

K12 ACADEMICS — A FIELD GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

The Complete Guide to Digital Citizenship

5 guides to raising a responsible digital citizen — online safety, screen time, media literacy & reputation.



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2026 EDITION

ABOUT K12 ACADEMICS

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Countries reached monthly

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The Foundations

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What Is Digital Citizenship?

WHAT IT IS

Digital citizenship is the set of skills and habits for using technology safely, responsibly, and kindly. Today's students grow up online, so these are core life skills — as important as reading a map used to be. This guide introduces the big picture; the others go deeper on each piece.

TYPES & OPTIONS

- ✓ **Online safety** — Protecting yourself from risks and knowing what to do when something goes wrong.
- ✓ **Privacy & data** — Understanding what you share and keeping personal information safe.
- ✓ **Respect & kindness** — Treating others well online — the opposite of cyberbullying.
- ✓ **Media & information literacy** — Thinking critically about what you see online and spotting misinformation.
- ✓ **Balance & wellbeing** — Healthy screen habits and a good relationship with technology.
- ✓ **Digital footprint** — Understanding that what you post can last and shape your reputation.

WHY IT MATTERS

Why it matters: kids encounter the online world early and constantly. Rather than just restricting, digital citizenship builds the judgment to navigate it well — so children become confident, thoughtful, and kind online, not just supervised.



AT A GLANCE

What	Using tech safely & responsibl...
Covers	Safety, privacy, respect, medl...
Why	Kids live much of life online
Goal	Confident, kind, savvy tech us...
At home	Model & talk about it
For	Students AND families

TIPS

- ✓ **Talk early and often** — Make tech an ongoing conversation, not a one-time rule
- ✓ **Model good habits** — Kids learn from how the adults around them use devices
- ✓ **Focus on judgment** — Teach why, not just what — so it sticks when you're not there
- ✓ **Keep it positive** — Emphasize being a good digital citizen, not just avoiding danger
- ✓ **Adapt by age** — Younger kids need more limits; teens need more coaching

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **What is digital citizenship?** — Using technology safely, responsibly, and kindly.
- ✓ **What does it cover?** — Safety, privacy, respect, media literacy, balance, and digital footprint.
- ✓ **Why does it matter?** — Kids live much of their lives online — these are essential life skills.
- ✓ **Isn't it just about rules?** — No — it's about building judgment, not only setting limits.
- ✓ **Is it for parents too?** — Yes — it's best learned and modeled as a family.

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Media Literacy

WHAT IT IS

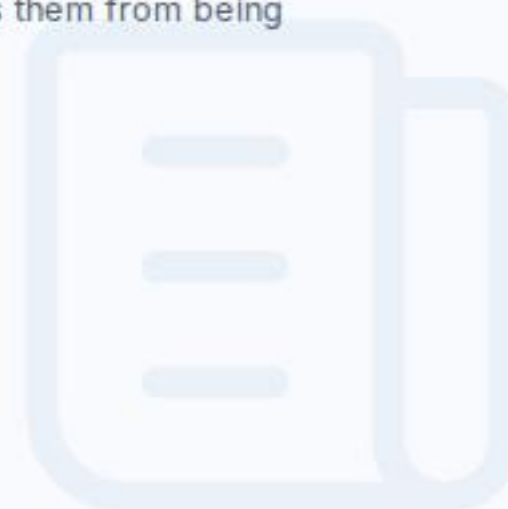
Media and information literacy is the ability to think critically about what you see, read, and hear — to tell reliable information from misinformation, and to understand who created a message and why. In an age of viral content and AI-generated media, it's one of the most important skills a student can build.

HOW IT WORKS

- ✓ **Ask who made it and why** — Every message has a source and a purpose — to inform, persuade, sell, or provoke.
- ✓ **Check the source** — Is it reliable? What's its track record and expertise?
- ✓ **Look for evidence** — Are claims backed by real evidence, or just assertion?
- ✓ **Watch for emotional manipulation** — Content designed to make you angry or afraid spreads fast — pause before believing/sharing.
- ✓ **Verify before sharing** — Cross-check surprising claims with reliable sources; don't spread what you haven't checked.

WHY IT MATTERS

Why it's urgent now: misinformation spreads fast , and AI can generate realistic fake text, images, and video . Teaching kids to question, check, and verify — rather than believe and share — protects them from being fooled and from spreading falsehoods.



AT A GLANCE

What	Thinking critically about medi...
Skill	Evaluate sources & claims
Spot	Misinformation & bias
Ask	Who made this, and why?
Verify	Check with reliable sources
More vital	In the age of AI

TIPS

- ✓ **Model skepticism, not cynicism** — Question sources without assuming everything is fake
- ✓ **Practice together** — Look at real examples and evaluate them as a family
- ✓ **Teach lateral reading** — Check what other sources say about a claim
- ✓ **Slow down** — Most misinformation spreads because people react fast
- ✓ **Connect to AI literacy** — AI makes verification more important than ever

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **What is media literacy?** — Thinking critically about media — evaluating sources and spotting misinformation.
- ✓ **How do I teach it?** — Teach kids to ask who made a message and why, check sources, and verify before sharing.
- ✓ **Why is it more important now?** — Misinformation spreads fast, and AI can generate realistic fake content.
- ✓ **What is lateral reading?** — Checking what other reliable sources say about a claim, rather than trusting one page.
- ✓ **How does this relate to AI?** — AI makes fakes easier to produce — so verification matters more than ever.

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Safety, Balance & Reputation

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Online Safety

WHAT IT IS

Keeping kids safe online isn't about fear — it's about habits and open communication. This guide covers the main risks in plain English, the practical protections, and how to keep the lines open so your child comes to you when something feels off.

STEPS TO TAKE

- ✓ **Use privacy settings** — Set accounts to private and review app permissions together
- ✓ **Teach 'don't share' basics** — No full name, address, school, phone, or location with strangers
- ✓ **Talk about strangers online** — People online may not be who they say; never meet alone
- ✓ **Keep devices in shared spaces** — Especially for younger kids; consider keeping devices out of bedrooms at night
- ✓ **Agree on rules together** — A family agreement works better than surprise crackdowns
- ✓ **Make it safe to tell you** — React calmly so your child comes to you when something goes wrong

TIPS

- ✓ **Adapt to age** — More supervision for young kids; more coaching for teens
- ✓ **Know the apps** — Understand what your child uses and its risks
- ✓ **Use tools, not just trust** — Parental controls plus conversation
- ✓ **Revisit settings** — Apps change — recheck privacy settings periodically
- ✓ **Keep talking** — Ongoing conversation beats one big lecture



AT A GLANCE

Main risks	Strangers, oversharing, scams...
Protect	Privacy settings & smart habit...
Teach	Don't share personal info
Keep open	Talk without judgment
If wrong	Tell a trusted adult
Adapt	By age & maturity

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **What are the main online risks?** — Strangers, oversharing, scams, harmful content, and cyberbullying.
- ✓ **How do I protect my child?** — Privacy settings, clear habits, supervision by age, and open communication.
- ✓ **What should kids never share?** — Full name, address, school, phone, or location with strangers.
- ✓ **What if something goes wrong?** — Make sure your child knows to tell a trusted adult — and react calmly.
- ✓ **Should I use parental controls?** — They help — pair them with ongoing conversation, not instead of it.

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Screen Time

WHAT IT IS

Screen time is one of the most common family questions — and the healthiest approach is about balance, not just a number. What matters is what kids do on screens, when, and what screens might be crowding out (sleep, activity, connection). This guide helps you find a balance that works.

HOW IT WORKS

- ✓ **Think quality, not just quantity** — Creating, learning, and connecting differ from passive scrolling.
- ✓ **Protect the essentials** — Guard sleep, physical activity, family time, and homework.
- ✓ **Keep screens out of bedrooms at night** — One of the most effective habits for sleep.
- ✓ **Watch for warning signs** — Trouble stopping, mood tied to devices, or screens replacing other activities.
- ✓ **Balance, don't just ban** — Aim for a healthy relationship with tech, not a battle.

WHY IT MATTERS

- ✓ **Make a family media plan** — Agree together on when, where, and how much
- ✓ **Set device-free times & zones** — Meals, bedrooms, and homework time
- ✓ **Model it yourself** — Kids notice how adults use devices
- ✓ **Prioritize sleep and activity** — These come first
- ✓ **Revisit as kids grow** — Needs and rules change with age



AT A GLANCE

Goal	Balance, not just limits
Focus	What, when & instead of what
Protect	Sleep, activity, connection, l...
Tool	A family media plan
Model	Your own tech habits
Adapt	By age & child

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How much screen time is okay?** — There's no single number — focus on balance and what screens might crowd out.
- ✓ **What matters most?** — Protecting sleep, activity, connection, and learning — and the quality of screen use.
- ✓ **What's the single best habit?** — Keeping screens out of bedrooms at night helps sleep a lot.
- ✓ **How do I set limits without a battle?** — Make a family media plan together, and model good habits yourself.
- ✓ **What are warning signs of too much?** — Trouble stopping, mood tied to devices, or screens replacing other activities.

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Digital Footprint

WHAT IT IS

A digital footprint is the trail a person leaves online — posts, photos, comments, and activity. The key thing for kids to understand is that it can last a long time and be seen by people they don't expect — including colleges and employers. The goal isn't fear; it's helping them build a footprint they'll be proud of.

HOW IT WORKS

- ✓ **Posts can last** — Even 'deleted' content can be saved, screenshotted, or resurface later.
- ✓ **It's more public than it feels** — Private isn't always private; things get shared beyond the intended audience.
- ✓ **Colleges & employers may look** — Admissions and hiring sometimes check public online presence.
- ✓ **It shapes reputation** — How your child shows up online affects how others see them.
- ✓ **The good news** — A thoughtful, positive footprint can actually help.

WHY IT MATTERS

- ✓ **Teach the pause** — Would you be okay with this being public, forever, to anyone?
- ✓ **Think before posting** — Once it's out, you can't fully take it back
- ✓ **Keep it kind and positive** — The same content builds or harms a reputation
- ✓ **Manage privacy settings** — But never rely on them completely
- ✓ **Build something positive** — Encourage sharing interests, talents, and good work



AT A GLANCE

What	The trail you leave online
It can	Last a long time
Affects	College, jobs & reputation
Teach	Think before you post
Rule	Would you want this public for...
Build	A positive footprint

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **What is a digital footprint?** — The trail of posts, photos, and activity a person leaves online.
- ✓ **Can posts really last forever?** — They can — even deleted content may be saved or resurface.
- ✓ **Do colleges and employers check?** — Sometimes — public online presence can be part of admissions or hiring.
- ✓ **How do I teach this?** — Teach the pause: would you want this public, forever, to anyone?
- ✓ **Isn't this just about fear?** — No — it's about building a positive footprint they'll be proud of.

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