Digital Citizenship and Online Safety

What Is Digital Citizenship?

Digital citizenship is the ability to navigate digital environments safely, responsibly, and respectfully. It involves making informed choices, protecting personal information, evaluating what we see online, and contributing positively to digital communities.

Why Digital Citizenship Matters

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Proverbs 4:23

We encourage students to become discerning digital learners who use technology wisely, maintain healthy boundaries, and treat others with respect. As children grow, the goal shifts from learning basic safety habits with adult guidance to developing the judgment and independence they need to navigate digital life responsibly.

Choose the section below that best matches your student's age and experience. Families can also explore the parent resources and safety supports near the end of this page.

Student Resources and Activities

Explore age-appropriate resources and activities to help students build digital citizenship skills. Choose the grade range that best fits your learner, then open the resource list to explore the options.

Early Elementary: Building Safe Digital Habits

Young learners benefit from simple explanations, guided practice, and regular conversations with trusted adults. Introduce the importance of keeping personal information private, asking for help, recognizing unsafe situations, and being kind online.

Early Elementary Resources and Activities (Grades K–4)

- BrainPOP Jr.: Internet Safety – an introductory video and activities about safe online behaviour for younger students.

- Be Internet Awesome (Google) – interactive activities and family resources that introduce privacy, respectful communication, recognizing scams, and seeking help.
- BrainPOP digital citizenship videos and activities – explore additional topics with older elementary students as they develop their digital skills.
- RightNow Media: *McGee and Me!* – videos featuring themes such as bullying and respectful behaviour. For access, email Margaret Basaraba for an invitation.
- **Featured video: *Safety Smart: Online!*** – Disney characters Timon and Pumbaa introduce online privacy, responsible digital citizenship, thinking before sharing, and what to do about bullying. This is a useful starting point for Kindergarten to Grade 2 learners.

  If the video does not play above, watch *Safety Smart: Online!* on Disney Wild About Safety.
- **Sora eBooks and audiobooks:** Digital Citizenship and Online Safety Collection (Grades K–4) – read or listen together and use the books to start conversations about safe, kind, and responsible technology use.

Middle School: Developing Digital Independence

As students use more apps, games, messaging tools, and online research resources, they need opportunities to practise making responsible choices. Focus on privacy, digital footprints, online friendships, cyberbullying, evaluating information, and knowing when to ask for support.

Middle School Resources and Activities (Grades 5–9)

- HCOS Digital Literacy Mini Unit Study Kit (Grades 6–9) – explore news media, social media, and digital research through an HCOS learning resource.
- BrainPOP Digital Citizenship Teaching Resources (Grades K–8) – lessons on online safety, cyberbullying, copyright, social media, and evaluating online sources.
- Common Sense Education: Digital Literacy and Well-Being Curriculum – select age-appropriate K–8 lessons on online relationships, privacy, media literacy, and healthy technology habits.
- Focused Education: Student Security Awareness Lessons (Ages 12–14) – Canadian teaching materials on data privacy, online identity, cyberbullying, social media influence, and cybersecurity.
- **Sora eBooks and audiobooks:** Digital Citizenship and Online Safety Collection (Grades 5–9) – books to prompt discussion about increasingly independent online decisions.

High School: Navigating Digital Life Responsibly

As high school students gain digital independence, they need to protect their privacy and reputation, evaluate online information, and recognize how digital platforms influence what they see. Essential skills include securing accounts, identifying scams and harassment, respecting consent and intellectual property, maintaining healthy boundaries, seeking help when needed, and contributing positively online.

High School Resources and Activities (Grades 10–12)

- Common Sense Education: Digital Literacy and Well-Being Curriculum (Grades 9–12) – free, structured educator lessons covering digital identity, online relationships, media literacy, online harms, and digital well-being.
- MediaSmarts: Digital Media Literacy Framework (Grades 9–12) – Canadian lessons and activities supporting critical evaluation of digital media, ethical online participation, and informed decision-making. Some lessons address mature topics; select materials appropriate to your learners.
- CIVIX CTRL-F: Student Verification Activities – videos and activities that teach students to investigate sources, check claims, and trace information. Educators can also explore the full CTRL-F program.
- Focused Education: Student Security Awareness Lessons (Ages 15–18) – Canadian, teacher-developed materials covering cybersecurity, information security, the impact of security breaches, and cybersecurity ethics.
- **Sora eBooks and audiobooks:** Digital Citizenship and Online Safety Collection (Grades 10–12) – books and audiobooks to support reflection on digital responsibilities and choices.

For Parents and Caregivers

Digital citizenship develops through ongoing conversations, shared expectations, and opportunities to practise sound judgment. Younger children generally need closer supervision, while older students benefit from progressively greater independence combined with open communication and clear boundaries.

Ways to Support Your Child

- **Discuss online responsibility:** Talk about the websites, apps, games, and communities your child uses, and encourage questions without judgment.
- **Set clear, age-appropriate expectations:** Agree on safe browsing, sharing information, respectful communication, and screen-free times.
- **Support younger learners with shared-space device use:** Using devices in common areas can support supervision while children establish safe habits.

- **Encourage balance:** Make room for rest, exercise, offline interests, and face-to-face relationships.
- **Teach critical thinking:** Ask who created online content, why it was shared, whether claims can be verified, and how it may influence choices.
- **Build independence with trust:** Revisit family expectations as students mature and encourage them to ask for help when something feels unsafe.

Parent and Caregiver Resources

- ProtectKidsOnline.ca – Canadian guidance for parents on emerging online risks and age-appropriate conversations about safety.
- The White Hatter: Free Online Parenting Books – practical guides for navigating technology, online safety, and digital parenting.
- MediaSmarts: Managing Media with Teens – suggestions for supporting responsible, independent media use during adolescence.
- Common Sense Media: Cyberbullying Resources for Families – parent advice and articles related to cyberbullying and online behaviour.
- *Raising Digitally Responsible Youth: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers* (2026, PDF) – a Safer Schools Together guide addressing family expectations, social media, and digital risks.
- Common Sense Education: Family Engagement Workshops – conversation and workshop resources for families navigating digital life.

For Educators

Explore the Digital Wellness Collection for Educators in Sora for professional reading and reflection.

Parental Controls and Digital Well-Being

Parental controls can help families establish healthy screen time boundaries, filter online content, and support safer technology use. These tools are most effective alongside regular conversations, clear expectations, and opportunities for children to develop independence. No filtering or monitoring tool can guarantee complete online safety.

Built-In Parental Controls

Start by exploring the controls already available on your family's devices. These tools generally do not require a separate parental-control subscription and may provide everything your family needs.

- **Apple Screen Time and Family Sharing** – set downtime, app limits, and content restrictions on supported Apple devices.
- **Google Family Link** – manage screen time, apps, and selected content settings on compatible Android devices and Chromebooks. Supervision features are more limited on

iPhones and iPads.

- **Microsoft Family Safety** – manage screen time on Windows and Xbox devices, set certain app and game limits, and use web filtering through Microsoft Edge.

Additional Parental Control Software

Families who need more extensive controls across different devices may wish to explore **Qustodio**. Depending on the device and subscription, it offers website filtering, screen time limits, app management, and activity reporting. A limited free option and paid plans are available. See Qustodio's getting-started guide for setup information.

Before choosing a tool: Check compatibility with your child's devices and operating systems, the information collected, and which features require payment. Filtering can work differently across browsers, apps, and mobile networks. These resources are provided for information, not as HCOS endorsements.

Remember: Explain which controls are in place and why. Choose the least intrusive tools that meet your family's needs, revisit boundaries as children mature, and make sure they know they can come to you when something online feels unsafe or confusing.

Online Safety: Getting Help and Reporting Concerns

If something online makes you or your child feel unsafe, threatened, pressured, or embarrassed, talk to a trusted adult or school staff member. Students should know that asking for help is always appropriate. If someone is threatening or exploiting a young person online, avoid engaging with the person and seek guidance on preserving relevant evidence without forwarding or sharing intimate images.

Support and Reporting Resources

- Canadian Centre for Child Protection: High School Resources – age-appropriate videos and information about healthy relationships, consent, boundaries, sextortion, and seeking help. Some topics may be sensitive.
- NeedHelpNow.ca – guidance for youth harmed online or concerned about the sharing of nude or abusive images created when they were under 18.
- Cybertip.ca – Canada's national tipline for reporting online child sexual exploitation and related concerns.
- Kids Help Phone – free, private support for young people. Call 1-800-668-6868 at any time, or text CONNECT to 686868 for crisis support.

Immediate danger: Call 911. For school-related concerns, contact your student's support teacher or another trusted HCOS staff member so they can direct you to appropriate school supports.

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