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.

References:

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