# Digital Citizenship: Promoting Positive and Ethical Behaviors Online

According to Common Sense Media, youth ages 8 to 12 spend nearly 6 hours per day using some form of media and teens spend more than 9 hours. Technology has greatly transformed our world including the way we educate and communicate with youth. Even adults use digital media in the work place and to connect with friends. It seems it is close to impossible to avoid digital media. Digital media is here to stay and we need to prepare youth to be healthy digital citizens.

Digital citizenship refers to the responsible and ethical use of digital media to communicate and engage in society, understanding the risks involved in using digital media and how to keep your information safe. Common Sense Media has identified 8 main topic areas that set the framework for digital citizenship.

- **Self-image and identity** – The way we are presented online may be different from our offline persona. It is important to help youth understand that their relationships and reputation may be affected by their digital identity.
- **Relationships and communication** – Encourage youth to use intrapersonal and interpersonal skills when communicating online. According to Pew Research Center, 55% of teens text their friends daily and 68% of social-media using teens experienced some form of drama online. Using interpersonal skills when communicating through text can help reduce drama.
- **Digital footprint and reputation** – The digital world is permanent. Once the information or photo is posted on a social media page, it is out there for good. Talk to youth about being cautious when posting information online because the information can follow them, particularly when applying to college or for a new job.
- **Cyberbullying and digital drama** – Educate youth on what to do if they are involved in a cyberbullying situation. Encourage youth to seek out a trusted adult if they or someone they know is being bullied online. For more information go to: http://scipnebraska.com/resources/resources/bullying-prevention.html
- **Information literacy** – There is a great deal of information available on the internet. Help youth identify credible websites and evaluate information critically online. Utilize schools and local libraries to teach youth information literacy skills.
- **Internet safety** – Have discussions with youth about how to be safe online. Youth are often targets of online predators. Educate youth on how to determine inappropriate versus appropriate contact online and how to avoid strangers. A 2015 study by Pew Research Center found that 57% of teens met at least one new friend online. Have discussions with youth about who they are communicating with online.
- **Privacy and security** – Youth need to develop strategies to manage online information and avoid scams. Educate youth on how to develop a strong password and help them adjust privacy settings on social media sites.
- **Creative credit and copyright** – Inform youth on how to avoid plagiarism and how to give credit to authors from online sources. School and local libraries have tools available to educate youth on copyright laws.

Common Sense Media and CyberWise offer school-based curriculum and resources for parents on digital citizenship. Education needs to continue both at home and at school. There are many benefits to technology, but there are also dangers that youth need be aware of. Collaboratively, schools and parents can help youth become healthy digital citizens.

If you are feeling overwhelmed or do not know where to begin, start with these basic tips.

**Basics and Best Practices:**

Use technology together – Parents and youth using technology together is a great way to educate kids, particularly elementary age students, on how to use technology appropriately. Teachers can also take advantage of the learning opportunity in the classroom.

Policy – With schools providing devices like Chrome Books, policies centered on technology are more important than ever. Become familiar with the policies at your school and talk to your kids about the policies and set boundaries at home.

Limit usage – Limit screen time in the evening, especially around bed-time. Shut-off phones 30 minutes before bed to optimize sleep. Consider the age of your child when setting limits. The younger the child, the less time they should be spending on digital media.

Monitor – Be aware of the websites your child is visiting and the apps your child has on their phone. Become familiar with the apps they are using by using them yourself and reading the reviews.

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The opioid/prescription pain medication epidemic is already a very serious and problematic issue in the United States. Now there is an added danger for those who take prescriptions drugs that are not prescribed by a doctor and provided to them by a pharmacy.

Over the last year, there has been a dramatic increase in the production and sale of counterfeit prescription drugs as well as the pill press machines used to make the counterfeit pills. These machines are reaching the US border in record numbers.

The machines being seized today are high-tech machines. These machines are capable of making the counterfeit pills look almost exactly like prescription drugs, but as we know, the pills actually contain something different.

Sometimes the counterfeit drugs are harmless placebo pills, while other times, these fake pills contain drugs such as Fentanyl and now more recently, Carfentanil.

Fentanyl is used for medical purposes to help ease extreme pain for patients in the final stages of diseases and it is up to 100 times more powerful than morphine and 50 times more powerful than heroin. It is the most potent opioid available for medical use. Of course, it should be noted that most of the Fentanyl on the streets today is illegally manufactured and then bought and sold over the internet. It is believed that Prince overdosed accidentally on counterfeit pills that contained Fentanyl.

Carfentanil is a powerful tranquilizer commonly used by zoologists and veterinarians for elephants and other large animals. Carfentanil is an analgesic potency that's 10,000 times stronger than morphine and 100 times more potent than <u>fentanyl</u>, according to the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

The dark reality is that adults and youth alike have been severely poisoned by these counterfeit prescription drugs containing Fentanyl, Carfentanil or other life threatening chemicals.

It's happening at such alarming rates the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and local health agencies have issued safety alerts to warn people about counterfeit pills being sold.

It is important to note that these counterfeit drugs are not being sold in pharmacies but rather on the street or online. As we all should know, it's already dangerous to use prescription drugs for any reason except why they were prescribed to you and an overdose can happen even when the pills do contain what they're supposed to so using any drug and/or pill that doesn't come from a medical office, hospital, or pharmacy is especially dangerous. Even if they look like prescription drugs, they could be tainted or fake and that could be deadly.

Remember prescription drugs are designed to cure or alleviate the symptoms of various medical conditions. According to the National Institute of Health, approximately 20 percent of Americans have used prescription drugs for nonmedical purposes. If you believe that you or someone you know may be struggling with prescription drug abuse, you can call and talk with someone.

Listed below are a few National Helplines for substance abuse and addiction.

- **Alcohol & Drug Addiction Resource Center: 800-390-4056**
- **Boys Town National Hotline: 800-448-3000**
- **National Drug Information Treatment and Referral Hotline: 800-662-HELP (4357) 24/7 information, support, treatment options and referrals to local rehab**
- **Alcohol and Drug Abuse Helpline and Treatment:** 800-234-0420

Sources:

https://www.therecoveryvillage.com
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# The Effects of Social Media on Mental Health

1 in 5 youth have a diagnosable mental, emotional or behavioral health disorder (National Alliance on Mental Illness).  While some experiences or activities can promote mental health and well-being, others have the potential to hinder our wellness.   According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, social media has the potential to negatively affect the mental well-being of young kids and teens.   Adolescence is an important period of growth and development.  There is no doubt that technology plays a major role in the lives of our youth.  As such, it is important that we pay attention to how technology affects them.

Modern teens are learning to do most of their communication online or via text messaging. When we learn to do most of our communication looking at a screen instead of another person, we miss out on very critical social skills, such as the art of talking, relating to people face to face (reading body language) and navigating social negotiations.  According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, virtual interactions come with less risk for some teens, resulting in increased anxiety during real-life social interactions.

Some of the adverse risks associated with social media use include cyberbullying, depression, high levels of anxiety, low levels of self-esteem and FOMO (fear of missing out). Social media's filtered sense of reality can lead to critically comparing and moments of envy, leading to lower self-esteem and depression.  Additionally, excessive monitoring of friends online behaviors can lead to feelings of exclusion and turn into increased social anxiety.

It is important to note that there are some benefits associated with social media.   Because of the individual nature of kids and teens, we can't assume that all youth respond in the same way to social networking.  How teens use social media matters.  One of the best ways adults can ensure that kids are engaging in healthy online experiences is to have conversations with young people about their socially networked life.  Ask them:

- Why do you use social media?
- How does it make you feel?
- Who are your "friends" that you follow or communicate with online?
- What do you like best?
- What isn't so great?

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Other tips:

- **Face-to-Face time is key to youth mental health.** While social media can provide a sense of support and belonging and strengthen existing friendships, it isn't a replacement for "real life" social experiences.
- **Encourage youth to get involved**. Finding an interest, hobby, volunteer project or enjoyable activity to engage in not only can open doors for more face-face interaction, but can also help build self-esteem and confidence.
- **Create "Screen Free" Time.** Set aside meal times, car rides or other times of the day to connect without screens.
- **Lights Off, Screens Off.** Sleep deprivation greatly impacts young people's mental health. Make sure kids/teens unplug before bed.
- **Set a good example as adults.** It's up to parents to set a good example of what healthy "device" usage looks like. Be "fully present" when interacting and communicating with youth. Kids need to see our faces, not our heads bent over screens.

References: American Academy of Pediatrics; Child Mind Institute; Psychology Today; National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).