau of network and etiquette. According to Encyclopedia Britannica ⧉, netiquette is a set of "guidelines for courteous communication in the online environment." Netiquette guidelines include rules for both social interaction and technical activities on the internet.

Albion, the longest-running commercial site on the web, includes a resource on the core rules of netiquette ⧉, from Virginia Shea's book, *Netiquette*. The core netiquette rules are:

1. **Remember there's a human on the other side of your digital interaction**, whether that interaction takes place on social media, email, or forum.
2. **Apply your normal standards of behavior** to your behavior online.
3. **Be aware of context**, and tailor your communications accordingly. Different forums, websites, blogs, and social media platforms have varying community standards, which are often stated onsite.
4. Shea says to "**respect other people's time and bandwidth**." This means users shouldn't post content that doesn't belong on a particular website or forum, nor should they post spam or needlessly long content.

5. **Don't post something that will embarrass you** and make you look bad. Posting tone-deaf, inappropriate, profane, or unlawful content is one of the major social media mishaps you should avoid.

6. **Prioritize and share content from verifiable, expert sources**. Avoid sharing content that is questionable in its veracity (fake news).

7. **Avoid excessive trolling and "flaming"** – flaming is intense, heated, and argumentative discussion, while trolling is abusive and subversive comments.

8. **Respect human privacy**; don't use digital technology to spy on other people.

9. **If you're in a position of power, don't abuse it**. Moderators and administrators must not shut down certain users arbitrarily.

10. Be graceful and **forgive people their mistakes**.

Just as proper table manners are a part of dining with a group, netiquette is a part of digital citizenship. Unfortunately, many members of the online community don't have proper table manners. However, children are now digital natives from a very young age – teachers and parents are well-equipped to influence them positively.

The classroom is the training ground for digital citizenship and netiquette. Through primers, exercises, and discussion, students learn the best practices of digital citizenship in a structured environment. They learn how to use the internet to accomplish goals, and how to be critical of content. Teachers accomplish this through curriculum and hands-on exercises specifically tailored to match practice to curriculum.

Digital Citizenship Curriculum Overview

Any discussion of digital citizenship should include "Vicki Davis' "9 Key P's." ☒ Teachers and parents can use the 9 P's to shape and curate digital citizenship curriculum. Because the 9 P's cover a lot of important ground, there are many corresponding resources you can use to create your curriculum.

Here are the subjects that the 9 P's address:

1. **Password protection**: Students must understand how to create secure passwords, lvary them, and store them safely. For a good place to start, the Cyberbullying Research Center has a teen-specific resource ☒ you can easily adapt to younger age groups.

2. **Privacy**: When it comes to internet safety, kids need to know if and when it's appropriate to share private information that entities can use to identify them. However, they may not be concerned about this issue. The Common Sense Media curriculum helps you answer the question, "what's the big deal about internet privacy? ☒" (grades 9-12).

3. **Personal content**: Predators and bullies can't necessarily identify students through their personal information, such as their favorite color or the name of their dog. However, it's still not wise for students to share too much information, particularly on social media platforms. Parentinfo.org helps separate the myths from the facts ☒.

4. **Photographs**: Alert students to the fact that prying eyes can use photos they upload to determine their location and software can identify them through facial recognition technology. Here again, they should think carefully before sharing on social media. Davis' Location Based Safety Guide ☒ addresses this issue.

5. **Property rights**: When it comes to images, digital citizenship requires students to respect copyright laws. Cult of Pedagogy has a resource on teaching students to use images legally online.

6. **Permission to use images**: Students must attribute the image's source to obtain permission for its use. Here's more information on copyright, fair use, and creative commons, as well as a usable curriculum on proper image attribution ☒.

7. **Protection against cyber hackers**: Due to the growing prevalence of cyber hackers, it's important to educate students about them. The Department of Homeland Security has a good cybersecurity ☒ starting point for educators. Additionally, educators with an online bachelor's degree or an online master's degree in cybersecurity are well-prepared to tackle this subject.

8. **Professionalism**: Middle school and high school educators can begin informing students on professional standards, including citing sources ☒ and using proper grammar.

9. **Personal branding**: The Huffington Post explains that building a personal brand ☒ is important for any high school student seeking to go to college. PwC provides a workbook ☒ on personal branding.

The above resources provide a starting point for the 9 P's — there's a wealth of information about these topics available on and offline. Next, we'll delve into one of the most important subject for kids who are active on the internet: safety and privacy.

Teaching Safety and Privacy in an Online Learning Environment

Being able to navigate the internet safely is a necessary computer skill for kids. Internet safety applies both to human users and the information and equipment they leverage online. There are hackers and cyber bullies who seek to compromise networks at schools and in homes. At the same time, there are users who seek to gain access to personal information and try to lure people into vulnerable situations. Staying safe requires an understanding of responsible behavior and responsible use of equipment and resources.

Understanding Digital Footprints

To begin, students should be aware of their digital footprint and its implications. A digital footprint is the unseen record of a user's activities online, including the websites they visit and the files and apps they download. The footprint exists in passive form, as when a website records a user's IP address as a "hit" — which includes information about how long they spent on the site and the pages they visited — or in active form, as when a user logs in to a site and makes changes to their profile and/or the content they post.

The **implications of a student's digital footprint** are as follows:

- If your student posts inappropriate pictures or comments on social media or elsewhere, the **content will remain online indefinitely unless removed**.
- **Predators and hackers can access location data** through social media pictures and — via the dark web — can purchase data on browsing history and other sensitive data in an effort to target users.
- **Colleges and potential employers can look at a student's digital footprint** — including their social media footprint — to determine whether they want to admit or hire the student.

Social media is just one place where people can examine a student's digital footprint. A simple search on Google and any other search engine can reveal information a student doesn't know is still there, such as profiles they created on old sites.

To schools, teachers, and future employers, the records of a student's online activities — especially their social media posts — provide a picture of the student's digital citizenship, which reflects on their ethics and everyday interactions.

Teaching Middle School Students About Their Digital Footprint

To teach middle school students (grades 6-8) about their digital footprints, consider the following best practices and resources:

- **Acquaint them with the nature of digital media**: "Digital Life 101 ⃝" provides students with a primer on the always-on nature of digital media and helps them analyze why it's important to engage in online relationships responsibly.
- **Encourage them to respect others' privacy**: "Secret Sharer ⃝" encourages students to take a proactive approach in understanding the importance of online privacy.
- **Encourage safe talk**: "Safe Online Talk ⃝" provides a short video, a guided class discussion, and a handout to help students understand the importance of avoiding risky conversations online.
- **Help them think about how they present themselves online**: "Which Me Should I Be? ⃝" poses the prospect of assuming a different identity online, provides a video to prompt discussion, and includes a handout to help students think ethically about posing as someone else.
- **Teach them the common sense basics of internet safety**: Common Sense on Internet Safety for Middle School Kids ⃝ is a resource teachers and parents can share in your efforts to teach them the essentials of internet safety. It includes information on
- What information they shouldn't share
- Which emails they shouldn't open
- A basic rule for sharing photos
- Password privacy (parents should have access)
- Encouragement to tell a trusted adult when something weird happens
- Additionally strategies for internet safety

Middle schoolers are just beginning to step out into an intriguing online world where they can potentially talk to anyone and be anybody. Impart critical thinking skills so they can realize newfound independence without stepping into the danger zone.

Teaching High School Students About Their Digital Footprint

To teach high school students (grades 9-12) about their digital footprints, consider the following best practices and resources:

- **Start by talking about relationships**: By high school, kids are fully immersed in the social aspect of the internet. "Risky Online Relationships ⃝" sets up a discussion about "stranger danger," unpacks the term "online predator," and presents a story to help high schoolers think about how to avoid risky online relationships.
- **Look at the major privacy and internet safety topics from a parent's perspective**: Common Sense Media's collection of internet safety topics ⃝ addresses major issues such as the dark web, privacy settings on Instagram and Facebook, and what to do when a teen's device gets hacked. Teachers can use this portal to tailor lessons to address the issues parents are dealing with every day.

- **Teach privacy by sharing stories and solutions**: Teaching Privacy's portal on digital footprints ⬀ shares real-world stories on people whose digital footprint came back to bite them, and provides information as well as guides on how to customize digital technology for optimum privacy.

High schoolers are confident digital natives who want to hear the facts and solutions concerning their digital footprints so they can decide for themselves. Parental and school filters aren't necessarily going to keep them from illegally downloading files and engaging in risky interactions online. It's the educators' and parents' job to help them think critically and ethically about internet safety, in part by modeling digital citizenship.

How to Model Digital Citizenship

Modeling digital citizenship is about giving attention to good behavior and "walking the talk" that students hear from authorities on this subject. In other words, if you see a student practicing digital citizenship, commend them for it, and do your best to be a digital citizen they look up to.

As students practice digital citizenship, help them build self-confidence in the classroom by engaging them in activities that help build self-esteem. Combining digital citizenship with confidence-boosting activities helps students build associative pathways that link a positive self-image with digital citizenship and netiquette.

Furthermore, since your students are undoubtedly on social media, consider the best practices for modeling positive interaction on the medium. Nikki Robertson, president-elect of the International Society for Technology in Education ☒ (ISTE) Librarians Network, recommends the following:

- **Walk students individually through safe social media usage**, from creating a profile to curating friends and followers to posting content.
- In the classroom, access your own social media account for the students to see and **show how to connect with experts, authors, and positive influencers**.
- **Set up a classroom social media account and give each student the chance to "take over,"** meaning they get to post pictures and videos of their favorite educational activities. Make sure the rules are well established.
- Monitor students' social media usage, and **when they make a mistake** – such as accepting a friend request from someone they don't know – **use it as an opportunity** to create a discussion about digital citizenship.

The key is to embrace social media, model positive usage, and set clear expectations and boundaries.

Next, study the Educator's Guide to Social Media ☒, which provides "a framework for thinking about how to best use social media." The guide covers ways to protect your privacy on various social networks, how best to interact with students on social media, protecting student privacy, and a host of other relevant topics, including cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying Awareness and Prevention

Cyberbullying is the use of digital technology to harass, intimidate, threaten, or humiliate a victim. A cyberbully may use texts, social media, email, websites, or website comment boards and forums to troll and bully victims.

In a survey conducted by educators from the Cyberbullying Research Center, nearly 61% of students ☒ said they had been bullied online, to the extent that their "ability to learn and feel safe" was affected. Of those who had been cyberbullied, 10% said they had stayed home from school because of it.

To promote internet safety, digital citizenship, and netiquette, it's crucial to curb cyberbullying. Because cyberbullying affects a student's psychological well-being and can lead to physical abuse, you must be prepared to help students deal with it.

Teaching Middle School Students About Cyberbullying

To help middle school students handle cyberbullies, consider the following best practices and resources:

- **Provide them with a go-to list of tips**: The "ABC's of Cyberbullying for Students ☒" is a simple list of easy ways for students to keep from becoming victims of cyberbullying.
- **Encourage them to stand up for themselves and others**: "Cyberbullying: Be Upstanding ☒" helps students distinguish between being a bystander and an upstander, provides a handout that helps them understand why they should care, and helps them think of concrete solutions to cyberbullying.
- **Engage them with multimedia activities that tell stories**: NetSmartz Lesson Plans ☒ include videos, interactive comics, worksheets, and interactive activities to engage students and help them think about the potential consequences of their actions online.

Middle schoolers know all about bullying, but many of them may not be aware of cyberbullying yet (even if they've experienced it), because kids are used to thinking of bullying in the physical sense. Give them illustrations and solutions, and help them engage in a discussion to recognize the different forms bullying, and cyberbullying, can take. Most importantly, work to gain their trust and encourage them to tell you if an incident occurs.

Teaching High School Students About Cyberbullying

To help high school students handle cyberbullies, consider the following best practices and resources:

- **Give them the facts and promote awareness**: The Anti-Defamation League's statistics on bullying ☒ provides the statistical picture so that cyberbully victims know they're not alone and cyberbullies know people are aware of what they're doing. Often awareness is the first step to change.

- **Engage them with multimedia activities that tell stories**: Like middle schoolers, today's high schoolers are more likely to be engaged through visual and interactive formats. NetSmartz lesson plans ⬀ for high schoolers help these students understand the subject.
- **Provide a guide**: HelpGuide's "Bullying and Cyberbullying ⬀" guide explains cyberbullying, its effects, the reasons why bullies do what they do, tips on how to deal with it, support mechanisms and strategies, and includes an informative sections for teachers and parents.

Help high schoolers understand they can get help and help others fight cyberbullying. Remind them to save evidence of cyberbullying and report incidents to a trusted adult.

Cyberbullying can include incidents in which a bully steals another student's identity or digital property with malicious intent. In that sense, it's helpful to acquaint students with the idea of digital property and its importance.

Copyright and Digital Property

As any teacher knows, plagiarism is a major issue, and any discussion of digital citizenship and netiquette inevitably must answer the question, "What is plagiarism?" To answer this question in a way that is relevant to the internet age, you must first establish the idea of digital property.

Digital Property

Digital property is any data someone can access digitally, including any kind of file, website and social media accounts, images, intellectual property (such as articles and blog posts), software, and contracts. Unless data is marked as fair use and available to the commons, it is someone's property and is subject to digital copyright law ⤢.

Copyright Law and Digital Property

Copyright law applies to any digital work that is fixed in a tangible medium (i.e. on a hard drive, in the cloud, on a USB drive), original, and creative. The law specifies that creativity can be very minimal and elementary (e.g. a stick-figure cartoon or game). For your work to qualify for copyright, it must be entirely your own. If you plagiarize a blog post and post it on your own site, you are responsible for copyright violation. The second you create an original work under your name, whether online or off, it's subject to copyright law, meaning other people can't use it without your permission.

For students, the common issues are plagiarism and illegal downloads. There's also the issue of making hard copies and sharing documents that do not have a Creative Commons license ⤢, or using copyrighted works under the auspices of fair use.

What Is Plagiarism?

Plagiarism isn't just the act of using another person's words and claiming they're your own — it's the act of appropriating another person's ideas or thoughts as well. In short, plagiarism is the act of stealing someone's work and passing it off as your own.

This applies to images, blog posts, songs — any sort of data that qualifies as the creator's original work. Even if a creation is licensed under the most lenient Creative Commons stipulation (CC BY) ⤢, and the student can "distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon" the creation, a student must attribute the source of the creation.

What Is Fair Use?

U.S. copyright law ⧉ permits the "unlicensed use of copyright-protected works in certain circumstances." In layman's terms, students and educators can most likely use a copyrighted work if:

- It's for educational purposes
- It's a factual or biographical work rather than an artistic, creative one
- It's a small portion of the work that doesn't capture the "heart" of it, or the way in which the student uses the entire work is such that it creates a brand new, original thing (collage or parody)
- It doesn't affect the work's current or future market value

Courts determine whether the use is fair on a case-by-case basis.

Fair Use Resources:

Creative Commons ⧉: Search portal for all content with a Creative Commons license

Canva ⧉: Free online tool that enables photo editing and graph creation, and houses a wide variety of document templates

Clipchamp ⧉: Free online tool that enables video editing

Illegal Downloads

In one case, a student had to pay $675,000 for illegally downloading ⧉ and distributing 30 songs. Under federal law, the penalty is anywhere from $750 to $30,000 per copyright infringement. Students may be tempted to illegally download the type of digital property most stringently protected by copyright law: songs, movies, and other creative, original work. They should be reminded of their digital footprint and the penalties they could face for downloading.

Teaching Middle School Students About Copyright and Digital Property

To teach middle school students about copyright and digital property, consider the following best practices and resources:

- **Help them understand what qualifies as "fair use"**: "Rework, Reuse, Remix ⧉" is a hands-on lesson that teaches students about the four points of fair use by incorporating critical thinking, and students create an original work through fair use.
- **Use a story to help them think about the responsibility of a creator**: "A Creator's Responsibilities ⧉" tells the story of a cut-and-paste artist, examines further case studies, and helps students consider the ethical implications of this type of artistry.

- **Encourage students to view themselves as both consumers and creators**: Copyright & Creativity for Ethical Digital Citizens provides a middle school curriculum ⬈ with sections that explain students' role, how to acquire and share content legally and ethically, and how to create new content via fair use.

- **Help them understand the difference between plagiarism and paraphrasing**: "Exploring Plagiarism, Copyright, and Paraphrasing ⬈" is a lesson plan that emphasises the importance of avoiding plagiarism and, through interactive practice, shows students the difference between plagiarism and fair use, as well as paraphrasing.

Middle schoolers are at critical time in their lives where they must gain a clear impression of digital ownership boundaries. Help them understand the problem with plagiarism by impressing upon them how it would feel if someone stole their work, as well as the consequences they could face from educators and authorities. Additionally, acquaint them with the flexibility and possibilities of appropriate fair use.

Teaching High School Students About Copyright and Digital Property

To teach high school students about copyright and digital property, consider the following best practices and resources:

- **Engage them through an activity that asks them to choose**: After explaining copyright law and fair use, "Copyrights and Wrongs ⬈" provides a handout that has students pretend they are an ad executive who has to apply what they've learned to the act of choosing a photo for an ad campaign.
- **Show them videos to illustrate what they must consider**: Copyright & Creativity for Ethical Digital Citizens provides a high school curriculum ⬈ with video-based lessons that address their role as creators and consumers, how to acquire and share content legally and ethically, as well as the rules for fair use, creative commons, permissions, and public domain.
- **Use college-level writing lab resources to prevent plagiarism**: The Purdue Owl writing lab ⬈ contains resources for teachers, including lessons on preventing plagiarism.

High schoolers are enamored with much of what they see online, and they want freedom. Give them plenty of preparation on fair use and provide them with resources to promote it.

The internet is a powerful tool for social networking, research, and education, and it has become almost ubiquitous in modern schools and households alike. Like any tool, though, it has potential for abuse and requires thoughtful use. Students and educators at every level can benefit enormously from learning to be more conscientious users, and understanding the risks and responsibilities of going online in the modern internet age.

Be Brave

Bring us your ambition and we'll guide you along a personalized path to a quality education that's designed to change your life.

Take Your Next Brave Step

Receive information about the benefits of our programs, the courses you'll take, and what you need to apply.

Step 1 of 4

When are you considering starting your program?

— Select —

Next Step

Contact Us

Undergraduate Admissions

314-445-4864

undergradadmissions@online.maryville.edu

Graduate Admissions

314-798-7912

gradadmissions@online.maryville.edu

650 Maryville University Drive St. Louis, MO 63141

Facebook

Instagram

Twitter

LinkedIn

YouTube

Why Maryville University?

About Maryville University

University Accreditation

Online Interactive Learning Tools

Faculty

The Maryville Approach

Tales of the Brave

Online Degree Programs

Online Bachelor's Degrees

Online Master's Degrees

Online Doctorate Degrees

Online Certificate Programs

Areas of Study

Business

Communication

Computer Science

Cybersecurity

Education

Healthcare

Human Services

Liberal Arts

Science & Mathematics

Social Sciences

Popular Programs

Master's in Business Administration

Bachelor's in Criminal Justice

Master's in Health Administration

Admissions

Incoming Freshman and Graduate Student Admission

Early Access Program

Transfer Admission

International Admission

Military Admission

Tuition and Financial Aid

Student Support

FAQ

Student Login ⎋

Consumer Information ⎋

Blog

Articles

Infographics

Webinars

News

Home   Privacy Policy   Complaint Resolution ↗   Maryville.edu ↗   Your Privacy Choices   Sitemap

News

Home   Privacy Policy   Complaint Resolution ↗   Maryville.edu ↗   Your Privacy Choices   Sitemap