



Integrating Digital Citizenship into Refugee and Immigrant Youth Programs

While online education, services, and socializing have served as important lifelines during the COVID-19 pandemic, increased screen time also increases the risk of children and youth exposure to digital threats and harms. Service providers can play an important role in ensuring that youth have the knowledge, skills, and support to stay safe online. This guide is designed to help staff integrate digital citizenship education into existing programs, with a focus on digital safety, security, and rights and responsibilities.

What is Digital Citizenship?

Digital citizenship is a relatively new concept that refers to how individuals participate in society online. It requires “hard” skills for making technology work, “soft” social-emotional skills for interacting with others online, higher-order thinking skills such as critical analysis and reasoning, and the application of all of these in order to find, use, create, and share information, ideas, products, and tools.¹

Digital citizenship education involves fostering skills and behaviors necessary to utilize the benefits of technology and digital media while avoiding potential risks and harms. It aims to increase individuals’ ability to participate in online environments in safe, secure, responsible, and ethical ways. While there are many different aspects of digital citizenship and digital citizenship education, this guide focuses on **digital safety, security, and rights and responsibilities**:

¹ Adapted from: Rogers-Whitehead, Carrie. 2019. *Digital Citizenship: Teaching Strategies and Practice from the Field*. Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield. pp. 2-6.

Digital Safety: The ability to identify, avoid, and stay safe from harmful online behaviors such as cyberbullying, sexting, online sexual solicitation, online stalking, and online harassment.

Digital Security: The ability to protect personal data, devices, and networks from identity theft, hacking, frauds, scams, and malware.

Digital Rights & Responsibilities: The ability to create and enjoy a safe, empathetic, respectful space online, and to understand real-life consequences of online behaviors and habits. This includes an understanding of positive and negative digital identities, professional and legal repercussions of online activities, negative impacts of inappropriate digital content, and effects of too much screen time on health and well-being.

An Integrated Approach to Digital Citizenship Education

Digital citizenship is a cross-cutting issue across program goals and activities, and is relevant to all children and youth. While some providers may be able to deliver dedicated sessions specifically for the purpose of digital citizenship education, many more have the opportunity to integrate digital safety, security, and rights and responsibilities education into the routines and content of existing programs. The following steps will help providers integrate digital citizenship learning into many types of services:

1. Identify risk and protective factors among refugee youth participants

Begin by considering both risk factors and protective factors related to digital citizenship among your program participants. Some examples are provided below, but since contexts, circumstances, and skills will vary widely, keep in mind that not all will apply to your community of students. To help learn which are most relevant, you can facilitate exploratory discussions on digital citizenship themes and actively listen to detect issues of importance to youth and their families.

Questions Related to Potential Risk Factors

- Have youth received any previous digital citizenship education?
- Have youth received opportunities to discuss digital citizenship topics with parents, teachers, and other trusted adults?
- Do youth have limited English proficiency?
- Have youth had past experiences of trauma?

- Do cultural norms minimize discussion of safety threats, including online sexual harassment or sexual solicitation?
- Do youth have identity characteristics that may be the subject of discrimination or bullying?
- Do youth understand good online etiquette?
- Do parents have the knowledge, skills, and time to monitor their children's online lives?

Potential Protective Factors to Consider

- **Knowledge:** Youth can identify risks and safely navigate through them. Youth understand the concept of a "digital footprint" and what constitutes respectful online behavior.
- **Empowerment:** Youth have safe environments for discussion where culturally rooted concepts of remaining silent are challenged and youth feel empowered to be vocal and comfortable asking for help.
- **Support:** Youth are able to identify and feel comfortable reaching out to the right people in their lives to report threats and/or seek emotional support.
- **Secure Online Habits:** Students have habits such as creating strong passwords, updating software, backing up data, using secure Wi-Fi, avoiding sharing private information, etc.
- **Parent Education:** Parents are aware of threats and have skills to monitor children's online lives.
- **Balanced Online-Offline Lives:** Students maintain a well-rounded routine within the circumstances of their lives.

Education and services can help mitigate risks and build protective factors. Cultivating protective attributes involves behavioral transformation both online and offline, where students learn by participating and engaging in activities that are relevant to their lives.

2. Determine your digital citizenship objectives and core messages

Clear objectives are important when helping youth build experience, confidence, and concrete skills. Based on the risk factors and protective factors you have identified, and topics of interest to youth and families, define the knowledge, skills, and values participants should develop or improve. See the box on the next page for some examples.

Sample Digital Citizenship Program Objectives

Digital Safety

Knowledge: Youth can identify digital safety threats (e.g., cyberbullying, sexting, sexual solicitation, stalking, etc.).

Attitudes: Youth take digital safety threats seriously. Youth feel safe online.

Behaviors: Youth talk to a trusted adult in the event of a digital safety threat.

Digital Security

Knowledge: Youth can identify digital security risks (e.g., fraud, hacking, and scams).

Attitudes: Youth believe it is important to manage their online privacy.

Behaviors: Youth use secure online practices (e.g., strong passwords, secure Wi-Fi, careful downloads, secure websites, etc.).

Digital Rights and Responsibilities

Knowledge: Youth can describe their rights and responsibilities when using digital media. Youth can explain how actions online can hurt others.

Attitudes: Youth have respectful attitudes towards others, both online and offline.

Behaviors: Youth engage respectfully online. Youth create a positive digital footprint. Youth maintain balanced online-offline lives.

3. Design activities within your program context that align with your objectives

Once you've identified your digital citizenship objectives, think about how they relate to the rest of your program's content and activities. Plan how you will integrate and sequence digital safety, security, and rights and responsibilities content, leveraging any natural opportunities for alignment. Three recommended ways to teach topics related to digital citizenship are:²

- **Gamification:** Use elements of games to make learning fun, such as splitting into teams to solve problems, awarding prizes, or creating challenges or "levels" that participants can earn points for solving or passing.
- **Experiential learning:** Create situations in which youth must try something, then reflect on their methods in order to learn.
- **Student-led learning:** Provide ways for youth to play a large role in teaching or leading an activity or initiative.

These teaching strategies encourage autonomy and self-efficacy, important soft skills for digital citizenship. Here are a few tips for implementing these activities within your program context:

- **Identify core resources:** Identify a few high quality sources for digital citizenship information, curricula, and activities. This helps to ensure messaging is consistent and reliable. See *Resources*, below, for examples.
- **Keep it consistent:** Address digital safety, security, and rights and responsibilities in bite-sized, digestible ways, during each session or every so many sessions, instead of holding just one or two long sessions on this topic. Ensure learning builds from one session to the next.
- **Keep it real:** Use scenarios that are simple, relevant to students' lives, and not overly frightening. Ensure games and activities end with positive resolution of the identified risks.
- **Recognize youth expertise:** Plan how to draw out what participants already know.
- **Plan checks for understanding:** Avoid too much talking by facilitators! Include discussion and checks for understanding to ensure youth have taken away the messages you intended.
- **Engage caregivers:** Seek out opportunities to engage with parents and caregivers. Identify their levels of understanding about digital citizenship and provide resources accordingly.
- **Design for flexibility:** Monitor students' engagement levels and adapt if lessons are too easy or too difficult, or take too much or too little time. Plan regular time for staff and volunteers to discuss progress, challenges, and adaptation strategies.

² Ibid., p. 31-40.

Integrating Digital Citizenship: Three Ideas for Different Timeframes

Over One Session

Open the session with a digital citizenship activity, like a short video to watch and discuss, an online quiz or game, or a comic to read and discuss. Follow with self-reflective questions that link back to risk factors and help establish protective factors, such as: In what ways is this information useful for you? Did anything surprise you? Are you comfortable talking with your parents about this issue? Do you know how to seek support if you need it? Keep topics and messaging consistent for everyone, but tailor the activity to participants' English proficiency, learning style, and maturity. Use short exit surveys or journaling at the end of the session to assess student learning.

Over Several Weeks

Have participants choose a digital safety, security, or rights and responsibilities issue to research with a tutor or mentor over several weeks. Then, hold a digital citizenship showcase where students and tutors share with the group. Projects might entail planning and teaching a lesson for other students, presenting a poster, giving a digital makeover to a persona with several risky digital habits, or writing an advice blog responding to other students' anonymously submitted questions about digital safety, security, and rights and responsibilities.

Throughout the Term

Establish a bank of fun digital citizenship challenges that address learning objectives. Challenges might include: earning a "web license," "digital passport" or "digital compass," taking a social media test drive, or completing a digital citizenship scavenger hunt (see *Resources*, below). Youth can work on these challenges with tutors or mentors throughout the program. Award badges or points towards an incentive at the end.

4. Model digital safety, security, and responsibility in your (remote) program environment

Program environments, including remote spaces, should be safe, secure communities of respect, belonging, and accountability to one another. This models positive digital citizenship behavior for participants.

- **Program norms:** With youth, collaboratively define program norms that create expectations for staff and participants to uphold each other's digital rights through safe, respectful, empathetic language and behaviors and data privacy and security practices (such as not sharing program entry information with non-enrolled persons)
- **Platform training:** If you are using a remote platform, ensure you are aware of security best practices and limitations. Train participants on appropriate use of the online platform.
- **Positive reinforcement:** Recognize and praise participants when they model positive digital citizenship norms.
- **Youth leadership roles:** Consider establishing a rotation of digital citizenship leaders responsible for reviewing the norms and checking that everyone is maintaining security practices.
- **Access to support:** Make sure youth know who they can talk to about digital safety, security, rights and responsibilities issues.
- **Temperature checks:** Check in with youth regularly to see how they are feeling. In a virtual environment, anonymous polls, sharing emojis or gifs of how youth feel in via chat boxes, virtual charades, or other means of creative self-expression can help staff monitor the environment.
- **Positive conflict resolution practices:** Respond to conflict using methods that focus on repairing harm and reestablishing a safe, inclusive community such as peer mediation and [restorative justice](#).
- **Feedback loops:** Collect and examine data from participants and staff on how safe, secure, respected, and valued they feel.

5. Prepare yourself and your team

Administrators, staff and volunteers must be prepared to properly facilitate key messages and to handle any digital safety, security and responsibility issues that arise. Clearly document your digital citizenship

objectives, strategies, curricular resources, and other materials, and train staff and volunteers on these.

Also be sure to train staff and volunteers on **how to respond if a youth discloses a digital safety or security incident**. This process might include:

- Be nonjudgmental and listen to the youth.
- Remind the youth about your organization's policies related to confidentiality and the limits of confidentiality. Explain when you would involve parents or authorities.
- Help the youth report inappropriate content, bullying, or abuse directly to the website or platform where it occurred, if appropriate.
- Help the youth make a plan to stay safe, such as changing privacy settings, deleting content youth have shared, and planning for what to do if they feel unsafe on the internet again.
- If you feel you may need to contact the youth's caregivers or the authorities (such as the police or child protective services), discuss the situation with your supervisor. Do so if there is a credible threat to the youth's safety. Sexual exploitation of children may be reported via that National Center for Missing and Exploited Children [CyberTipline](#).
- Document the safety threats according to your organization's incident reporting policies.

Resources

Child- and youth-friendly digital citizenship materials

[Amaze.org](#) offers resources including age-appropriate videos (e.g., [Being Safe on the Internet](#) and [Wise on the Web](#)) and the lesson plan [Being Smart. Staying Safe Online](#). [Multilingual materials](#) are available.

[BrainPop Jr](#) contains lesson plans, quizzes, games, and other fun educational activities on topics including [cyberbullying](#), [digital etiquette](#), [distance learning](#), [privacy](#), [malware](#), [online safety](#), and [social media](#).

[Common Sense Media](#) provides downloadable digital citizenship materials for grades K-12, including [lessons during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) and a [social-emotional learning toolkit](#) to reinforce digital citizenship themes. Many student materials are available in [Spanish](#). Some [family engagement materials](#) are available in additional languages, including Arabic, Farsi, Haitian Creole, Russian, and Vietnamese.

[Facebook's digital literacy library](#) contains lessons on digital identity, privacy management, online security and positive online behavior among other themes.

[KOED Learn](#) is a free online platform for middle and high school students to engage in critical and meaningful discussions in safe and responsible ways.

[Netsmartz](#) has fun and age-appropriate [videos](#) on digital safety, [resources](#) for educators that includes presentations, tip sheets and classroom activities, and a comprehensive [toolkit](#) on Digital Citizenship. Many materials are available in [Spanish](#).

[Stop.Think.Connect](#) is a national public awareness campaign that contains a [toolkit](#), videos and blogs on online safety and security.

Resources for staff and volunteers

Common Sense Media offers [Teaching Digital Citizenship](#), a one-hour online interactive course.

KQED Teach offers courses on [Teaching Through Media](#), including video and audio production, blogging, etc.

International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) offers [Digital Citizenship in Action](#), an online course on integrating digital citizenship education in K-12 settings.

[Privacy Technical Assistance Center \(PTAC\)](#) offers webinars on student privacy and virtual learning during COVID-19 and [additional information and guidelines](#) for ensuring students' privacy and security.

Digital Citizenship: Teaching Strategies and Practice from the Field, a 2019 book by Carrie Rogers-Whitehead, provides a comprehensive resource for those educating youth on digital citizenship, including helpful explanations on a variety of teaching models.

Digital Citizenship in Schools, a 2015 book by Mike Ribble and Gerald Bailey, details nine elements of digital citizenship. It includes lessons and activities for staff (professional development) and for students. Refugee service providers will likely need to adapt content to be culturally and linguistically appropriate.

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