Building a Digital Citizen: How Can Adults Promote Youth to Engage Positively in Social Media?

Canadian youth today tend to be referred to as a "digital generation". Youth have greater access to the Internet and communication devices than ever before. They live in an "on demand" interactive digital culture where engaging in social media has become a large part of their social lives. As such, it becomes important to provide youth with the skills necessary to become positive citizens within a largely digital world. Digital citizenship involves being a critically engaged user and consumer of media (MediaSmarts, 2014). Here are some of the most important skills that we can teach youth to help build their digital citizenship:

RESPECT PRIVACY. It is important for youth to respect their own privacy needs, as well as the privacy of others. Teaching youth to keep their confidential information private, including personal details and passwords, is essential. It is also important to teach youth to respect other people's privacy when "sharing" friends' photos, videos, and comments on social media sites. Additionally, adults can model positive media behaviours by respecting youth's privacy when sharing family videos, photos, and other details of their lives on social media platforms.

RESPECT FEELINGS. Helping youth to build digital empathy is important, as it is often easy for youth to forget that people online are real people with real feelings. Encourage youth to ask themselves questions as they interact online about how they would feel if particular comments, photos, or videos were shared about them.

RESPECT PROPERTY. Youth are often faced with ethical media decisions regarding online content including photos, videos, movies, music, and video games. We need to remind youth to think about what they are looking at, sharing, watching, listening, and playing online in a manner that respects the people who own/made the digital content.

In order to help youth become digital citizens, it is important to build their digital literacy skills. The main competencies of digital literacy involve learning to use, understand, and create digital media (MediaSmarts, 2014). Here are some ideas on how to build these skills:

BUILDING MEDIA LITERACY IN THE CLASSROOM. Teachers can help facilitate students' learning about appropriate uses of digital media through interactive lessons, active discussions, and encouraging positive digital choices. Providing students with authentic learning opportunities using technology can be an important tool in teaching digital citizenship and shaping positive social media and technology use.

BUILDING MEDIA LITERACY AT HOME. Parents can help facilitate digital literacy at home by talking to their children about media and using teachable moments to build your children's abilities to ask questions about media and make positive choices. Tip sheets for talking about various media issues can be found through the MediaSmarts Media Literacy Week materials HERE.

RESOURCES FOR DIGITAL AND MEDIA LITERACY
MediaSmarts: Canada's Centre for Digital and Media Literacy provides information and resources for youth, educators, and parents wanting to learning more about digital and media literacy. In particular, Stay on the Path: Teaching Kids to be Safe and Ethical Online is a series of resources created by MediaSmarts that aim to promote ethical online behaviour for youth. It includes various tools including e-tutorials, tip sheets, and lesson plans. For more information related to what is presented in this article, please visit this resource series.