

Digital Citizenship and Digital Civility



Key Points

The internet presents great opportunities, but it is not without real risk of experiencing inappropriate content, contact, conduct, or commerce. The risks can be mitigated by teaching digital literacy and civility—elements that are central to good digital citizenship.

In 2016, Microsoft launched its campaign for Digital Civility (www.microsoft.com/digitalcivility) to encourage young people and adults around the world to lead with empathy and kindness and to promote civility in all online interactions.

Education policymakers should broaden online safety efforts and adopt a set of national goals for online safety, including minimum standards for digital literacy curricula.

New information technologies have profoundly

changed the world—the immense resources of the internet and the accompanying array of internet-enabled devices and services give everyone tremendous opportunities to work, learn, communicate, and play. While largely positive, the internet has also created new potentials for harm. These include infection by malicious software, such as viruses, worms, and spyware; victimization by online scammers selling counterfeit goods or pushing fraudulent investment schemes; loss of privacy and damage to online reputation; and identity theft by criminals.

Governments, the technology industry, and public sector organizations have addressed this risk to online safety through technology tools, policies, law enforcement activities, and education. These approaches play important roles, but to be successful, strategies (educational approaches in particular) must take into account the social norms and behaviors that everyone, including young people, must understand to become responsible digital citizens.

The concepts of digital citizenship—the safer, more responsible, and appropriate use of technology and devices—underpin such an approach. In becoming good digital citizens, people develop a sense of ownership and personal responsibility that will help them make ethical decisions in the online world, and in so doing build a safer, more trusted internet. Digital citizenship is grounded in two primary elements: digital literacy and digital civility.

Digital Literacy

Those who are literate in the online world are better prepared to avoid risky situations, make better-informed decisions, and better understand how to protect their privacy. They have learned such basic online safety habits as how to protect their accounts and reputation, the importance of strong and secret passwords, and how to update their computers and devices to defend against malware and scams. Digital literacy also requires the critical thinking and analytical skills needed to evaluate online information and situations and to problem-solve.

Digital Civility

Digital literacy provides a solid foundation for digital citizenship, but internet users must also demonstrate respect for others—behaving with civility and being protective of everyone's rights (their own included). People must learn and apply the skills to behave ethically and within online social norms. These skills include being judicious about what they say and do online; protecting others' privacy by not sharing personal details of friends and family without their permission; and respecting the intellectual property of others—for example, downloading only legal copies of copyrighted material. In 2017, Microsoft launched its Digital Civility Challenge, calling on young people and adults across the globe to pledge to live by four basic tenets for life online: Treat others as you would like to be treated; respect differences; pause before replying, and stand up for one's self and others online.

Microsoft Approach

Materials to Teach Digital Citizenship

In the *Resources* section of Microsoft's Online Safety website (www.microsoft.com/saferonline), people can find a wealth of materials designed to teach and learn good digital citizenship. Fact sheets, tip cards, brochures, and other materials provide information about standing up to online bullying and harassment, identifying misinformation and hate speech, and safeguarding one's online reputation.

Microsoft Inaugural Council for Digital Good

To advance digital civility, in 2017 Microsoft selected 15 teens from across the U.S. to serve as its inaugural Council for Digital Good. The Council is part of a pilot program in the U.S. aimed at advancing Microsoft's online safety policy work. The hope is that additional Councils will be formed in other countries and geographies to spread the message – and actions – about being safer and kinder online. To learn more visit: www.microsoft.com/saferonline.

Worldwide Safety Education Programs

Microsoft promotes digital literacy programs in 134 countries with a particular focus on broadening the reach beyond those who speak English and other commonly used languages.

Support for Online Safety Curricula in Schools

Microsoft believes that digital citizenship is an important component of any school curriculum; it supports the integration of digital citizenship concepts in technology instruction for students, with key topics woven into existing curricula.

Policy Considerations

Policymakers in government and industry can help companies work more securely on the internet and protect company data and financial assets against cybercrime by adhering to the following principles:

Emphasize Digital Citizenship Education

Education policymakers should broaden online safety efforts to include an emphasis on digital citizenship through digital media literacy and education programs. They should also adopt a set of national goals for online safety, including minimum standards for digital literacy curricula.

Provide Legislation Supporting Digital Safety Curricula

Some jurisdictions require that online safety education be an integral part of school system efforts to achieve digital literacy for their students. Legislation requiring schools to implement online safety education should be broad enough to account for local variations in curricula. One example is a US law mandating that internet safety be included in the curricula of any school that receives E-rate funding from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which gives schools and libraries discounts for telecommunications and internet access.

Supporting Funding of Digital Citizenship and Digital Civility Programs

Governments should ensure that all digital literacy and online safety programs are funded through competitive grants open to qualified applicants, with periodic review and assessment built in so that the results from the best programs can be replicated in other communities.

Promote Industry Self-regulation and Innovation

As governments address the risks associated with emerging technologies and online services, it is important that they support industry self-regulation and legislative frameworks that encourage technological innovation.