Cyber Citizenship
Helping Teenagers Be Good Netizens

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Note To The Reader

I am so happy you found this booklet important enough to possess for yourself. My underlying motivation in providing information like this is for parents to have the resources they need to raise happy, responsible and productive teens.

This booklet was originally a series of blog posts. These posts are still available on my website where you can access them without charge. Or, this may be a copy someone provided to you because they thought it was worth sharing.

It takes a lot of time and effort to make information like this available for you. The amazing advances in technology now make it possible (and practical) for you to pay a modest fee for using this material. It allows you to be respectful of what it took for me to create this for you and to let me know that you found this information valuable to pay for. If you are strapped for money or want to review the information to see if it is worth paying for, I am happy for you to use it free of charge.

However . . .

If you find that this information has been useful to you, please follow the link to my **Online Store** (https://squareup.com/store/drjameswellborn/item/blog-post-reading-fee) to officially pay for this booklet. Of course, you will be able to just take it without paying. I hope you won't do that. You will see by the charge for this material that this is not my path to riches. (It should also go without saying that you must cite me as the source for any of this material you use for your own purposes. Also, you do not have my permission to use this information to make money for yourself. That's just wrong.)

Thanks for your interest. Hope you find this helpful.

Jim

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Introduction: Talking About Cyber Citizenship

When your kids plug into the internet or the cellular networks, they instantly become full-fledged members of a worldwide community.   They have instant access to every other person who is also wandering around in that world. And, of course, someone coined a cute name for it: Netizens. Despite the corny name, it is worth thinking through the implications for your kid (and all of us really) being a contributing member of this global, extended community. Immediate access, physical distance and the perceived anonymity of the cyber world causes humans no end of trouble. That is doubly, triply, true for adolescents. Kids need to know how to behave in a civilized way, even, and, maybe especially, online. The old fashioned (and sadly rarely discussed) concept of citizenship can provide a framework to talk to your kids about how to be a responsible, contributing member of this cyber society. (The focus will be on the cyber community but the lessons are universal.)

What's a parent to do?

Unfortunately, most of us haven't given much thought to what makes a good citizen since middle school Civics lessons. This booklet will provide information on talking to your kids about being a good cyber citizen (as a way to be a decent person in cyber space). It will identify some important components of a code of conduct in the cyber community. There will also be suggestions for how to encourage good citizenship (and punish undesirable cyber behavior).

To be a good cyber citizen, your kid will need to know what that actually means. Citizenship is the rights, privileges and duties conferred on a member of a society. It most often includes both protections (e.g., the Bill of Rights) and duties (e.g., obeying the law, contributing to the community). Cyber citizenship is the rights, privileges and responsibilities required of internet and cellular network users.

Cyber Rights

Cyber citizenship is based on the general concept of citizenship but differs in a couple of ways. First, there are no real "rights" you have as a cyber citizen other than the legal protections you already have as an actual citizen. (And, some of those are not even available due to the global nature of the cyber world.) Nevertheless, every citizen of the cyber world *should* have the right to respect, privacy and their own opinion. Your kids should act respectfully toward other people. They should also require others to treat them respectfully. People (in this country) have the right to privacy. While these rights are not absolute in the legal sense, this isn't a legal treatise. This discussion is about how your kids SHOULD treat others. That means they should keep other people's private communications private. It also means keeping personal information private. There are very specific implications for this when it comes to privacy settings on online accounts that will be discussed in more detail later. Finally, the United States has a long standing and legally elaborated protection of free speech. It is the spoken version of a right to your own opinion. (Having a right to your opinion does not mean you are correct. Nor does it this right extend to EXPRESSING your opinion in insulting, defamatory or rude ways.) A free exchange of opinions is a sign of a vibrant democracy. (It can sometimes also be the result of a jerk just spouting off

about whatever comes to the front of their mind.) Your teen should be able to tolerate someone expressing an opinion they disagree with. They should be able to express their opinions in a confident and appropriate way.

Cyber Privileges

The privileges that your kids have as cyber citizens are actually conferred on them by you. It is a privilege to have access to the internet (since it is not free). It is a privilege to have the technology that allows them access to the internet and cellular networks. It is important to remind them of this, frequently.

Cyber Responsibilities

Responsibility is really at the heart of cyber citizenship. To be responsible, your kid will need to be informed about the cyber world. They also need to know about how to remain safe and protect themselves online. Another area of responsibility is to obey the law. This can be less straightforward for kids than you might think. Finally, kids are responsible for being considerate and well-mannered citizens.

Cyber citizenship is probably more accurately characterized as civil behavior. There are certain ways civilized human beings should behave toward others. This is the ideal realm of parental guidance; because we are talking about character, morals and ethics.

Increasing Your Teen's Cyber Awareness

If your kids are going to be good cyber citizens, they should be informed about the different areas that make up their cyber world. This includes their personal information (i.e., identity), traces of their online presence (i.e., footprint), the various kinds of creative products that belongs to them and to other people (i.e., property) and the various ways to relate to and interact with other people (i.e., relationships).

Cyber Identity

There are a range of ways your kid can be identified and recognized online. It starts with the online names they use for various accounts as well as their online addresses (e.g., email, texting number, social media account, etc.). Then, there are the more traditional forms of identity such as name, home town, school they attend, home address, or phone number. Your kid may also be identified by their date of birth and social security number. Each computer or device that accesses the internet or cellular network has a unique IP address that can be used to identify that device (and potentially the user of that device). Finally, your kid may also establish a cyber identity through credit and debit card numbers used to make online purchases.

Cyber Footprint

Every time your kid goes online or transmits anything over a cellular network, they leave a trace of that activity. This is known as a cyber footprint. There are generally two kinds of cyber footprints.

Intentional Cyber Footprints. The first is an intentional footprint; things they have knowingly posted or entered online. Consider this something like putting your shoe prints in wet cement that dries into a permanent trail. Intentional footprints include things like

- Photos
- Videos (e.g., YouTube, Vimeo, Vine, Skype, Facetime)
- Texting
- Social media accounts (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, Chatroulette, blogs like Tumblr)
- Comments posted on other sites
- Emails
- Tagged photos on other user accounts
- Apps (e.g., Pinterest, Snapchat, Instagram)
- Purchases and other transactions

Unintentional Cyber Footprints. Then, there are unintentional footprints your kids leave in cyber space. This is more like stepping in mud and then unknowingly tracking it through the house upon your return. Unintentional footprints include such things as cookies, search engine metrics and social media tracking. It is pretty surprising (and unnerving) how easily someone could follow your muddy footprints.

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Cyber Property

Anything that is posted online automatically becomes the copyright protected product of the creator. This includes music, photos, videos and written material. The creator of these products doesn't have to formally register it with the US Office of Copyrights or with the United States Patent and Trademarks Office. Use of these products, particularly for monetary gain, requires permission of the copyright owner.

Cyber Relationships

The internet was conceived and originally designed to facilitate communication between people separated by great distances. This original purpose has not expanded beyond what anyone could easily have imagined. Billions of people can contact any of the other billions of people who are online. This has led to the development of unique relationships that occur in the cyber world. The main categories of cyber relationships to review with your teenagers are friendships, sexually intimate communications and relational aggression.

Online Friendships.
The cyber world provides an avenue for kids to develop and maintain friendships with the people they know in person. But it has also opened up an entirely new world of social relationships. The traditional definition of a friend has become much more complex and nuanced. All social media accounts have some way to add "friends" (i.e., any random person who is allowed access to the information, observations and comments posted on the account). It is a strange challenge for 21st century parents to help their kids recognize the difference between *friends* (i.e., people who follow their cyber presence) and friends (i.e., people with whom they have an emotional connection and share a mutually supportive relationship). Some of these actual friendships may only exist online, i.e., ifriends. Think of these as new fangled pen pals who have instant access to your kid, no filters or delays in the establishment or connection between them and no real way of verifying anything about the person on the other end of the exchange. Another version of ifriends occurs among online video game team members for online role playing games. While these video game relationships are primarily practical and task oriented (e.g., working together to murder, maim and destroy) there is still a lot of socialization that occurs through and in between the cussing and insulting that goes on among members of the same team.

Sexually Intimate Online Relationships.
The cyber world has also provided a new way for teens to be sexually intimate. The form that has garnered the most attention these days is sexting; sending sexually explicit images to another person. It is a way to express sexual interest and to feel sexy without all the discomfort and embarrassment of having the person be right next to you. It is a way to seduce someone you don't know very well. (It also happens to be child pornography if the images are of a juvenile, even if the kid took the picture of themselves. You can find a booklet on Sexting by visiting my website.)

In addition to sexting, there is also what used to be called phone sex. Kids can have sexually explicit discussions that describe what they are doing, want to do or want the other person to do. These can be sent by email, text, comments on websites or posts on blogs and social media accounts.

Relational aggression. Finally, the internet and cellular networks can be used to express frustration, anger and cruelty to other people. The most common form of relational aggression is represented by insensitive comments, crude and awkward remarks or attempts at playful humor. The inability to read nonverbal social cues when making or receiving playfully insulting or sarcastic remarks can result in misunderstandings about the real intent of the remarks or the reactions of the recipient.

Cyber communication can also be used to intentionally bully, intimidate, harass or threaten other people. Through speaking directly online to another person or by using the social networks to speak about another person, the internet provides another forum for the age old attempts to be mean and cruel to another person. The internet is also a means through which someone can act to harm another person by sending malicious programs to damage their hardware or software. It is possible to steal content from someone's computer that can be used to try to embarrass or humiliate them. And, most disturbingly, it is possible to use technology to create false images and information that is then attributed to the target of the aggression (e.g., using editing software to insert images of a person in compromising or humiliating images or situations).

Cyber Safety

The cyber world has risks and dangers just like the real world. It would not be safe for your kid to walk alone late at night to a high crime neighborhood asking strangers where to pay cash for an expensive video game system. What if your kid then gave your house key to a stranger who offered to help and asked them to drop it off sometime when no one was home? It is important to avoid the online equivalent of this risky behavior. Teenagers need to know how to keep themselves safe, both on and off line. This means understanding the issues of privacy and security in the cyber world.

Privacy

Cyber privacy is about revealing or withholding information from others. Cyber citizens have the option of allowing others access to personal information. Privacy in the cyber world is more difficult for kids to appreciate than it is in the physical world. In the physical world, there are doors and windows and walls and clothing and silence and darkness that make it easier to identify and understand privacy. (The problems with even these concepts of privacy is beyond the scope of this column. Suffice to it to say that these areas of privacy also have their limitations.) Only the most technologically sophisticated kid (or parent) can truly appreciate how difficult it is to maintain privacy in the cyber world.

Personal privacy. To begin with, your kid will need to think carefully about what information to keep private. This usually includes some, but not all, elements of their cyber identity and their cyber footprint. (See previous section.) The criteria should include whether the information could be used to embarrass or cause them harm. Information that should typically treated as private includes personally identifying information (e.g., social security number, full name, passwords, etc.), geographic location (e.g., home address, neighborhood, GPS signal!) and numbers to money accounts (e.g., debit card, PayPal account, etc.).

Other's privacy. In the cyber world, your kid is not only responsible for their own privacy but also for maintaining the privacy entrusted to them by others. When someone reveals private information to your kid or gives them access to private online information your kid is obligated to keep that information private. Personal information about an individual or their accounts should only be shared with that person's permission. (That also means that your kid should think carefully about who they share private information with.)

Security

Security is about protecting private information from people who may try to obtain it without your kid's knowledge or consent.

Opportunistic Thieves. The first level of security deals with opportunistic thieves. These are individuals who make use of private information that has not been secured. Security for dealing with these kinds of thieves includes maintaining complex and frequently changed log in identifications and

passwords. It also includes being aware of the ways in which information is available through public sources through the foot print your kid leaves in the cyber world. Marketers who send spam through mass emails would also be included in this level of cyber security.

Professional Thieves. The next level of security is necessary for dealing with professional thieves. This includes the use of hidden programs to gather information from your kid's computer without their knowledge or to take control of the computer to use for other purposes. This would be represented by phishing emails, malicious bots, viruses and worms and zombie computers. It would also include people who actively attempt to defeat your kid's computer security programs (i.e., computer crackers).

By reviewing the concepts of privacy and security with your kid, you will better prepare them to move more safely in the cyber world. It will also help them recognize the various strategies professional thieves use to misuse your kid's identity and resources. The next aspect of cyber citizenship is that of respect in the cyber community. This includes respect for the rights of others as well as respect for the law.

Respect

As citizens of the cyber community, teenagers have a responsibility to be aware of the different aspects of the cyber world. It is also important for them to know about how to keep themselves safe and secure online. Finally, teenagers have a responsibility as cyber citizens to respect the laws of the online community.

Rights

While the cyber world does not have a bill of constitutionally protected rights such as those enjoyed by citizens of the United States (see the US Constitution), your teenager should still be required to respect certain unalienable rights: life (e.g., right for fair and reasonable treatment online), liberty (e.g., right to basic freedoms) and pursuit of happiness (e.g., right to explore personal interests without undue interference). These rights provide a framework for your kid on how to treat others in the cyber community. But, as importantly, they provide a validation for how your kid should expect and require others to treat them online.

Life. In the cyber world, the right to life is primarily about being treated in a civil and respectful manner. This means interacting with people in a considerate, tolerant and appropriate way; the way your grandmother would expect you to act (if your grandmother is a polite and well-mannered woman). This right also includes freedom from threats to life or personhood.

Liberty. Respect for online freedom should be similar to those enshrined by our constitution, especially the Bill of Rights. Your kid should respect (and expect) privacy, safety and equal treatment regardless of sex, religion or sexual orientation. They should honor other's property. They should also respect the right for others to express themselves and their opinions.

There are some limitations to these rights that are worth mentioning. The first being that children (and even adolescents) represent a special category of citizen. There is an expectation minors should be protected from undue influence and developmentally inappropriate material or experiences. (And who gets to decide this? Parents do.)

There are also limitations to the rights citizens have in the form and nature of the freedom of expression. While United States laws have an appallingly broad interpretation of what is protected speech and expression, as a parent you have the right and the responsibility to both limit your kid's exposure to the extremes of speech and its many forms and to limit your kid's personal expressions.

Pursuit of Happiness. The weird thing about the concept of happiness as it relates to human rights is that it isn't actually about happiness as we usually think about it.   Happiness isn't about getting everything you want. It is about the right to basic opportunities for personal growth and determining what is in your own best self-interest (rather than a government determining these for you). The cyber world is remarkable for the diverse opportunities for personal growth and to pursue personal interests.

Your kid, as a cybercitizen, is obligated to respect (and expect) others' rights to pursue their own personal interests.

The primary reason your kid should have respect for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is due to being a moral, considerate person. But, beyond that, there are some laws they need to follow.

Laws

The most important area of respect your kid should demonstrate as a cyber citizen is for the law. There are several legal issues related to online activity.

Intellectual Property Rights. Intellectual property rights include the written word, ideas and products like music. This area is protected by federal copyrights, patent and trademark laws. When your kid copies and pastes passages from the internet and claims they wrote it, it violates the property rights of the writer. When your kid downloads music without paying for it, they have violated the property rights of the artist.

Harassment. Another area that has legal protections is cyber harassment and bullying or cyber stalking.   These laws are primarily enacted by state legislatures.   Most (though not all) states have anti cyber harassment laws. Fewer states have cyber stalking laws.   Threatening, harassing or intimidating someone through electronic means violates that person's rights to be free from harassment. It may be against the law depending on the state in which you (or the person being communicated with) reside.

Pornography. Pornography also is regulated by law. For the most part that means insuring that it is not child pornography. Most other forms of pornography occupy a grey area that is in part protected as free speech and in part whether it violates community standards of decency. This pretty much means it is unregulated. A more recent aspect of pornography is what has been called revenge porn. For people over 18, a slimy former partner or, as likely, someone who has hacked your kid's account, may provide nude images to sites that solicit this kind of material. It can be done without the consent of the person in the images.

Identity Theft. Finally, there are laws about identity theft both at the federal and state level. Creating a false web sites under another person's name and otherwise using their personally identifying information is both a federal and state crime.

Cyber Crimes

So, here is a summary of things that are against the law.
- ✓ **Copyright infringement**
- ✓ **Plagiarism**
- ✓ **Downloading songs you didn't purchase**
- ✓ **Profiting from others' creative efforts or products**
- ✓ **Bullying and harassment**

- ✓ **Child pornography (including sexting)**
- ✓ **Internet stalking**
- ✓ **Identity theft**

While avoiding prosecution is an important goal for everyone, your kid should be a citizen who bases their behavior on what is right (i.e., morals and ethics) rather than just what is covered under the law. Morals provide a higher standard of behavior that all of us should use to guide and direct our behavior. Nevertheless, your kid does need to know about the law.

Civility

Civility is the foundation of civilized society (and not just because of the common derivation of the words). It is how we get along with each other. Civility is treating others with fairness and consideration for their feelings and needs. It is treating others as people worthy of respect and dignity. It is the golden rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Civility is particularly important in the cyber world. Most human communication is non-verbal. Words alone can be misinterpreted and misunderstood. When you are online, you often don't see the other person with whom you are interacting. (And when you do the fact that you are talking to a screen removes the direct human to human part of that interaction.) Civility helps minimize misunderstandings and disrespect. As a member of the cyber community, your kid should behave with civility toward their cyber neighbors. This means a couple of different things.

Politeness

Politeness is about respect. It is about courtesy. Whether and how you greet other people upon meeting them will let them know whether or not you consider them a person worthy of respect. Farewells demonstrate that you consider someone to be a person worthy of acknowledgement. Saying "please" and "thank you" are ways to be gracious for what someone else has done for you. Allowing someone to speak without interruption is a common courtesy (regardless of how wrongheaded or misguided the person is). Apologizing when you screw up or misspeak shows that you consider the other person's feelings to be important and legitimate. There are lots of behaviors that human cultures have developed to avoid unintentionally ending up in a mortal conflict. Politeness is one of these. Good cyber citizens are polite to others in the online community.

Kindness

Freedom of speech doesn't mean you get to say whatever you want. The right to free speech was not developed to protect insults, criticism, cursing, vulgarities, profanity and meanness. Treating others with civility means you don't speak in ways that are offensive, insulting, embarrassing or humiliating. Cyber citizens respect the sensibilities of others by speaking with kindness and consideration for others' feelings.

Tolerance

There is a big old cyber world out there with a horrifying diversity of values, beliefs and traditions. Civilized people respect the beliefs and traditions of other people, regardless of what they think about them.

Disagreements

Your kid needs to know how to disagree in a civilized way. This usually means talking about ideas rather than their momma. Condescension, sarcasm and belittling others (who aren't your good friend) is

uncivilized. Civil disagreement means stating the nature of your disagreement and how you think the other person is wrong. It does not mean informing someone of how stupid or idiotic they are. Disagreeing in a civil way does not happen at the top of your lungs (or, online, in ALL CAPS). Civility requires you to disagree without questioning the values or humanity of the other person.

Personal Boundaries

Finally, civility also includes expecting and requiring others to treat you with respect. Cyber citizens need to be assertive. They need to think for themselves. Your teen needs to be able to recognize other's attempts to manipulate or entrap them. They will need to know how to respond when others are inappropriate or abusive. They need to know how to reach out for help in formulating ways to respond to people who are behaving in uncivil or even criminal ways.

Here are a couple of resources dealing with civility in general.
The Institute for Civility
Choosing Civility: The Twenty-five Rules of Considerate Conduct by Forni, P. M.

Code of Conduct

Cyber Citizens should abide by a strict code of conduct based on the rights, privileges and responsibilities of being a member of the cyber world. Here is a checklist of all the information and expectations parents should have for their kids to be good cyber citizens.

Obey the Law
- ☐ Copyright Infringement: using, selling or distributing products or creations without permission of the copyright owner
- ☐ Plagiarism: presenting the words, music, thoughts or ideas of others without giving them credit
- ☐ Bullying and Harassment: repeatedly threatening, pressuring, intimidating or intentionally lying about another person
- ☐ Child Pornography: taking, sending, forwarding or keeping naked pictures of someone under 18 years old
- ☐ Stalking: continued unwanted monitoring and attention focused on another person
- ☐ Identity Theft: using the personal data of another person without their permission

Protect Personal Information
- ☐ Do not share
  - o Passwords
  - o Social Security number
  - o Credit/Debit card numbers
  - o PIN numbers
- ☐ Cautiously share
  - o Full Name
  - o Social media access
  - o GPS locations on cell phone, electronic devices, etc.

Be Safe
- ☐ Create secure passwords and [change them](#) on a regular basis
- ☐ Install and maintain a highly rated anti-spyware and malware protection program on electronic devices
- ☐ Do not conduct personal business on unsecured (public) internet network servers
- ☐ Block and ignore [malicious social networking posts](#)
- ☐ Don't open emails from unknown people, companies or organizations
- ☐ Provide personal information directly to reputable sites and not through email links
- ☐ Download apps or programs only in consultation with parents
- ☐ Be selective in adding online friends and sharing personal information

☐ Keep parents informed of potential risks, malicious communications and worrisome things that occur

Limit Your Footprint
☐ Post pictures you would be comfortable sharing with a potential employer
☐ Make comments and use the language you would with a future employer
☐ Be aware of information stored and the data collected by online sites

Respect Other's Property
☐ Give credit where credit is due for thoughts, ideas, words or music belonging to others

Respect Other's Privacy
☐ Keep confidential information confidential
☐ Don't forward others' words or pictures without their permission
☐ Intimate information (or behavior) should be kept private and personal

Be Civil
☐ Be polite
☐ Argue and disagree without name calling and making hurtful remarks
☐ Speak with kindness
☐ Demonstrate compassion and understanding for the misfortunes (or short comings) of others
☐ Don't engage in behavior that will harm others emotionally, psychologically, socially or physically
☐ Maintain your own personal boundaries

Citizens are committed to these behavior regardless of whether they are online or in the physical world. It is well worth holding your kids accountable for how you expect them to conduct themselves as citizens in their larger communities. We will all benefit from that.

Resources

First, you might find my book on parenting teens helpful. There are two chapters on the internet as well as 77 other chapters on a wide range of issues parents face in raising the typical teen
Raising Teens in the 21st Century

There is lots of information you can find on my websites for both parents and teens.
www.drjameswellborn.com is my primary website. My blog posts on this website provide lots of information on parenting teens.
www.jamesgwellbornphd.com is my website that has loads of information for parents and teens on internet resources, books, movies, family activities and more.

You may also be interested in receiving my semi-monthly newsletter on parenting teens. Signing up is easy.

If you are in my area, you could attend my parenting seminar for parents and kids. It's fun, informative and there's food!

Finally, you can follow me on my professional social media accounts that keep you updated on events I am participating in and activities that might be of interest to you as well as providing daily inspirational quotes on character and insights gleaned from books I've read, songs I've heard and videos I've seen.

Hope you found this booklet helpful.
Remember to enjoy your kid!
Jim