

# Digital Citizenship



## Key Points

- Today's young people are navigating a new digital culture in which rules and social norms are sometimes unclear. They must learn about digital citizenship—and develop a sense of ownership and personal responsibility—in order to make responsible, ethical decisions in the online world.
- The Internet presents great opportunities for young people, but not without real risks. Some of the risks can be mitigated by helping young people develop a strong sense of digital citizenship.
- Rather than relying solely on protective measures that are primarily reactive responses to existing problems, an approach to online safety that includes proactively teaching digital citizenship will help young people safely interact in the online world. Teaching young people about digital literacy, ethics, and etiquette is no longer merely an option—it is an imperative.

## BACKGROUND

New information technologies have profoundly changed the world in which today's young people learn and grow. The immense resources of the Internet and the accompanying array of Internet-enabled devices give young people tremendous opportunities to learn, share, and communicate. Yet adults have concerns about online safety for young people, who might encounter inappropriate content or sexual predators, suffer damage to their online reputations, or have other harmful experiences online.

Many countries have implemented a three-part approach to protecting young people with technology tools, safety education, and law enforcement activities. All three play vital roles, but these strategies are often reactive responses to emerging safety issues. A more proactive and comprehensive approach to online safety would include measures that take into account the rules and behaviors that young people must understand before they can become responsible digital citizens. Digital citizenship takes just such an approach.

Digital citizenship is often defined as “the norms of behavior with regard to technology use.” But digital citizenship is about more than social norms—it is about preparing young people for living and learning in a technology-rich society. Digital citizenship helps young people develop a sense of ownership and personal responsibility that, in turn, will help them make appropriate, ethical decisions in the online world. It has two primary elements:

- **Digital literacy.** Young people who are literate in the online world will have a better chance of avoiding risky situations, will make better-informed decisions, and will better understand how to protect their privacy. But digital literacy involves more than mere technical competence—it requires critical thinking skills to evaluate many different sources of digital information.
- **Digital ethics and etiquette.** While technical knowledge provides a solid foundation for digital citizenship, young people must also learn digital ethics and etiquette before they can make sound decisions in the online world. Instruction in digital ethics will help young people make good ethical decisions, and instruction in digital etiquette will help them operate within online social norms.

## MICROSOFT APPROACH

- Microsoft's approach to children's online safety includes technology tools, education and guidance, and partnering with government, industry, law enforcement, and others to help create safer, more trusted computing experiences for everyone.
- Microsoft supports the integration of digital citizenship in technology instruction for students. Given the pervasiveness of technology in classrooms today, Microsoft believes that digital citizenship is an important component of any school curriculum.
- The Microsoft Safety & Security Center provides age-appropriate guidance for Internet use, including tips for teaching children what's appropriate to view and share online. The site provides information about topics including the prevention of online bullying, safer social networking, safe use of mobile devices, responsible online gaming, and addressing inappropriate online behavior.

## POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- Microsoft supports broadening online safety efforts to include an emphasis on digital citizenship through digital media literacy and education programs that help parents and teachers prepare kids for navigating online and managing digital media.
- Microsoft suggests that education policymakers adopt a set of national goals for online safety, including minimum standards for digital literacy curricula, to better educate children and families about managing multimedia-infused lives.
- Although there are many things that governments should do, it is important to note what they should not do. It is tempting to try to protect young people with legislation that imposes technology mandates. These, however, have generally proven ineffective, especially given the global reach and scale of the Internet. Further, mandated technology may quickly become obsolete due to the fast-paced and ever-changing nature of the digital world.



## Helpful Resources

The Microsoft Safety & Security Center, with age-based guidelines for Internet use  
[www.microsoft.com/security](http://www.microsoft.com/security)

Online Safety 3.0: Empowering and Protecting Youth  
[aka.ms/Online-Safety30](http://aka.ms/Online-Safety30)

The Family Online Safety Institute  
[www.fosi.org](http://www.fosi.org)

Research and curriculum materials promoting digital citizenship  
[www.digitalcitizenship.net](http://www.digitalcitizenship.net)