

Excerpted from

Raising a Digital Child

Mike Ribble

How can parents keep up with all the new and ever-changing technologies that children take for granted? Parents often feel overwhelmed with the challenges and risks of this digital culture presents to children. They want their children to take advantage of all technology has to offer; however, they also want them to stay safe and act responsibly. Parents can make sure their children are both safe and responsible by educating them about how to appropriately use technology.

Raising a Digital Child: A Digital Citizenship Handbook for Parents is a parent's guide to learning about many of the newest and most popular technologies. It discusses the challenges of each and how parents can help children to deal with these challenges. Parents will discover how they can teach and model the types of behaviors that every child should learn in order to become a good citizen in this increasingly digital world.

Getting Started

When I talk to parents about how their children use technology, parents often throw up their hands and say, “They know about this stuff and we don’t” or “How can we monitor something that we don’t understand?” Parents hear about all the negative things that are going on with kids and technology through the media—sharing personal information with strangers, illegally downloading music and movies, bullying others through e-mail and social networking sites. Parents ask themselves, “Didn’t we raise our children to know better than this?” Of course, more often than not the answer is yes. We taught our kids to do the right thing, just as we were taught—look both ways before crossing the street, don’t talk to strangers, don’t steal candy from the grocery store. But we haven’t taught them enough. We are working with a generation that has the awesome power of mass communication, but that has not learned the basics of digital citizenship.

Parents need to be involved in the process of raising their children to be good digital citizens. Fortunately, more parents than ever are trying to understand what their children are doing with technology. Research suggests that a majority of parents are taking action to protect their children when using technology. For example, some parents have installed software to block objectionable websites. The problem is, kids can find ways to get around these barriers. It is not enough to try to block out the problems around us. We need to teach our children how to live and work in this new digital society.

There are many technology issues that parents need to be aware of to help their children become effective adults. And today, with the rise of technology use, being able to talk with your children about these issues is important. Children are bombarded with conflicting messages when it comes to technology use, so it is up to adults, parents in particular, to help children understand what they need to know. We cannot be angry at our children (or others) for the way they use technology inappropriately if we have not taught them what we consider appropriate. But to help children, parents must understand what the issues are, not just with the Internet, but with all technologies.

The digital world is growing and changing very fast. Technology companies release products so rapidly that there is little time for anyone to stop and think of issues that might arise with their use. Too often when we purchase a new digital technology we look at all the bells and whistles and don't think of the consequences or all the potential misuses of the technology.

In the year 2000 we hadn't even begun thinking about social networking sites, but now they are discussed everywhere in mainstream media. Parenting the "MySpace Generation" involves completely new protocols from the ones most parents grew up with, not to mention new ways of understanding the world. For example, some are concerned that technology tends to isolate people—kids text each other instead of talking face-to-face. On the other hand, technology enables people to communicate with millions of others around the globe in seconds.

This concept of being alone, yet visible to anyone online, can be difficult for children to comprehend. Often, because children do not see others while they work and play online, they believe they are anonymous. They post personal information online because they don't believe that anyone other than their friends would care about it. Unfortunately, they are wrong. People might be watching their conversations. Digital technology also offers a wall to hide behind. Sometimes people use this anonymity to write hateful e-mails and posts because the recipient is not standing in front of them. How often have we hit the Send button only to think of the ramifications afterward?

Technology offers exciting opportunities, but for some parents this strange new world can be scary. Every day we see articles and news programs about online

stalkers, pedophiles, college admissions offices, and potential employers checking up on our kids online. How is a parent to keep up with the issues when there are so many to think about?

This is where digital citizenship comes in. It provides a framework for understanding appropriate technology use. The nine elements of digital citizenship can help parents see the larger picture related to technology. These elements do not focus just on the Internet or other technologies, but allow for a broader perspective of technology use, misuse, and abuse.

Elements of Digital Citizenship

Digital citizenship is a new way to think about digital technologies. Instead of focusing on what technology can do, the aim is to think about how technology should be used. As defined in the introduction, digital citizenship means using technology appropriately and responsibly.

This book on digital citizenship is not simply a list of rules. Instead, it offers ideas and guidelines for thinking about technology. Here are the reasons why:

- It is better for someone to be involved in the process of doing the right thing.
- Technology changes so quickly that today's rules may not be applicable tomorrow.
- What is right for one family may not be right for others.

I have identified nine elements within the broader concept of digital citizenship: digital access, digital commerce, digital communication, digital literacy, digital etiquette, digital law, digital rights and responsibilities, digital health and wellness, and digital security.

Within the nine elements there is a fair amount of overlap of issues and ideas. For example, the topic of cell phones can easily fit into discussions of digital

communication, digital etiquette, and digital health and wellness. All of the elements need to be kept in mind when thinking about appropriate technology use. When reading through the nine elements in Chapter 2, you and your children should discuss how each element affects you and how you can apply the concepts to your own use of technology. The process of learning how to think about technology and use it appropriately is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4.

Digital Citizenship in Schools

It is the responsibility of parents, educators, and members of the community to provide children with an understanding of what it means to live and work in a digital society. Schools and independent educational organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of digital citizenship.

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) has developed the National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) for students, teachers, and administrators. With these standards, ISTE provides structure for using technology in a responsible way. In 2007, the NETS for Students (NETS•S) were updated, replacing the standard of Social, Ethical, and Human Issues with the new standard of Digital Citizenship to encompass the ideas of ethics in an educational setting. The NETS are used in every U.S. state and many countries, demonstrating the importance of technology standards as a part of the educational curricula. See Appendix D for a full listing of the NETS for Students.

It is up to parents to ask educators if they are teaching digital citizenship at school. Find out whether the teachers in your school district consider responsible technology use a priority or believe it is an important skill for our children's future.

Source

International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE). (No date). *National educational technology standards*. Retrieved June 17, 2008, from www.iste.org/nets/

It Takes a Village

Digital citizenship is not for just one person or one group of technology users. Everyone belonging to this new digital society has a part to play, including understanding the issues surrounding technology use. Why is it so important to understand these issues? Because we are all teachers, whether we realize it or not. Anyone who passes on information to another is educating that person. This is the basis behind the statement that “it takes a village to raise a child.”

Parents hope that their children will be able to learn what they need and differentiate what is right and what is wrong. However, without the basic knowledge of digital citizenship, children may not think of the consequences of their actions. People often think that the way they use technology has no effect on others, but this is simply not the case. Not only could their actions be inconveniencing others, but they may be modeling behaviors that other people, including children, will observe and emulate. Without the knowledge of appropriate technology use as well as a certain level of self-awareness, irresponsible behavior and bad habits can be passed along. However, if we take the concept of digital citizenship into our workplaces and communities, we can set a new standard of how we (and hopefully others) will act with respect to technology. We can pass on good behavior by showing others that we have certain guidelines for technology use. We all need to step up to the plate and be good role models, not just at home, but in our communities.

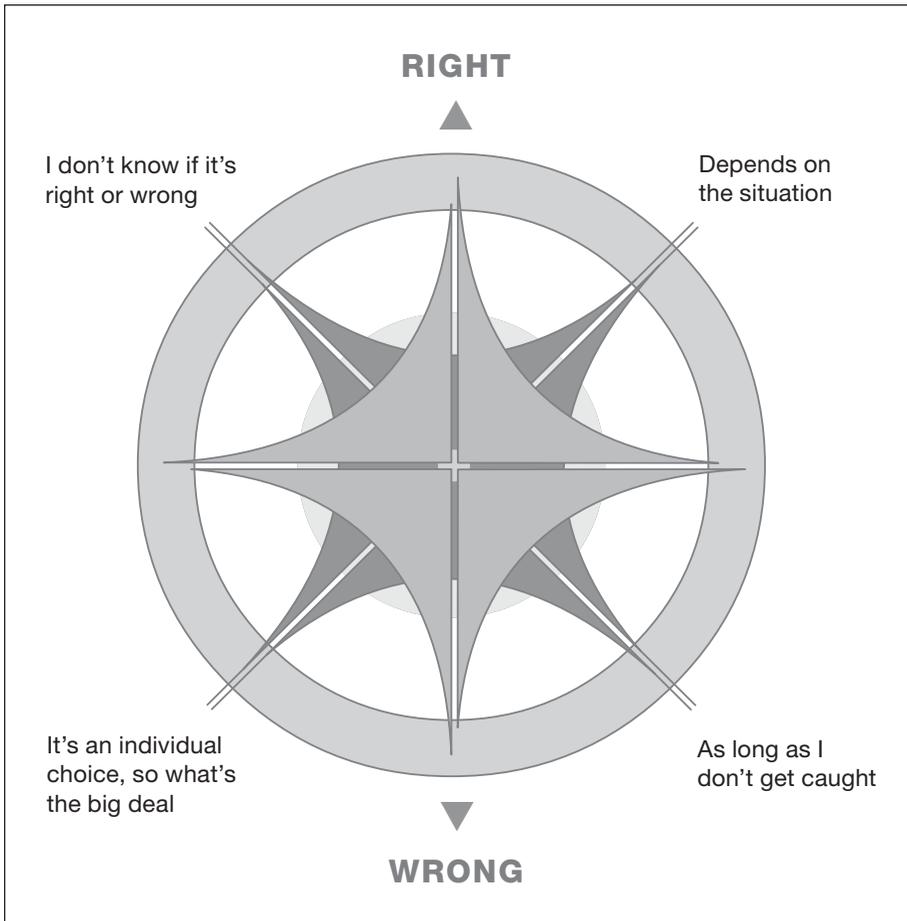
Remember that what you teach your children today is what they will be teaching their children in the future. But you're not in it alone. Digital citizenship is about addressing technology issues as a community. We all need to work together to mold the digital society we envision for future generations.

The 21st-Century Digital Compass Activity

The 21st-Century Digital Compass Activity can help determine the direction of both you and your child in relation to appropriate technology use. Read the following scenarios and come up with your own answers. Then read the descriptions of the six points on the compass to determine which direction you are going (see the Digital Compass figure). You may have a different direction for each scenario. Then go ahead and look at the guidelines in the section called Interpreting the Answers.

After you are finished, have your child go through the same process to determine his or her direction. See if your child's answers match yours. If the answers do not match, have your child explain how he or she may see the issues differently than you do. The goal of this activity is not to determine one correct answer for each scenario (although in some cases that may be quite clear), but to open lines of discussion about appropriate technology use.

Don't worry if you feel unsure about your own answers at this point. You may be more comfortable with this activity after you've read Chapter 2 and familiarized yourself with the nine elements. This activity does, however, provide an introduction to some of the technology issues we see today, so it is well worth a look.



Digital Compass for the 21st Century, a way to orient yourself on the path to digital citizenship

- Scenario 1.** One person sends a harassing e-mail to another person. The receiver retaliates with a “flaming e-mail.” *Is sending harassing and flaming e-mail messages wrong?*
- Scenario 2.** When going to the movies, a person gets a cell phone call and conducts a loud conversation. *Is talking in a loud voice on a mobile phone in a public place acceptable behavior?*
- Scenario 3.** A person logs on to a P2P (peer-to-peer) file-sharing website and downloads the newest song. *Is downloading music from P2P sites wrong?*
- Scenario 4.** A person clicks on an unknown link to a website and downloads a virus to the home computer. *Should users have some knowledge of where they are going before they click?*
- Scenario 5.** The night before an assignment is due for a class, a student goes to a website and copies and pastes information without giving credit to the author. *Is using Internet materials without giving credit to the author wrong?*
- Scenario 6.** A person uses a software package to copy movies and games from DVDs for friends. *Is copying copyrighted materials right?*
- Scenario 7.** A student goes online to a school website to download material she needs for class. *Is online learning appropriate for grade school, middle school, or high school students?*
- Scenario 8.** Two people are text messaging on their cell phones to gossip about someone else. *Is it appropriate to send text messages about others?*
- Scenario 9.** A person creates and publishes a website on the Internet for personal use, but the website cannot be read by people with disabilities. *Is it right to make websites that are not accessible to people with disabilities?*

Scenario 10. A technology user is given a USB flash drive by a friend with lots of different files on it. The technology user does not check what is on the drive before installing the files. *Is it appropriate to connect a storage device with unknown files to any computer?*

Scenario 11. A technology user places a keystroke logging program on a computer to get passwords or other information. *Is putting programs on a computer without another’s knowledge appropriate?*

Evaluating Your Child’s Answers

There is no easy answer for any of the scenarios, and responses will vary. Why? Many situations have shades of gray, and even technology users with a strong foundation in digital citizenship may have different “right” answers. When interpreting each scenario, consider not only your own background and experience, but how others might see it. The purpose of the compass activity is to help children and their parents analyze their ideas about appropriate technology use. Use the following six compass directions to interpret the answers.

Wrong. When technology users travel in the wrong direction, the cause is often bad information, lack of training, or a lack of consideration for others. To get back on the right path, children need to learn how their technology use can affect others.

It’s an individual choice, so what’s the big deal? Often children don’t consider how others may feel about their behavior, and they believe “if it doesn’t bother me, why should it bother anyone else?” Children traveling in this direction can’t understand what the big fuss is about. Parents need to help their children see beyond their own personal needs. As technology becomes more personalized and accessible, it becomes a part of who we are. Children may say, “Because my cell phone is mine, what I do with it is my concern.” Some children believe that technology use is a right and not a privilege. Simply put, they don’t want others to tell them how to use their technology.

As long as I don't get caught. Children choosing this direction believe that technology is there to be used, and even if they do something questionable, everything will be fine as long as no one else knows. The trouble with this attitude is that what we do or don't do can and often does affect others around us. Many children know that what they are doing is not right, but they believe that if no one knows, that makes it acceptable.

Depends on the situation. Different situations may call for different behavior, but an overarching understanding of appropriate technology use is still important. Children need to know that some activities may be appropriate in one situation but not in another.

I don't know if it's right or wrong. Some children are given technology but fail to learn how to use it appropriately. However, ignorance cannot be used as a defense for technology misuse or abuse. Basic digital citizenship skills should be learned in addition to simply learning how to use the technology. This is the direction people go when they understand some aspects of technology but “only enough to be dangerous.” Sometimes, this can be worse than having no training at all. When no digital citizenship training is provided, children learn from others and can get poor advice.

Right. Traveling in the right direction takes time and diligence. To follow this path, children need to have a good understanding of the technology they are using. They also need to reflect on how they use technology on a daily basis. Those who follow the right direction take time to decide not only how their actions affect themselves, but those around them.

Most of the instances of going in a wrong direction stem from a lack of understanding about how our actions affect others. Chapter 4 suggests ways to build awareness of our individual technology use.

Interpreting the Answers

Scenario 1. One person sends a harassing e-mail to another person. The receiver retaliates with a “flaming e-mail.” *Is sending harassing and flaming e-mail messages wrong?*

Answer guidelines. While most adults would see sending a harassing e-mail to another person as wrong, some children might say that it’s OK as long as they don’t get caught, or perhaps that it depends on the situation. If your child provides this kind of answer, you might probe deeper. How would they respond verbally to the same situation? The feeling of anonymity (not seeing the other person) may add to the motivation to respond in a negative manner, as well as support the idea that they may not get caught.

Scenario 2. When going to the movies, a person gets a cell phone call and conducts a loud conversation. *Is talking in a loud voice on a mobile phone in a public place acceptable behavior?*

Answer guidelines. Cell phone use has become second nature for many people, and we often forget that we are talking loudly in a public place. Even though establishments such as movie theaters and houses of worship remind us, we still sometimes forget. Some children may respond that it’s the individual’s choice or that they don’t know if it’s right or wrong.

Scenario 3. A person logs on to a P2P (peer-to-peer) file-sharing website and downloads the newest song. *Is downloading music from P2P sites wrong?*

Answer guidelines. With the easy access to P2P sites and the simplicity of downloading songs from these sites (without being informed of the possible legal issues), many users may not know if it is right or wrong. Those who do know that they could be charged with illegal downloading may respond that it’s OK as long as they don’t get caught.

Scenario 4. A person clicks on an unknown link to a website and downloads a virus to the home computer. *Should users have some knowledge of where they are going before they click?*

Answer guidelines. Many technology users are unaware that just by visiting a website they risk infecting their computers with a virus, spyware, or adware. Many simply don't know if what they are doing is right or wrong. This is why technology users need to make sure that their antivirus, antispyware, and antiadware programs are installed and up-to-date.

Scenario 5. The night before an assignment is due for a class, a student goes to a website and copies and pastes information without giving credit to the author. *Is using Internet materials without giving credit to the author wrong?*

Answer guidelines. Many technology users have learned that taking information without the creator's permission is wrong. However, information on the Internet is easy to access and seems available for anyone to use, so some kids might think that it's OK to copy as long as they don't get caught or that it depends on the situation. Let your children know that people who provide the information might expect to be paid for their effort, or would at least like some credit for the work they have done. It would be even better to seek out the permission of the creator.

Scenario 6. A person uses a software package to copy movies and games from DVDs for friends. *Is copying copyrighted materials right?*

Answer guidelines. Almost all of us have seen the copyright notification at the beginning of movies that lets us know that it is wrong to make copies. Still, some people might believe that it's OK as long as they don't get caught or that it's an individual's choice. Some people might rationalize that the big companies make so much money that the one copy they make won't make a difference.

Scenario 7. A student goes online to a school website to download material she needs for class. *Is online learning appropriate for grade school, middle school, or high school students?*

Answer guidelines. Making information available to students through the web has become very acceptable in our schools. Some parents may be hesitant to download materials (even from a school) if they are concerned about viruses, spyware, adware, and other dangers. If parents do not understand how these systems are configured they may not know if this activity is right or wrong. Parents need to work with educators to learn how these systems are to be used at home.

Scenario 8. Two people are text messaging on their cell phones to gossip about someone else. *Is it appropriate to send text messages about others?*

Answer guidelines. Gossip in any form is usually seen as wrong, but people still do it. With the new technologies it has become easy to talk about others in various formats (through blogging, texting, and instant messaging). Your kids may see this as an individual choice or think it's OK as long as they don't get caught.

Scenario 9. A person creates and publishes a website on the Internet for personal use, but the website cannot be read by people with disabilities. *Is it right to make websites that are not accessible to people with disabilities?*

Answer guidelines. Web publishing programs have made creating and uploading websites very easy. Often technology users do not think about the people who might look at their site. As web developers, they should think about others, but since the website is being created for personal use they may see this as an individual's choice. People who have not learned that creating accessible sites is even an option may not know if this is right or wrong.

Scenario 10. A technology user is given a USB flash drive by a friend with lots of different files on it. The technology user does not check what is on the drive before installing the files. *Is it appropriate to connect a storage device with unknown files to any computer?*

Answer guidelines. When a friend hands us a flash drive, we may not consider whether anything could be wrong with the files. Many of us take it on faith that the information has been checked out before it is given to us. Some might say it depends on the situation (some friends being more careful and responsible than others), while others may simply not know if it's right or wrong. As mentioned before, it is always important to make sure you have up-to-date antivirus, antispyware, and antiadware software.

Scenario 11. A technology user places a keystroke logging program on a computer to get passwords or other information. *Is putting programs on a computer without another's knowledge appropriate?*

Answer guidelines. Keystroke logging, or keylogging, programs can be used to gather information, such as finding the source of errors in computer systems or measuring employee productivity on clerical tasks. They can also be used to obtain passwords or encryption keys, which is useful in law enforcement and for less noble pursuits. Most users would believe that putting a keystroke logging or any other foreign program on another's computer is wrong, but some may feel that this would be acceptable as long as they don't get caught.

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January 2009

168 pp. 7 x 9 ¼

b/w illustrations

Product code: DICIPA

978-1-56484-250-3

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