

Digital Citizenship & Online Responsibility

A Message from Our School Counselor

Cyberbullying prevention encompasses teaching students the importance of digital citizenship. Positive digital citizenship shows students how to connect with one another, use empathy, and create lasting relationships through digital tools. Negative digital citizenship involves cyberbullying, irresponsible social media usage, and a general lack of knowledge about how to safely use the Internet. During a recent sixth grade Life Skills class, students were taught digital citizenship skills to help them understand that when they are communicating online, they must choose their words wisely and speak with respect and compassion.

Online responsibility is led by parents and adults. It is their responsibility to follow their child's social media accounts, skim text messages, check the websites that their child visited, and know the passwords to their child's email, social media accounts, and cell phones. It is also important to search online for information available about their child to ensure responsible use and maintain safety. Finally, it is essential for parents and adults to role model appropriate device use including the amount of time spent on devices and the use of devices around others. Most of these strategies should be used, discussed, and updated on an ongoing basis to address the changing social needs of children and teens as they get older, and with the emergence of new technologies.

The pandemic has increased our use of technology and devices in the context of social distancing and remote learning. This has altered our views of what is age-appropriate [screen time](#). In this context, it is important to look at the type of digital use occurring and how the experience is for the user. The use may be FaceTime to stay connected with friends and grandparents and therefore, the experience was an interactive consumption and a positive. Another positive tech experience can be from content creation where a student is using technology to create music or art. Some tech experiences, however, may leave a user drained, with poor attention span and feeling fragmented. There may be feelings of inadequacies comparing oneself to the "best life" posted by another that is far from reality. Scrolling is a passive consumption, taking up mental space and ultimately a more negative tech experience. The passive consumption can be a soothing experience that releases dopamine and serve as relief or an escape. We protect students from the hazards of dopamine releasing drugs and alcohol, and we need to do the same when online use becomes excessive or interferes with day-to-day functioning. Our students' screen time amount is one factor to measure, but a more important indicator is making sure the online use is responsible and it does not get in the way of [sleep](#), homework, family conversation, friendships, and outside exercise activities. A great way for families to have clarity of expectations for technology and device use is to create a [Family Media Plan](#).

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