Digital Footprint and Reputation

DIGITAL LITERACY RESOURCE for Wales

Our children live in a culture of sharing that has forever changed the concept of privacy. In a world where everyone is connected and anything created online can be copied, pasted, and sent to thousands of people in a heartbeat, privacy starts to mean something different than simply guarding personal or private information.

What do we mean by Digital Footprint? There are two main types of digital footprint: passive and active. A passive digital footprint is created when data is collected without the owner knowing. An active digital footprint is created when personal data is shared or posted online deliberately by a user.

Though there are many benefits to sharing information online, it is important that children and young people understand that the Internet should generally be considered public because "private" information can become public if passed on, and in many online communities posts are public by default.

It is important too that all of us understand the permanency of what is shared, and the potential audience today and, of course, in the future. In other words, what we post adds to our reputation; what our family and friends, our teachers, our future employers think about us, based on what they see online.

It is important for children and young people (and adults) to understand that:

- most information posted online can be searched and seen by potentially huge, invisible audiences
- can be copied, altered, and sent to others, and is persistent – it's almost impossible to take down as it can start to spread the minute it is posted
- Information that people post can get out of their control fast, so it is important to consider the consequences beforehand.

Therefore, it is important that children and young people have opportunities to:

- • identify some of the benefits of sharing information online
- • reflect on the risks of sharing inappropriate information online
- • think critically about what they choose to post and share about themselves online

At primary level pupils learn a simple message that the information they put online leaves a digital footprint or "trail." This trail can be big or small, helpful or hurtful, depending on how they manage it.

As pupils reach secondary age they learn to distinguish between the positive and negative impact of online activity and begin to understand the implications of what they create, post, share or send can have on their future plans in education or employment. They also learn that they have a choice on how they share personal information and that some choices, for example, around the posting or sharing of inappropriate content ("sexting") can have far reaching consequences.

Remember: Digital life is both public and permanent. Everything our children do online creates digital footprints that migrate and persist. Something that happens on the spur of the moment – a funny picture, an angry post – can resurface years later. And if they aren't careful, their reputations can be harmed. A child may think he or she just sent something to a friend, but that friend can send it to a friend's friend, who can send it to their friends' friends, and so on. That's how secrets become headlines, and how false information spreads fast and furiously. The stakes only increase when we remember that all of this takes place in front of a huge, invisible audience. A child's deepest secrets can be shared with thousands of people they've never even met.

To find our latest resources on digital footprint and reputation, log in to Hwb and search for 'digital footprint' or 'reputation'. These searches will bring up four brand new playlists on this topic from our Digital Literacy Resource for Wales http://www.digital-literacycymru.org.uk/. You will find an Introduction

playlist, one for Primary schools, one for Secondary schools and one for parents and carers.