



Embrace Civility in the Digital Age ~ Issue Brief

Cyber Savvy

The majority of young people make positive choices online, effectively respond to the negative situations that do occur, and are not overly distressed by these situations. They may make mistakes that could be prevented through better education. A minority of young people face greater risks that must be addressed through effective prevention and intervention.

Cyber Savvy Strategy

Nancy Willard's new book, *Cyber Savvy: Embracing Digital Safety and Civility*, provides comprehensive insight for educators to provide instruction. Her focus is on ensuring young people become Cyber Savvy. Cyber Savvy youth:

- **Keep Themselves Safe.** They understand the risks-and they know how to avoid getting into risky situations, to detect whether they are at risk, and to effectively respond.
- **Present a Positive Image.** They present themselves online as someone who make positive choices.
- **Respect Others.** They respect the rights, privacy, and property of others and treat others with civility.
- **Take Responsibility for the Well-being of Others.** They help others and report serious concerns to a responsible adult.

Instructional Components

Incorporate these three key components into instruction:

- **Reinforce Positive Norms.** Universal education must promote the positive norms and effective practices held by the majority of the students. This can be accomplished through student-led constructive instruction, use of older students to teach younger students, and messaging ground in the insight into positive norms and practices derived through local surveys.
- **Strengthen Effective Skills.** Constructive instruction can also help students gain skills through sharing of effective practices and strategies. Effective skills include problem-solving and decision-making. Students must also recognize possible negative influences related to the use of technologies, as well as the influences for making positive choices.
- **Encourage Helpful Allies.** As helpful allies, young people can provide support to a peer who is at risk or being harmed, challenge irresponsible or hurtful behavior, and report unresolved or serious concerns. Increase skills in responding and emphasize the positive perspective of helpful allies.

Key School Action Steps

Implement these key actions steps:

- **Establish a Multidisciplinary Coordinating Committee.** Include educational technology specialists, school librarians, and health teachers--and the school resource officer if this person will be providing instruction. Collaborative involvement of these professionals is essential.
- **Ensure Professional Development.** All members of this team require an understanding of the issues and effective instructional approaches that is ground in research insight. A significant amount of disinformation has been disseminated over the last decade about Internet risk. Fear-based messaging and simplistic rules against normative online behavior will not be effective in preventing risk behavior.

Instructional Don'ts & Do's

The following are approaches to avoid and alternatives to look for when evaluating curriculum or presenters:

- **Avoid** approaches that communicate the misperception that many young people are at risk online or are engaging in unsafe or irresponsible actions. **Choose** approaches that communicate positive messages that the majority of young people make safe and responsible decisions and effectively respond to negative situations.
- **Avoid** approaches that impart inaccurate, fear-based information and messaging. **Choose** approaches that provide insight grounded in research on actual risks and degree of harm associated with those risks.
- **Avoid** approaches that impart simplistic rules against normative online behavior like rules against communicating with any online strangers or posting photos of oneself or of friends online. **Choose** approaches that focus on problem solving and skill building.
- **Avoid** approaches that impart "stranger danger" warnings and try to make it appear that anyone they meet online is highly likely to want to harm them. **Choose** approaches that focus on strategies young people can use to safely interact online with people who are known in person or not.
- **Avoid** approaches that rely primarily on adults directly instructing secondary students. However, sometimes this approach can be useful, for example, having a law enforcement official make a special presentation. **Create** situations where the majority of the instruction engages students in talking with their peers.
- **Avoid** having students sign "Internet safety pledges." **Encourage** students to develop their own statements of personal standards.
- **Avoid** recommending that parents of teens strongly rely on filtering or monitoring technologies. **Recommend** that parents engage in active and positive interactions, use protective technologies for children, and constructively use monitoring technologies for tweens and at-risk teens.

Being Cyber Savvy

Cyber Savvy: Embracing Digital Safety and Civility present the following key areas of necessary insight and steps to being Cyber Savvy:

Avoid the Impulse. Remember, what you do reflects on you.

- If you engage in an impulsive negative act that results in posting or sending material in digital format, this material can become widely disseminated and possibly permanently available. This could harm your reputation, friendships, and opportunities; place you at risk; or cause harm to others.
- Engage in effective problem solving and positive decision making before posting or sending anything. Be a helpful ally if you see someone is at risk or is being harmed.

Read With Your Eyes Open. Assess the credibility of information.

- Anyone can post or send anything online, and there is no guarantee that what has been posted or sent is accurate. Individuals, organizations, and companies may use sophisticated techniques to seek to influence your attitudes and behavior.
- Carefully assess the credibility of all information accessed on websites or received in messages and the trustworthiness of people you interact with.

Keep Your Life in Balance. Avoid addictive use of digital technologies.

- While use of digital technologies can be fun and allow you to connect with your friends, excessive use of digital technologies can be unhealthy.
- Ensure your use of digital technologies does not interfere with other activities that will make your life happy and successful.

Think Before You Post. Protect your reputation and respect others.

- Other people will judge your character and decision making based on the material you post and send. This can effect your reputation, friendships, and opportunities positively or negatively. You can hurt others if you post or send material that reveals their personal information.
- Be careful whenever posting or sending material in digital format. Respect the rights and privacy of others.

Connect Safely. Interact safely with others online.

- You will interact with many different people online. Most are safe and trustworthy, but some may not be. It is easier for people to be deceitful and manipulative online.
- Be careful when you interact with people online. Only let people you know, or those whom your good friends know, have access to your personal profile. If you want to meet in person with someone you have gotten to know online, make a safe meeting plan and bring along friends.

Keep Yourself Secure. Implement security and avoid scams.

- Digital technologies can be corrupted with malware, which often is used to commit identity theft. Criminals use the Internet to commit a variety of scams.
- Ensure your computer security is maintained and your activities do not increase your risk. Watch out for scams—offers that are too good to be true or threaten loss if you do not share personal information.

Abide by the Terms. Act in accord with policies, terms, and laws.

- Your online activities are governed by laws, use policies of the organization that provides your access, and the terms of use of the websites or services. These laws, policies, and terms ensure that user's activities do not cause harm to others or to the technical system.
- Follow the common standards to protect the rights of everyone.

Stay Out of the Garbage. Avoid objectionable and illegal material.

- People distribute materials online that are harmful to others, including pornographic material. You could accidentally access this material. Accessing or distributing child pornography is a serious crime.
- Use safe surfing techniques to avoid accidentally accessing this material. Know how to effectively respond if such material is accidentally accessed. Don't access or distribute child pornography.

Don't Sell Yourself. Disclose and consume wisely.

- The financial model of the Internet involves providing access to free content and services in exchange for market profiling and advertising. Sites and apps track your postings and activities to create a market profile that guides the advertisements you will see. Social networking sites encourage friends to send advertisements to their friends. You can find helpful information about companies and their products or services online.
- Make a personal decision about how much personal information you want to share with sites and apps. Use the Internet to research companies, products, and services prior to making purchases.

Protect Your Face and Friends. Be savvy and civil when networking.

- Social networking sites are fun places to post information and connect with friends but present risks that involve posting inappropriate material or engaging in unsafe interactions with

others. These sites encourage users to share personal information and have many friends so they and their advertisers can obtain market profile information and use friendship connections to encourage purchasing. The terms of use prohibit hurtful actions.

- Protect your privacy by limiting access to your profile to those you have friended. Protect your reputation and respect others when you post. Friend only people whom you or a trusted friend know in person. Report abuse.

Embrace Civility. Prevent hurtful digital communications.

- The vast majority of people do not like to see others post hurtful material, send hurtful messages, disclose private material, or cause other harm through digital communications.
- Exercise care when posting or sending material so you do not place yourself at risk of attack. If someone is hurting you, wait until you have calmed down to respond. Save the evidence. Then calmly tell the person to stop, ignore or block the communications, or file an abuse report—or all three. If the person does not stop, ask for help. Recognize that no one deserves to be attacked online. If you hurt others, this will damage your reputation and friendships. If you see someone being harmed, provide support to that person and speak up against the harm. If the situation is serious or continues, report to a responsible adult.

Cyberdate Safely. Avoid exploitation and abusive relationships.

- Watch out for fantasy relationships.
 - Recognize that forming close personal relationships primarily through digital technologies can lead to unrealistic understandings and expectations.
 - Proceed with caution when forming a relationship digitally.
- Avoid exploitation.
 - People you communicate with online may try to exploit you sexually by asking for nude photos or seeking sexual encounters. They may be online strangers or people you know—adults or other teens. Sexual relations between adults and teens are illegal. Common grooming techniques involve sending overly friendly messages and being overly eager to establish a close relationship. If you send a nude photo to anyone, that person could, at any time, distribute the photo to everyone, and your reputation will be trashed or the person could use that photo to blackmail you.
 - If someone appears to be trying to manipulate you to engage in sexual activities or requests a nude photo, discontinue contact and report this to an adult.
- Do not allow a partner to abuse you.
 - An abusive partner may try to use digital technologies to control you by constantly texting and controlling your digital communications with others.
 - Do not allow a partner to seek to control you in this manner.

Embrace Civility in the Digital Age

Embrace Civility in the Digital Age (a program of Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use) promotes approaches that will best ensure all young people become cyber savvy and that seek to address youth risk in the digital age in a positive and restorative manner. Web site: <http://embracecivility.org> E-mail: info@embracecivility.org

© 2011 Embrace Civility in the Digital Age. Permission to reproduce and distribute for non-profit, educational purposes is granted. Embrace Civility in the Digital Age is reliant on sponsorships and donations. If this document is widely distributed, a donation is requested. See our web site for more information.

Nancy Willard's new, *Cyber Savvy: Embracing Digital Safety and Civility* (Corwin Press), and online course, *Cyber Savvy: Promoting Students' Safe and Civil Internet Practice* (Knowledge Delivery Systems) extensive insight into effective instructional approaches.