



# DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP... AND YOUR CHILD

What every parent  
needs to know and do



We are all taught at home, at school  
and through our daily activities how to  
become responsible citizens, but today  
it is vital that we, and our children, also  
become **digital citizens**.

[www.coe.int/education](http://www.coe.int/education)



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# What is a digital citizen?

A digital citizen is someone who uses technology safely, ethically and responsibly, protecting his/her own rights and information, as well as those of everyone present in the digital world.



It is up to you, the parent,  
to help your children  
become digital citizens.

Nowadays children of all ages spend a lot of time “digitally connected”, through mobile phones, apps, laptops and tablets, but also through toys and household objects. They post information and meet people you will probably never get to see.

Service providers and advertisers are constantly gathering data from the content they post to target them with ads, prioritise results they get through search engines and even help shape future products and tools to better correspond to teen tastes.

More importantly, the information they provide online is constantly creating ‘digital footprints’ that are almost impossible to delete. One aspect of digital citizenship is about building positive digital footprints and understanding what data is being given away.

The border between the digital and offline worlds is rapidly disappearing. Children are now using digital tools often before they have really mastered how to interact positively and responsibly with family and friends face-to-face. In just a couple of clicks they can find themselves in big communities where they probably can’t see who they are communicating with and where their words or actions can be risky or hurtful though that wasn’t their intention.

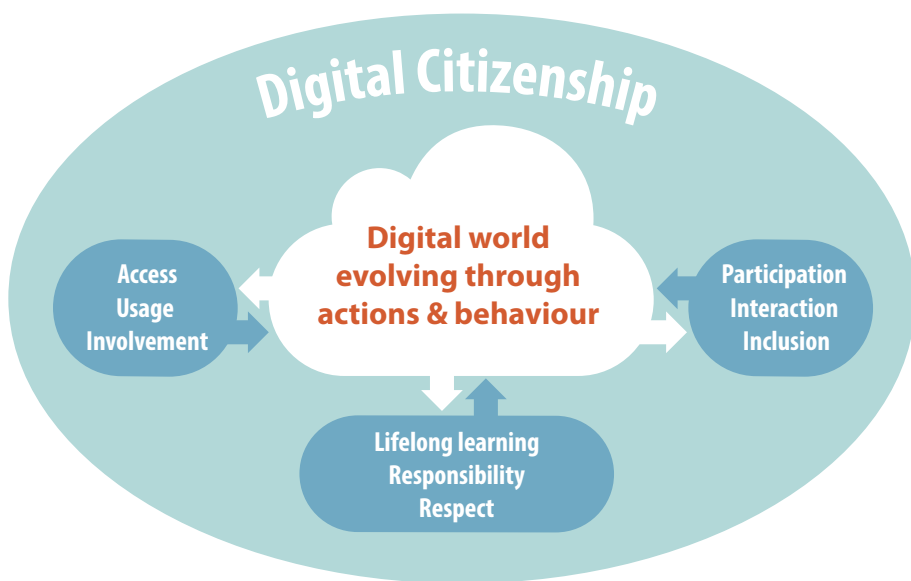
Digital citizenship education aims to give children the opportunity and guidance to master the essential tools that will help make the digital world an open, inclusive, creative space where people respect each other’s rights, and each other. It is made up of the **values, attitudes, skills, knowledge** and **critical understanding** that are the building blocks for becoming a just, responsible and caring citizen, whether in the digital or non-digital world.

# What is Digital Citizenship?

Digital Citizenship is like a frame, and in some ways a filter, that guides the way we use digital technology and behave online. It is about the things we need to know, to do and to be in order **to use** the internet, mobile phones, apps and other internet-connected devices **creatively and responsibly** to communicate, explore, work, learn and play online.

Digital citizenship defines the way we **access and use digital technologies** and data, making it easier for us to benefit from the opportunities the digital world opens to us, and avoid the pitfalls. It helps us build the knowledge we need to take part in various sorts of communities (such as social networks, or online discussion groups), and the critical understanding to see which ones we want to be part of. It also equips us with the values and attitudes to make sure everyone can have their voice heard.

Digital technology is constantly developing and moving into new areas of our lives, through toys, entertainment, health, household items and more. It **makes lifelong learning easier** but also essential, because we need to remain alert to both the advantages of technology and the negative impact it can have on our quality of life and on people everywhere in the world.



*In Microsoft's Digital Civility Index, parents emerge as being the most trustworthy when it comes to ensuring the safety of individuals and families online.*



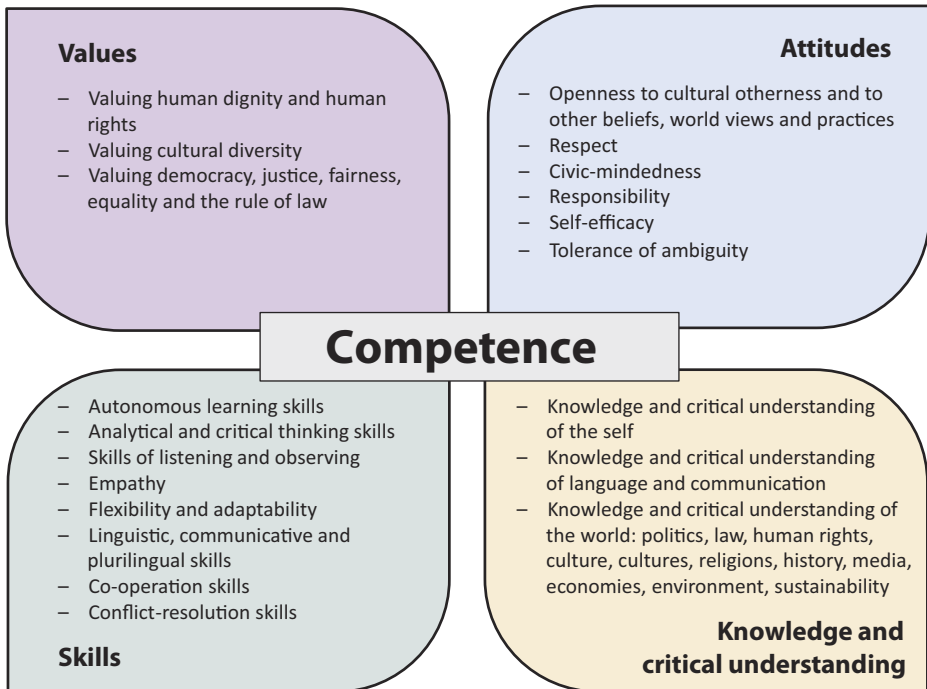
*Children learn from what you do, not what you tell them to do. Show them how to be responsible and respectful towards others.*

# As a parent... where do I begin?

Digital citizenship begins at home, from earliest childhood. In the first years of their life, children are constantly watching how parents, older brothers and sisters and family friends communicate and interact, and copy what they see. This is how you teach your children essential citizenship values such as fairness, equality and rights, and attitudes such as respect, openness to others and wanting to do worthwhile things.

As they sharpen their listening and observing skills, both essential to being a digital citizen, they will begin to take notice of how the people around them are feeling, and learn to show empathy for others. At this point they need lots of opportunities to practice cooperation, solve simple problems and adapt to new situations – family card and board games are a great, fun way to develop these skills and others.

Values, attitudes and skills, along with specific types of knowledge and understanding that children will pick up on the way, are called **competences**. They are the building blocks that digital citizenship is built on.



Think about how you can help your children develop the 20 competences above; you can learn more about them from the Council of Europe at [www.coe.int/competences](http://www.coe.int/competences).

# Why is digital citizenship so important for my children?

By helping your children develop these competences, you will set them off on the road to becoming responsible citizens not only at school or at play, but also in the digital world. Your children will have benchmarks that will help them learn and grow from the many opportunities that the digital world offers, because they will be:

- ▶ more selective about who they meet and the sort of activities they do online;
- ▶ more resilient to harm that could come from things they see and hear online, because they have their own personal filters – their citizenship competences – in place;
- ▶ more adaptable to new situations, because they are open to other views, cultures and practices.

## The ten domains of Digital Citizenship

Differences and specific needs exist in any world, depending on the region, and areas within regions. This is true in the digital world too, where certain content we access and things we do require more focus on certain competences than others. To make it easier for you as a parent to understand your children's needs more clearly and the competences they need to develop, the Council of Europe has divided digital activities into three broad groups that cover ten areas or domains.





## Did you know...

... that digital technology opens valuable learning opportunities for your children. Families and schools both play an important role in their digital citizenship education.



## Ensure access and inclusion

### ► Get involved!

- Explore the digital world with your children, help them choose websites and tools suited to their age and interests, and discuss their online activity with them whenever you can.
- Set a few ground rules that will keep your children on track and make it easier for you to see what they are up to, even from a distance.
- Discuss with them the notion of equality, and ways that we can open the digital world to everyone regardless of disability, gender, race, culture...
- Encourage them to come to you any time they feel uncomfortable or excluded online.

### ► Ideas for teachers

- Include digital citizenship as part of daily classroom activities. It's not necessary to be equipped with digital technology to develop digital citizenship competences!
- Give children examples of why and how they can defend their own and other people's rights to access technology and not to be left out of activities.
- Teach children to manage their own learning and be creative with digital technology.



*The internet offers a big range of tools and platforms that make anywhere-anytime learning a powerful reality.*

### 4 building blocks of anywhere-anytime learning:

Being able to learn independently.

Believing in your own values.

Being a doer, as well as a thinker.

Interacting meaningfully with others.



## Did you know...

... that learning and creativity are closely linked, and that “anywhere-anytime learning” is one of the keys to success in the information society.



## Promote learning and creativity

### ► Get involved!

- Play games with your children to help them learn through exploration and play.
- Do fun activities and go to fun places with them to boost their imagination.
- Make the most of any opportunity to encourage their creativity; creativity in childhood has proven to be a three-times more important factor than IQ in long-term creative achievements.
- Organise cooperation-based activities with family and friends to help your children realise the value of justice and fairness, and respect for other people and their ideas.

### ► Ideas for teachers

- Include some coding activities in class, it will improve the children’s understanding of the possibilities and limits of technology.
- Use technology in the classroom in ways that will make learning a positive experience for all children.
- Organise class activities that will encourage cooperation and let children practice “living” democratic values.
- Stimulate creativity, and talk about ownership of creative works and copyright issues.



*The internet offers access to valuable learning opportunities and resources that help your children become digital citizens.*



*Give children practice in processing, analysing and validating information.*





## Did you know...



... that media and information literacy is an essential pillar in digital citizenship.



## Help develop your children's literacy skills

### ► Get involved!

- Surf the net with your children and point out ways you can tell true from false, real from fake information.
- Get your children to use a search engine to find information about a topic you have selected together. Compare the results, and find ways of finding trustworthy sources online.
- Explain to your children that anybody can write anything on the internet. Help them find examples that show how information and messages are shaped to influence our way of thinking.

### ► Ideas for teachers

- Include activities in class that get children analysing, assessing and creating information from an early age.
- Demonstrate how easily content can be uploaded on the net, and why it's so important that we all double-check information.
- Show the best ways to use search engines for research, and how to analyse, compare and validate results.



***As we teach our children to navigate the risks of their home, town or city, so they should learn to safely and securely navigate the online environment, for their own welfare and that of others around them.***



***Show children how to find meaningful answers, conduct evidence-based research, and take part in debates.***



***Literacy is the ability to meaningfully use media and information channels.***





## Did you know...



...that children and teens across Europe are asking parents and teachers to educate them about being ethical and empathetic in the digital world.



## Ethics and empathy are important in your child's life

### ► Get involved!

- Empathetic people usually have well-developed listening and observing skills; play games with your children to sharpen theirs.
- Remind them that, whether online or offline, they should stick to the ethical values and attitudes they have learned from you.
- Use news stories or online information to open a discussion with your children about empathy.
- By pointing out that each person is unique and not everyone thinks and feels the way we do, you'll help your children to accept themselves and others, and that multiple viewpoints can comfortably exist side by side.

### ► Ideas for teachers

- Talk about ethics in class and get children to make posters displaying the ethical rules to follow offline and online.
- Organise role-play activities to get children to reflect on their own feelings, and observe and imagine the feelings of others.
- Organise class discussions to highlight that views between pupils often differ; this will help them learn to value diversity.
- Discuss bullying or hate speech incidents in class, and get children thinking of ways to improve empathy.



**Teach your children to be open to cultural otherness and other world views, beliefs and practices.**



**Make ethics and empathy part of the school curriculum.**

*The Digital Citizenship Education Handbook is full of ideas and examples of good practice for teachers and families.*



## Did you know...



... that today's over-rich diet of information and the amount of time spent online can impact children's health and well-being.



## Safeguard your children's health and well-being

### ► Get involved!

- Create a family environment where your children feel secure and loved.
- Leave handwritten notes for your children occasionally, it strengthens emotional ties and improves linguistic skills.
- Remember that self-esteem builds children's confidence and competence.
- Playing board games with children boosts their well-being, because they learn to negotiate social rules with caring adults on an equal footing.

### ► Ideas for teachers

- Ensure a healthy balance between your children's on- and offline activities.
- Run class activities that empower pupils to listen, observe, empathise and cooperate; this will help them understand and practice justice, fairness and openness to diversity.
- Trigger discussions among pupils about the time they spend online, and what this means for their health and well-being.



*The greatest wealth is health.*

*Virgil*



*Teach children to:*

- *Listen*
- *Observe*
- *Empathise*
- *Cooperate*





## Did you know...

... that maintaining a healthy e-presence, and communicating respectfully and responsibly, is the cornerstone of digital citizenship.



## Promote respectful online presence and communications

### ► Get involved!

- Discuss with your children the tools they use to communicate online, and how these could be used more ethically and responsibly.
- Conduct a search with your children on their name. Discuss the results; how can they make their digital identity and reputation more positive?
- Discuss how each of our actions online leaves a digital footprint that shapes our online identity; before posting anything online, get them to ask themselves if they would show or say the same thing in a face-to-face situation.
- Remind them to control and protect their online presence by regularly updating the privacy settings on the platforms they are using.

### ► Ideas for teachers

- Find ways to help children improve the quality of their online presence. One way is to get pupils to print and post their online profile on the classroom wall where everyone can see it, just as they would in the online world.
- Create a netiquette guide with pupils, to spell out the basic rules of behaviour online.
- Look at the security settings on the most popular platforms in your country, and talk about ways that accounts can be made more secure.
- Download some of the well-known phishing emails, and get children to spot ways that they can identify and avoid scams and fraud.



***Empower your children to build and maintain their online reputation and online interactions in a positive manner.***



***Using children's favourite tech tools in class improves motivation and can open up the classroom to the world.***

# Active Participation; Rights and Responsibilities



## Did you know...

... that the respect of digital rights and responsibilities are essential elements for being active citizens online.



## Ensure active and responsible participation

### ► Get involved!

- Have open discussions with your children on topics of social interest; this will give them practice in expressing their own views, and taking onboard the views of others.
- Download the 'Terms of Use' of some of their favourite online platforms, and see if they can spot the users' rights and responsibilities that are common to all.
- If they feel their rights are not being respected, show them 3 simple steps they should take: ignore the offensive content, block the sender, and report the incident to the platform provider.
- Encourage your children to take part in local youth communities; face-to-face interaction is important for their well-being.

### ► Ideas for teachers

- Organise activities that enable pupils to actively participate in groups beyond the classroom; online courses or group tutorials are good examples.
- Ask pupils to research ways that the misuse of online platforms can interfere with the right to actively participate in certain activities.
- Organise class debates on democracy and freedom of expression, and point out why it is so important to respect the opinion and views of everyone.
- Work with pupils to create a "Responsible / Acceptable Use Policy" for guiding the use of technology in the classroom and the school.



***Teach your children to defend their rights and responsibilities, while also respecting the rights of others.***



***The notions of "just" and "fair" should be at the heart of every rule, every opportunity, every discussion.***



***The truest test of a democracy is in the ability of anyone to act as he likes, so long as he does not injure the life or property of anyone else.***

*Mahatma Gandhi*





## Did you know...



... that the way users manage their own privacy, data and security impacts on the rights and freedom of expression of everyone online.



## Be privacy and security aware!

### ► Get involved!

- Install filters, firewalls and antivirus software on your children's devices, and show them how to regularly clean their navigation history, to reduce tracking and limit targeted ads.
- Show them which bits of their data are private, which bits can be safely shared, and with whom.
- Check out the 'Terms and Conditions' and 'Privacy Policy' of the platforms they are using; this will help them make informed decisions about consenting to cookies or providing data online.
- Encourage your children to use pseudonyms whenever possible to protect their identity.
- Be informed about what data is being collected by internet-connected toys and household devices, and where this data is stored.

### ► Ideas for teachers

- Organise fun activities that teach children how to create and manage strong passwords.
- Do class activities that help them understand what information is private, what can be shared with anyone, and what shouldn't be shared.
- Talk about spam, phishing, viruses, malware and bots, and how we all need to protect ourselves by using appropriate protective tools.
- Invite pupils to do an online search on their own name and share results with a classmate; is there any way to remove pieces of data they don't want people to see?



*Privacy, security and self-protection online should be taught across all subject areas, via playful age-appropriate activities.*



**Teach your children to think twice before they click, because it is very easy to give away data that can be used for profiling them (to target ads, content etc.)**



**Privacy is not an option, and it shouldn't be the price we accept for just getting on the internet.**

Gary Kovacs





## Did you know...



... that consumer education helps contribute to a sustainable economy, and improves health, well-being and security.



## Create consumer awareness

### ► Get involved!

- Make sure your children understand that the same consumer rights and responsibilities apply both offline and online.
- In our age of credit cards and online consumerism, children need to be reminded of the true value of money.
- Help your children check out the reputation of the websites they use, and be suspicious of anything online that seems too good to be true.
- Visit some commercial websites with them, and show them how to make secure transactions; read and discuss the consumer terms and conditions. Are they easy to understand? Are they appropriate? Is something missing?



***Empower your children to defend their consumer rights and respect their consumer responsibilities.***

### ► Ideas for teachers

- Include class activities that promote online entrepreneurship and get children working together towards a common goal, e.g. creating an imaginative e-commerce website.
- Organise children into groups to create security guidelines for their parents about shopping online. Don't forget to include how to avoid misleading information and scams.
- Discuss sustainable consumerism in class, and how consumers can defend their rights and respect their responsibilities offline and online.



***Consumer awareness includes online entrepreneurship – the internet opens entrepreneur opportunities to all.***



***It is fundamental that all individuals understand their rights as consumers of products and services.***

# How can I support my children in building their digital citizenship competences?

With digital technology, it is not always easy to know what your children are up to, and if their digital citizenship competences are meeting the challenge. It is not easy for your children either. Digital technology is a bit like an iceberg, with so many currents below the surface (for example, new trends, new technology) that can quickly pull them out of their depth.

These 3 checklists may help you to spot areas where they could need extra help. It could also serve as a conversation starter to talk about their digital activities.

## Access

- Do you know what sort of activities your children do online?
- Does your family have technology downtime, switching off technology at meal-time or after a certain time at night?
- Do your children show a healthy balance between face-to-face, physical and online activities?
- Do you surf online with your children, and discuss with them how to use the internet responsibly and ethically?
- Do your children discuss with you things that bother them online, or unpleasant content they have seen?

## Participation

- How many of your children's online and offline friends do you know?
- Do you know how many online groups they are part of, and the points of interest that bring these groups together?
- Are they creating and sharing their own content, or do they spend more time communicating with friends, playing online or watching videos?
- Are they good listeners and observers, able to understand the other person's point of view?
- Do they take an interest in talking about what they believe is wrong in the digital world, and ways they could try to make things better?

## Lifelong learners

- What percentage of the time online do your children spend doing projects, homework or exploring new things (for example visiting an online museum)?
- Are they able to use search engines effectively, and compare the results they get?
- Which are their favourite information sources, and do they have any favourite news channels?
- Are they able to judge which online information is reliable and which is false or fake?
- Do they use digital technology at school, and what sort of things do they do with it?

The Council of Europe has created this guide to help you:

- ▶ better understand digital citizenship, and how it shapes online behaviour
- ▶ discuss digital citizenship with your children
- ▶ take steps to help your children master the competences digital citizenship is built on
- ▶ encourage your children's school to play its role in educating competent young digital citizens

Other Council of Europe publications on Digital Citizenship Education (<https://book.coe.int/eur/en>):

- ▶ Digital Citizenship Education Handbook (2019)
- ▶ Digital citizenship education - Volume 1: Overview and new perspectives (2017)
- ▶ Digital citizenship education - Volume 2: Multi-stakeholder consultation report (2017)
- ▶ Bullying: perspectives, practice and insights (2017)
- ▶ Parenting in the digital age - Parental guidance for the online protection of children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (2017)
- ▶ Internet Literacy Handbook (2017)

Further information available at <https://www.coe.int/dce>

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**www.coe.int**

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