



# Easy steps to help learners become Digital Citizens

Using your experience as an educator to guide children and young people on their path towards digital citizenship



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# What does it mean to be a citizen?

■ We are all citizens of the country in which we live. However, in today's digitally rich society, most of us inhabit overlapping "real" and "virtual" spaces, the borders defined only by the platforms we are using at any given time. Even when we are offline, we are constantly being influenced and impacted by the digital technology all around us.

■ Being a citizen means that you have certain rights and responsibilities common to everyone, that you actively contribute to society, and you try to make the world a better, friendlier place for the next generation. The same applies for digital citizens, who need to understand, respect and protect their rights and responsibilities both online and offline.

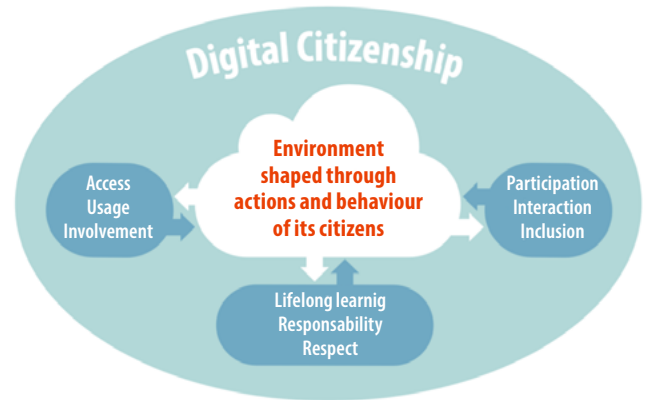
■ It is the role of professionals in education, and families, to help children and young people develop the competences to do this.

# What is a digital citizen?

■ Digital Citizenship is like a frame, and in some ways a filter, that guides the way people use digital technology and behave online, and makes them aware of the impact it can have on their lives now and in the future. Digital citizens are lifelong learners, aware of the need for a critical understanding of the rapid changes that digital technology is bringing to the world. They:

- ▶ are open to other cultures and other people's perspectives;
- ▶ are able to use digital technology responsibly and effectively, and know how to behave online;
- ▶ cooperate meaningfully both on- and offline, and contribute positively to society;
- ▶ understand, protect and respect their own rights, and those of everyone else;
- ▶ carefully manage their own private information and that of the people they interact with.

■ Digital citizens make the most of the opportunities brought by digital technology, are conscious of the influence of digital technology in daily life, and know how to avoid the risks and overcome its pitfalls.



# Supporting a digitally-connected generation

■ Participation, cooperation and learning activities used to take place in the home, the school, the neighbourhood or the local community. But nowadays, children of all ages do a lot of these activities "digitally-connected", through mobile phones, apps, laptops, tablets, toys, and even wearable devices like e-watches. Things like video games, cars and the TV in our living room are becoming increasingly more connected to the internet.

■ Digital citizenship education helps children and young people use digital technology creatively and responsibly to communicate, explore, work, learn, play and participate in society. It is an ongoing process that fosters the values and attitudes required to overcome discrimination and stereotypes and actively contribute to making the digital world an open, inclusive, creative space where people respect each other's rights, and each other.

■ Digital citizenship education provides young people with benchmarks that will help them become:

- ▶ 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.

## Where do educators begin?

■ Children and young people participate in many different types of digital activities. In order to be as comprehensive as possible, the Council of Europe has subdivided these into ten different areas, or domains, that are broadly grouped into three clusters: Being Online, Well-being Online, and Rights Online, as illustrated here-below. The division into

domains makes it easier for professionals in education to spot the more specific needs of learners, and the competences required to respond to these needs.

**Being Online:** the 3 domains in this group are related to the effective, creative and insightful use of digital technology in widely varying contexts. Focus is on critical thinking and the importance of meaningful, equitable participation in open digital spaces.

**Well-being Online:** the 3 domains in this group underline the need to act ethically and with empathy both online and offline, and encourage balanced, ergonomic digital practices.

**Rights Online:** the 4 domains in this group aim to make digital citizens more conscious of their rights and responsibilities, and ways to counter the impact of digital technology on privacy, security and also consumerism.

■ Professionals in education can help empower learners to become digital citizens. In this guide, we explain some of the easy steps to follow, to help them master what it takes to act responsibly and respectfully online.



# Checklist for professionals in education

Before looking at each domain separately, you may want to go through this checklist to spot where your students could be needing extra help. It could also be used as a conversation starter, to get children and young people talking about their digital activities with you.

## BEING ONLINE

- ▶ Our students use digital technology with peers in class to do projects and explore new things (for example, online museums or eScience labs). YES  NO
- ▶ They know how to use search engines effectively, and compare the results they get. YES  NO
- ▶ They know how to discern between reliable and unreliable information and check the validity of the information sources they use. YES  NO
- ▶ They use digital technology creatively, understand the concept of copyright, and are able to share the content they create. YES  NO
- ▶ They are good listeners and observers, able to participate in open debates, and respect the point of view of their peers. YES  NO

## WELL-BEING ONLINE

- ▶ Our students are conscious of the amount of time they spend online, and the need to take regular breaks from online activity (in class and elsewhere). YES  NO
- ▶ They are aware of the importance of maintaining a healthy balance between face-to-face, physical and online activities. YES  NO
- ▶ We have set up a system in our school for all students to have someone to turn to whenever they are bothered by anything they come across online. YES  NO

- ▶ In class, we talk about online behaviour, as well as digital footprints and profile settings. YES  NO
- ▶ We openly discuss the focus of the online groups students belong to, and how to interact positively and meaningfully. YES  NO

## RIGHTS ONLINE

- ▶ Our students are aware of their online rights and responsibilities, and know what it means to use technology responsibly and ethically. YES  NO
- ▶ They are aware of the sort of information that should be kept private about themselves and the people they interact with, and why. YES  NO
- ▶ We have open discussions about the downsides and pitfalls of the digital world, and ways we could help make things better. YES  NO
- ▶ All digital technology in our establishment is equipped with security software and protected by firewalls. YES  NO
- ▶ Our students know how to check where consumer products are sourced, and are aware of the impact their consumer habits may have on the environment. YES  NO

# BEING ONLINE

## Access and Inclusion

Ensuring that all children and young people have equitable access to the internet, and opportunities to learn the values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding they need to express their opinions respectfully, online and offline.

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Include digital citizenship in daily classroom activities. Don't wait until learners are equipped with digital technology to start developing their digital citizenship competences!
- ▶ Give students examples of why and how they can defend their own and other people's right to access technology, and why no-one should be left out of activities.
- ▶ Teach students to stand up for themselves and others if they ever feel excluded at school, or at any time online.



### Did you know...

... that, at the societal level, promoting inclusion is about reshaping social and educational frameworks so that citizens are encouraged to evolve and are given the space to do so.

### HOW TO

- ▶ Promote a positive school environment, where learners enjoy equitable opportunities and are made to feel part of the school community, regardless of gender, disability, race or culture.
- ▶ Together with students, look online or in the daily news for stories about inclusion and the importance of diversity. What can society do to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities, online and offline?
- ▶ Encourage students to speak out if they ever feel uncomfortable or excluded online or offline. Discuss the notion of disability, and ask them to look for online platforms that cater to special needs.

### 4 building blocks for anywhere-anytime learning

- ▶ Develop the skills to learn independently
- ▶ Take action, don't just think about it
- ▶ Build self-esteem by contributing positively to the community
- ▶ Interact meaningfully with others

# BEING ONLINE

## Learning and Creativity

Helping students become lifelong learners and use digital tools creatively in broadly ranging contexts.

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Use technology in class in ways that will make learning a positive experience for all.
- ▶ Stimulate creativity: teach students to use digital tools creatively to publish material online.
- ▶ Talk about ownership of creative works to help students better understand copyright issues.



### Did you know...

... that, in the growing complexity and unpredictability of our fast-moving world, creativity helps citizens adapt to new environments, respond to emerging societal needs, and find solutions to the many challenges that technology raises.

### HOW TO

- ▶ Include coding activities in study programmes to improve learners' understanding of the way digital technology works.
- ▶ Visit a museum, a local fair or an exhibition with students, then get them to look for further information online and prepare a presentation about their experience. Show them how to publish their presentations on the school blog.
- ▶ Invite students to choose their own medium (for example, write a news article, create a piece of art or a video) to present their ideas on a topic they care about, then get the whole class to look at their creation. How would they feel if someone else took credit for it? Discuss copyright, and have them look up Creative Commons.

**Creative Commons (CC)** licenses give everyone from individuals to large institutions a standardized way to grant the public permission to use their creative work under copyright law. There are 6 CC license types (please visit: <https://creativecommons.org/about/cclicenses/>).



# BEING ONLINE

## Media and Information Literacy

Developing learners' ability to critically understand and interpret digital media content, and to use digital technology meaningfully to express their own ideas.

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ In class, include activities that encourage learners from an early age to analyse and assess information.
- ▶ Show learners how easily content can be uploaded to the internet, and why it is so important that all information is double-checked before it is posted online.
- ▶ Help learners find the best ways to use search engines when conducting research, and build skills to analyse, compare and validate results.
- ▶ Explore and discuss with learners new and emerging technology such as wearable technology devices and ChatGPT, and how this technology is changing the world we live in.



### Did you know...

... that it is absolutely essential that elementary education enables future citizens to understand, to criticise and to create information. Through education, digital citizens must learn to think critically to meaningfully engage with and participate in their community.

### HOW TO

- ▶ With learners, choose a topic and ask them to find out more about it using a search engine. Does information differ from one site to another? How can they check that it has been written or published by a credible source? Is it possible to differentiate between information and ads?
- ▶ Check out the IFLA poster "[How to spot fake news](#)" in class, and discuss the 8 points illustrated.
- ▶ Get learners to show each other ways they refine their web searches for more targeted search results. Are they aware that by putting a word or phrase inside quotes "", they can get results that more precisely match the query? In what other ways can search results be improved?
- ▶ Get learners to think about the skills needed to post content on the internet. Since anyone, and not only experts, can post information on the internet, how can we tell if online information is accurate or true? Is there any way to tell if content has been generated by humans or machines (for example, ChatGPT)?

**Fake news:** stories that are probably false, that appeal to a lot of people, and are often read or watched by millions. Fake news and information have become much easier to create and more difficult to spot because of AI applications such as deep fakes.

# WELL-BEING ONLINE

## Ethics and Empathy

Providing opportunities for children and young people to learn about equality, justice, openness to diversity and much more, and encouraging them to respect the feelings and perspectives of others.

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Talk about ethics in class. Make sure that learners understand the meaning of empathy and the importance of being attentive to the needs and views of others.
- ▶ Help learners to be more accepting of themselves and others by pointing out that we are all unique, and feel and think about things differently.
- ▶ Point out the importance of multiple viewpoints, and that differing views can comfortably exist side by side.
- ▶ Discuss bullying and hate speech in class, and get learners to suggest ways that empathy can be fostered.



### Did you know...

... that positive online interaction depends to a large extent on empathy.

### HOW TO

- ▶ In groups, get learners to create a poster listing the ethical principles they feel we should all follow offline and online.
- ▶ Organise role-play activities to encourage learners to reflect on their own feelings, and observe and think about the feelings of others.
- ▶ Organise class discussions to highlight how views between learners often differ; this will help them learn to value diversity.
- ▶ Conduct a class discussion about a recent story that may have been published online or in the media about bullying or hate speech. How would learners feel if they had been in the shoes of the victim?

**Empathy** is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others.

# WELL-BEING ONLINE

## Health and Well-being

Building attitudes, skills, values and knowledge that help children and young people understand how digital technology can positively or negatively influence their body and mind.

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Discuss with learners the amount of time they spend online, and how this could impact their health and well-being.
- ▶ Positive interactions in class go a long way towards building learners' resilience, which is closely linked to their level of confidence and self-esteem.
- ▶ The safety, health (i.e. posture, ergonomics), and well-being of young people should be at the top of the mind of educators when they make choices about digital devices and content to be used in class.



... that the integration of online life into real life means that the internet is not isolated from wider society, but a part of it. This means that online life can replicate harmful discriminatory dynamics or behaviours that exist in wider society: what happens offline is brought online, and vice versa.

### HOW TO

- ▶ Ask learners to keep a log for a week, noting the things they do and the time they spend on- and offline. Discuss their logs in class to draw their attention to healthy and less healthy practices and pastimes.
- ▶ Encourage learners to build and be proud of their own personal skills and abilities, rather than letting themselves be over-influenced by the opinion of others.
- ▶ In groups, ask learners to research healthy online practices and ergonomics and create a poster about the topic.

For the health and well-being of learners, it is important that they learn to balance the time they spend online with physical and outdoor activities.

# WELL-BEING ONLINE

## ePresence and Communications

Developing the personal and interpersonal qualities needed to maintain a positive self-image online and enjoy fulfilling online interactions.

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Help students improve the quality of their ePresence by discussing in class more responsible ways of using their favourite online platforms.
- ▶ Underline the importance of being polite and respectful in all on- and offline communications, and the advantages it will bring.
- ▶ Explain what digital footprints are, and the impact a negative footprint can have on future career opportunities.
- ▶ Point out some of the essential differences between on- and offline communication. For example, discuss the way less visible body language and facial expressions in online communication can lead to words and actions being more easily misinterpreted or having a greater impact.



### Did you know...

... that digital citizens should be able to create and maintain a healthy ePresence and communicate responsibly, without negatively impacting the rights of others.

### HOW TO

- ▶ Ask students to print out one of their online profiles, and post it on the classroom wall for everyone to see. Are they happy to do this? Why should it bother them since it is posted online for all the world to see?
- ▶ In class, create a netiquette guide showing the top 10 rules that should be respected online. Then ask students to keep a netiquette log for 2 weeks to see which rules are the trickiest to follow.
- ▶ Ask students to conduct an online search on their own name. Any surprises? Would they show everything they found about themselves to their parents? Does their footprint correspond with what they had expected?
- ▶ Ask students to work in small groups and make up something funny about an imaginary friend that they would have no problem posting online. Then ask groups to read their story out loud in class. Would they have used the same language and said the same thing about someone in a face-to-face situation?

**A digital footprint** is a trail of data we leave behind when using the internet. It includes the websites we visit, messages we send, information we post...

# RIGHTS ONLINE

## Active Participation

Playing an active role and making responsible decisions in on- and offline communities to positively contribute to creating a better digital environment.

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Organise activities that enable young people to understand the importance of active participation and the fun it can bring.
- ▶ Organise class debates on democracy and freedom of expression, and point out why it is so important for everyone to be able to express their opinion and views.
- ▶ With students, research and discuss ways that certain cultural and/or political contexts may interfere with the rights of citizens to actively and freely participate in on- and offline communities.



### Did you know...

... that the values and attitudes we adopt online are constantly shaping the digital environment, just as the actions of citizens in offline communities shape the world we live in.

### HOW TO

- ▶ Build on the 'real world' experience of learners at group events such as summer camps, workshops or sporting activities, to highlight the value and pleasure of active participation.
- ▶ Conduct a class debate on a fun topic such as choosing a new colour for the front of the school building. Ask students to come up with suggestions and 'sell' their idea to their peers. Finish the session with a vote to show students the power of influence, and the importance of the democratic act of voting.
- ▶ Talk about a country in the world where active participation is limited, and discuss what this means for its citizens and for democracy.

**Participation** means that people are involved in decisions that affect their lives. Through participation people can identify opportunities and strategies for action, and build solidarity to effect change.

# RIGHTS ONLINE

## Rights and Responsibilities

Knowing and understanding our rights and responsibilities as citizens in the physical world, and applying this knowledge in the online world.

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Educate learners to defend their rights and respect their responsibilities, and to respect the rights of others.
- ▶ Discuss the rights and responsibilities of users of online platforms, and the importance of making sure they are respected.
- ▶ Discuss with students exactly what information they may be giving away when they sign up to online platforms and use them.



### Did you know...

... that a first step to becoming an active digital citizen is learning to understand and respect digital rights and responsibilities.

### HOW TO

- ▶ Ask students to make a list of the rights and responsibilities they feel they have at school, and discuss with them the ways in which these may be different in the online world.
- ▶ Look at a few of the most popular online platforms used by learners, and check the Terms and Conditions of a few of them in class. Do all platforms protect users' rights such as respecting their privacy, filtering out harmful content, and blocking contact requests from strangers?
- ▶ Many top social media platforms state:  
*"...[when you post content] you grant us a non-exclusive, transferable, sub-licensable, royalty-free and worldwide licence to host, use, distribute, modify, run, copy, publicly perform or display, translate and create derivative works of your content."*  
What does this really mean, and is it acceptable? Which of our rights are jeopardized by such terms?

**Rights** are fundamental rules about what is allowed of people or owed to people within a legal or social system, for example, the right to freedom of expression. **Responsibilities** are duties or tasks that people are required or expected to do, for example, to protect others.

# RIGHTS ONLINE

## Privacy and Security

Learning how to protect the information and personal data of the people we interact with, and understanding the impact that our online actions and behaviour can have on others.

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Make sure that your school installs and regularly updates filters, firewalls and antivirus software, and takes special care of students' private data. Conduct fun school-wide activities that teach students how to create and manage strong passwords.
- ▶ In class, organise activities that will help students understand which types of information are private, shouldn't be shared, or can be shared with anyone. Do they realise how much information they may be inadvertently giving away online?
- ▶ Talk about cookies, and how important it is to properly manage them to protect our data.
- ▶ Discuss ways we can protect ourselves from spam, phishing, scams and malware (e.g. viruses, bots, ransomware) by using appropriate protective tools. Remind students never to reply to emails and to scan any files they unexpectedly receive before opening them – even if they seem to have been sent by people they know. They should be careful about clicking on unknown links too.



### Did you know...

... that cookies are small pieces of data stored on our computers by the websites we visit. They record our online activity and our browsing history.

### HOW TO

- ▶ A trick for creating strong passwords is to make up an easy-to-remember sentence containing at least eight words, and use the first letter of each word as a password. "I like to eat pizza with salami and cheese" becomes "iltepw sac". Then, change certain letters to capitals, use symbols (&, @, !), and/or replace a word or two with a number.
- ▶ Analyse the privacy policy of a popular social media platform with students. What data and content does the platform collect, and how is this used and shared? Show how privacy settings can be adjusted, so that what is posted online is not publicly visible and is displayed only to selected groups of people.
- ▶ Visit a website with students, and discuss which types of cookies are really necessary and which ones can be rejected. Use a popular browser to show how cookies and history can be deleted.
- ▶ Download a few well-known phishing emails, and get students to spot ways that they can identify and avoid scams and fraud. Show them how antivirus software can protect their data.

A private or "incognito" browser lets you browse the internet privately. When you exit the Incognito Browser, everything you've done in the private browser will be erased, including history, cookies, and sessions.

# RIGHTS ONLINE

## Consumer Awareness

Learning to navigate safely in online social spaces as a user, a consumer, and also as an entrepreneur.

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Discuss the rights and responsibilities of consumers in class, pointing out that they remain the same regardless of whether we are offline or online.
- ▶ In class, include activities that foster entrepreneurship and encourage learners to work towards common goals, e.g. creating a mockup e-commerce website. What terms and conditions would they include?
- ▶ Talk about ads, and ways in which we may be influenced by advertising.
- ▶ Discuss sustainable consumerism in class, and how consumers can defend their rights and respect their responsibilities offline and online.



### Did you know...

... that consumer education enables even very young children to understand how they can play their part in making the world a better, more equitable place.

### HOW TO

- ▶ Work with learners to create a list of consumer rights and responsibilities, for example, when buying electronic devices, toys, or clothing in a store. Work through the list with them to discuss how these rights and responsibilities play out online.
- ▶ Look at a few commercial websites, and test them against the checklist of minimum requirements at the bottom of this page. Do students think that the terms and conditions are easy to understand? Are they adequate? Is anything missing?
- ▶ In small groups, ask students to choose some ads they would like to work on (e.g. for gadgets, toys, food, sweets, etc.). Their task is to analyse the techniques and strategies used to make us want to buy these products.
- ▶ Invite students to make a wish-list of things they would like to have, then get them to do an online search to find out where the items are sourced and produced. Does the national or local economy of the country-of-origin benefit from the production, and are fair-trade norms respected?

### Checklist of requirements of e-commerce websites

- ✓ The company producing and selling the product is clearly identified;
- ✓ Product characteristics, terms of service and warranty are easily accessible;
- ✓ The privacy policy shows how consumer data is stored, deleted, made accessible to consumer;
- ✓ A padlock and "https://'" are visible on the payment site to indicate that transactions are secure.









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

- ▶ Data Protection Leaflet: Protecting Privacy and Personal Data (2022)
- ▶ Digital Citizenship Education Handbook (edition 2022)
- ▶ Educating for a Video Game Culture: A map for teachers and parents (2021)
- ▶ Act for eliminating exclusion and bullying online and offline (2021)
- ▶ Internet Literacy Handbook (2017)

Further information available at:

<https://www.coe.int/dce>

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

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