



# Easy steps to help your child become a Digital Citizen

Using your experience as a citizen  
to guide your children on their path  
towards digital citizenship



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# Table of Contents

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<b>WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CITIZEN?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>WHAT IS A DIGITAL CITIZEN?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>SUPPORTING A DIGITALLY-CONNECTED GENERATION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>WHERE DO PARENTS BEGIN?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>BEING ONLINE</b>	
Access and Inclusion	7
Learning and Creativity	8
Media and Information Literacy	9
<b>WELL-BEING ONLINE</b>	
Ethics and Empathy	10
Health and Well-being	11
ePresence and Communications	12
<b>RIGHTS ONLINE</b>	
Active Participation	13
Rights and Responsibilities	14
Privacy and Security	15
Consumer Awareness	16

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## What does it mean to be a citizen?

■ Being a citizen means that you have certain rights and responsibilities common to everyone where you live, and that you try to make the world a better and more person-friendly place for the next generation. The same applies for digital citizens, but they inhabit overlapping “real” and “virtual” spaces, with borders for everyone worldwide defined only by the platforms they are using at any given time. Digital citizens need to be constantly aware of this, and of how to protect their rights and respect their responsibilities.

■ We are all citizens of one country or another, and as parents it is our role to use our knowledge and experience as citizens to guide our children in the virtual, or online, world too.

## What is a digital citizen?

■ Digital citizens know how to use digital technology sensibly, and how to behave online. They know how to protect their own rights and information, and are careful with the rights of the people they communicate and interact with online.

■ Digital citizens know how to cooperate meaningfully on- and offline, and contribute positively to the online activities that are constantly shaping the digital environment. They are open to other cultures and other people’s perspectives, building on the positives of the online environments they choose to move in, and avoiding the downsides.

■ Digital citizens are also aware of the need to be lifelong learners, to keep up with the rapid changes that digital technology is bringing to the world.

## 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 eWatches. Things like video games, cars and the TV in our living room are becoming increasingly more connected to the internet.

■ It used to be much easier to keep an eye on what our children were doing. In the online world in just a couple of clicks children, especially younger children and more adventurous teens, can encounter problems. Banning them from the internet is not the solution, because they will find a way to go online anyway, possibly in places where we cannot keep an eye on what they are doing or step in to help them when they need it.





## Where do parents begin?

■ Parents, and “non-tech” grandparents too, can help children become digital citizens! In this guide, we explain some of the easy steps to follow, to help children master what it takes to act responsibly and respectfully online!

■ Children 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, Rights Online.

■ You will find useful tips and concrete examples for each of the ten domains in the following pages.



# Checklist for parents

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

## BEING ONLINE

- ▶ I know what sort of activities my children do online. YES  NO
- ▶ My children know how to use search engines effectively, and compare the results they get. YES  NO
- ▶ My children spend a lot of their time online doing projects, homework, or exploring new things (for example, an online museum or eScience lab). YES  NO
- ▶ My children create and share their own content. YES  NO
- ▶ My children are good listeners and observers, able to understand the point of view of other people. YES  NO

## WELL-BEING ONLINE

- ▶ My family takes time out from technology, switching off devices at meal-time or after a certain time at night. YES  NO
- ▶ My children discuss things that bother them online with me, and also any unpleasant content they come across. YES  NO
- ▶ I know the online groups my children belong to, and the focus of these groups. YES  NO

- ▶ My children show a healthy balance in the time they spend on face-to-face, physical and online activities. YES  NO
- ▶ My children spend more time communicating face-to-face with friends than they do playing or chatting online, or watching videos. YES  NO

## RIGHTS ONLINE

- ▶ I sometimes sit next to my children when they go online, and we talk about how to use the internet responsibly and ethically. YES  NO
- ▶ My children are aware of the sort of information they should keep private, and why. YES  NO
- ▶ My children take an interest in talking about what they believe is wrong in the digital world, and ways they could help make things better. YES  NO
- ▶ I know the main information sources and/or news channels my children use. YES  NO
- ▶ My children are able to tell the difference between reliable and unreliable online information. YES  NO

# BEING ONLINE

## Access and Inclusion

Ensuring that all children have equal access to the internet, and suitable opportunities to learn the skills and attitudes they need to express their opinions respectfully online.

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Explore the digital world with your children. Help them choose websites and tools suited to their age and interests, and discuss their online activity with them whenever you can.
- ▶ Set a few ground rules that will keep your children on track and make it easier for you to see what they are up to, even from a distance.
- ▶ Discuss the notion of equality, and ways that we can open the digital world to everyone regardless of disability, gender, race, culture...
- ▶ Encourage your children to come to you any time they feel uncomfortable or excluded online.



#### Did you know...

... that digital skills are essential for inclusion, not only in the digital world, but also in the offline world.

### HOW TO

- ▶ Help your younger children to create their own list of favourite age-appropriate websites in the *Bookmarks* menu of your browser. They can then easily re-visit them without using a search engine.
- ▶ Family ground rules could include:
  - Think twice before sharing personal information online;
  - Keep a check on the time you spend online;
  - Always treat others with respect.
- ▶ Most parents ask their children how their day was when they get home from school. But have you thought of asking them similar things about their online activities?

**Inclusion:** having equal access to the internet, and being respected and accepted socially as an equal, regardless of abilities, disabilities, gender etc.

# BEING ONLINE

## Learning and Creativity

Helping children become lifelong learners in digital environments, able to use digital tools creatively in different contexts.

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Do fun activities and go to interesting places with your children to boost their imagination.
- ▶ Make the most of any opportunity to encourage their creativity; creativity in childhood has proven to be a three-times more important factor than IQ in long-term creative achievements.
- ▶ Talk to your children about what copyright is, and the importance of respecting the texts, pictures and music that other people create.
- ▶ Organise cooperation-based activities with family and friends to help your children realise the value of justice and fairness, and respect for other people and their ideas.



### Did you know...

... that learning and creativity are closely linked, and that 'anywhere-anytime learning' is one of the keys to success in the information society.

### HOW TO

- ▶ Take young children to a natural history or maritime museum. When you get back home, help them download pictures of animals they have seen to illustrate their own imaginative animal stories.
- ▶ Show your children the difference between being a passive (simply looking) and an active internet user (producing content). Help them post texts and images online on age-suitable internet platforms.
- ▶ Discuss with your children how they feel when someone copies or gets credit for something they made or did.
- ▶ Choose a family project to work on with your children. A popular project is to select the next family holiday destination together. This requires online research, and give and take between family members.

**Copyright** is a law that gives the creator or author of a text, image, music etc. the right to say how other people can use it. You can learn about copyright and many other online activities in the Council of Europe's Internet Literacy Handbook (<https://rm.coe.int/internet-literacy-handbook/1680766c85>).



# BEING ONLINE

## Media and Information Literacy

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

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Surf the net with your children and point out ways you can tell true from false, real from fake information.
- ▶ Get your children to use a search engine to find information about a topic you have selected together. Compare the results, and discuss ways of finding trustworthy sources online.
- ▶ Explain to your children that anybody can post anything on the internet, but it is not always true!
- ▶ Find examples (such as ads) that show how information and messages are shaped to influence our way of thinking.



**Did you know...**

... that media and information literacy is an essential pillar of digital citizenship.

### HOW TO

*These activities are mainly for older children*

- ▶ Cut out or download a fake news article from a newspaper, magazine or online news platform. How do you check the credibility of the source? What other ways are there to prove the news article is fake?
- ▶ Choose a topic, and look it up using 2 or 3 different search engines. Note the differences if the results you find are ads, or sponsored or non-sponsored links. Check out the source of each result to help children see how to spot trustworthy sources.
- ▶ Look up "fakest news" on the internet or YouTube. You will find dozens of examples that show that people are capable of believing - and writing - anything!
- ▶ Fashion trends are great examples of how media influences what we eat and wear, and the music we listen to. Use online ads to show your children how words, images, and music are used to influence us.

**Fake news:** stories that are probably false, that appeal to a lot of people, and are read or watched by millions.

# WELL-BEING ONLINE

## Ethics and Empathy

Providing opportunities for children to learn about things such as equality, justice and openness to diversity, and to try to understand the feelings and perspectives of others.

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Empathetic people usually have well-developed listening and observing skills; play games with your children to sharpen theirs.
- ▶ Remind them that, whether online or offline, they should stick to the ethical values and attitudes they have learned from you.
- ▶ Use news stories or online information to open a discussion with your children about empathy.
- ▶ By pointing out that each person is unique and not everyone thinks and feels the way we do, you'll help your children to accept themselves and others, and that multiple viewpoints can comfortably exist side by side.



### Did you know...

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

### HOW TO

- ▶ Empathy is first triggered by eye to eye contact with loved ones. Play games that get children mirroring your movements or closely observing details (for example, "I spy").
- ▶ With your children, decide on a few ethical rules your family could follow on- and offline. Write up a "family contract" that you can all sign, and put it up where you will often see it (e.g. the fridge door).
- ▶ "In their shoes" - find a recent news story on- or offline about a sad or challenging event. Discuss with your children how they would feel if that event had happened to them.
- ▶ Choose a theme of concern for your whole family (such as screen time, household chores...), and get everyone to express their viewpoint. Show how, even when viewpoints differ, they can co-exist and be respected.

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

# WELL-BEING ONLINE

## Health and Well-being

Building the attitudes, skills, values and knowledge that help children become aware of how digital technology can positively or negatively influence their body and mind.

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Create a family environment where your children feel secure and loved, and help them understand that we all make mistakes sometimes.
- ▶ Ensure a healthy balance between children's on- and offline activities, and set a good example yourself. Research shows that leaving children handwritten notes from time-to-time strengthens emotional ties with parents and improves a child's language skills.
- ▶ Remember that resilience is built on confidence and self-esteem. Resilience determines their capacity to spring back after a hurtful or disappointing experience (such as bullying).



#### Did you know...

... that today a majority of children and adults spend a lot of their time in overlapping virtual and real spaces.

### HOW TO

- ▶ Cultivate a trusting relationship with your children and make sure they understand that they can always confide in you, even when they make mistakes. Explain that you are there to help them, and won't ban them from using the internet if they make a mistake online.
- ▶ Include something about screen time in the family rules you agree on with your children, and try to live by the rules yourself. Children learn from what you do, not what you say! Organise family technology-free weekends regularly, and do outdoor activities together.
- ▶ If your child is going through a difficult period at school or with friends, sit with him/her to write a "7 best things about me" list. Your child can do this for family members and friends, too, to understand that nobody is perfect, but it is our qualities that are important.

For the health and well-being of your children, it is important 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 online self-image and interesting, worthwhile online interactions.

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Discuss with your children the tools they communicate with online, and how these could be used more ethically and responsibly.
- ▶ Discuss how each of our actions online leaves a digital footprint that shapes our online identity; before posting anything online, they should ask themselves if they would show or say the same thing in a face-to-face situation.
- ▶ Conduct a search with your children on their name. Discuss the results; how can they make their digital identity and reputation more positive?
- ▶ Communication online is different than offline. Body language and facial expression play a big role in face-to-face communication, and online we often don't realise the impact of our words.



### Did you know...

... that maintaining a healthy e-presence, and showing respect for the person or audience you are communicating with, is an essential element in digital citizenship.

### HOW TO

- ▶ Make sure your children know the basic rules of netiquette: do an online search with them to find netiquette models they can use.
- ▶ Talk about digital footprints with children of all ages. They need to be aware that every time they visit or do something online, they leave "footprints" that shape their online reputation. Get them to sketch the footprint they think they may have left so far.
- ▶ Get teenagers to type their name into a search engine and see if their footprint corresponds to what they had expected. Do they want to delete anything, and do they know how? How can they control their footprint now and in the future?
- ▶ Children of all ages can be quickly made aware of the limits of online communication. Get them to stand on each side of a wall, and get one to explain to the other how to draw a diagram, or fold an origami. When you bring them face-to-face, you will probably all laugh at the crazy result!

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

# RIGHTS ONLINE

## Active Participation

Playing an active role in on- and offline communities, and being able to make responsible decisions that will help improve the digital environment.

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Have open discussions with your children on topics of social interest; this will give them practice in expressing their own views, and taking onboard the views of others.
- ▶ Encourage your children to take part in local youth communities; face-to-face interaction is important for their well-being.
- ▶ Make sure your children understand that there can be no real anonymity online. All of our actions are recorded on servers around the world via our IP address (the address that permits us to connect online).



#### Did you know...

... that the values and attitudes we adopt online are actually shaping the digital environment, just as offline citizens shape the community we live in.

### HOW TO

- ▶ Meal-time discussions are good occasions for children of all ages to share ideas and views. They give parents an opportunity to learn more about their tech-savvy children's on- and offline activities, and to provide support through their own life experience.
- ▶ It is difficult for children to participate meaningfully online unless they have practiced participation skills in face-to-face situations. Enrol them in a youth or sports club suited to their interests or hobbies (tennis, coding workshop, etc.).
- ▶ If your children are old enough to be on social media, ask them to copy, print and stick their profile page somewhere where the whole family can see it. If this troubles them, remind them that the internet does exactly this, but on a worldwide scale. Use a search engine to look up "caught out by the internet" with them – they will be surprised at the search results, and at how much you know!

**Participation:** contributing to the shaping of on- and/or offline environments, taking part in discussions, expressing ideas and concerns, etc.

# 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!

- ▶ It is important that we understand our rights and responsibilities in both the physical and online world.
- ▶ Although no one really reads the “Terms of Use”, it is useful from time to time to download them from the social media platforms your children use, to see if they can spot the users’ rights and responsibilities that are common to all.
- ▶ If your children feel their rights are not being respected, show them the 3 simple steps they should take:
  1. ignore the offensive content,
  2. block the sender, and
  3. report the incident to the platform provider.



### Did you know...

... that learning about respecting digital rights and responsibilities is one of the first steps to becoming an active digital citizen.

### HOW TO

- ▶ Challenge older children to see who can come up with the best list of online rights and responsibilities. Get them to check their facts on the internet. Then choose one right or responsibility per week for the family to focus on, and discuss at the end of each week how easy or difficult it was to respect it.
- ▶ Download the data policy in the Terms of Use on your children’s favourite website or gaming platform. Are they aware of the personal data and the content they are giving away when they post to this platform? Are there other reasons they should think twice before posting things online?
- ▶ Get your children to look for the “block” and “report” buttons on their favourite age-suitable platform. Are they easy to find? How do these buttons work and when should they be used? During the discussion, you may learn about problems your children previously encountered but didn’t talk about at the time!

A **right** is a freedom that is protected, such as the right to freedom of expression. A **responsibility** is a duty or something you should do, such as respecting others.

# RIGHTS ONLINE

## Privacy and Security

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

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Install filters, firewalls and antivirus software on your children's devices, and show them how to regularly clean their navigation history to reduce tracking and limit targeted ads.
- ▶ Show your children which bits of their data are private, what can be safely shared, and discuss who they would feel comfortable sharing personal data with.
- ▶ Encourage your children to use pseudonyms whenever possible to protect their identity, and get them to use a "private browser".
- ▶ Explain to children that passwords on the internet are like the keys to our home: if somebody has them (even our very best friend) they can enter our private space whenever they wish.



### Did you know...

... that many internet-connected toys and household devices collect data too, and often don't provide privacy settings or tell users where their data is being stored.

### HOW TO

- ▶ Use a search engine to find out what filters, firewalls, spam and antivirus software do. Remember to compare results, and don't get caught out by the many ads that will pop up! Alternatively, visit a local IT store to find out about the protective software you should think of installing.
- ▶ Ask your children how they would feel if they were told to stand in a busy marketplace and shout out their name, home address, mobile number and name of their school. Help them understand that the internet is like a huge virtual market place, but you cannot even see who is next to you and may be listening to you. Personal data needs to be protected wherever you are.
- ▶ Creating and remembering passwords is a fun activity for children of all ages. To create a strong password, one trick is to make up an easy-to-remember sentence with at least eight words, then use the first letter of each word: "I like to eat pizza with salami and cheese" becomes "iltepwsac". Changing some letters to capitals, using symbols (&, @, !), and replacing a word with a number (to becomes 2), makes a stronger password too.

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 within online social spaces as a user, a consumer and also as an entrepreneur.

### GET INVOLVED!

- ▶ Make sure your children understand that consumer rights and responsibilities are the same, both offline and online.
- ▶ We are living in age of credit cards and online consumerism, and it is more important than ever to remind children of the true value of money.
- ▶ Help your children check the trustworthiness of the websites they use, and remind them to be suspicious of anything online that seems too good to be true.
- ▶ Many young people consider that they are not taught enough about ethical marketing strategies at home or at school.



### Did you know...

... that through consumer education even young children can rapidly understand how everyone can play their part to make the world a better, more equitable place.

### HOW TO

- ▶ Ask your children to list their rights and responsibilities as consumers in a toy store, for example. Now go through the list with them and discuss how these rights play out online. If you are not sure, do an online search on “consumer rights online”.
- ▶ Use a unit of reference your children know (a train ticket, an ice-cream) and get them to estimate the cost of different devices, for example, *a mobile phone costs about xx train tickets or xx ice creams.*
- ▶ Look at some commercial websites with your children, and test them against the checklist of minimum requirements at the bottom of this page. Are the terms and conditions easy to understand? Appropriate? Is something missing?
- ▶ Go online with your young children and check out some ads for toys, child-targeted cookies, breakfast cereals etc. See if they can tell you why and how the ad makes the product look so attractive.

- ✓ Clear identification of the company selling the product (name, address, contact information);
- ✓ Product characteristics, terms of service and warranty info are easily accessible;
- ✓ Privacy policy that indicates how your data will be stored, deleted, accessible to you;
- ✓ A padlock and https// on the payment site, to indicate you are making a secure transaction.









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

- ▶ Digital Citizenship Education Handbook (2019)
- ▶ Bullying: perspectives, practice and insights (2017)
- ▶ Parenting in the digital age (2017)
- ▶ Internet Literacy Handbook (2017)

Further information available at:

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

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

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