

LET'S TALK ABOUT Digital Literacy



A FAMILY GUIDE TO SUPPORTING DIGITAL LITERACY (GRADES 9-12)

WHAT IS DIGITAL LITERACY?

Digital literacy describes the knowledge, skills, and habits people need to use technology safely, responsibly, and effectively. It includes communicating, creating, thinking critically, protecting personal information, and making informed choices when using digital tools.

WHAT IS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)?

Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems that recognize patterns, respond to questions, make suggestions, or generate content. Many familiar tools, including search, translation, spelling suggestions, voice assistants, and learning platforms, may use AI. Generative AI creates new text, images, audio, video, or other content. AI can be useful, but it can make mistakes or reflect bias.

TIPS TO GET STARTED

- Respect your teen's growing independence while staying available.
- Ask open questions and listen to your teen's point of view, even when you disagree.
- Discuss family expectations together, including what matters, what is flexible, and how expectations may change as responsibilities grow.

SUPPORT TRUST, INDEPENDENCE, AND BELONGING.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Grades 9-12 students need opportunities to make decisions while knowing trusted adults are available to help them think through risks, responsibilities, and consequences. Digital spaces can support connection and belonging, but can also create pressure, comparison, conflict, and exclusion.

IDEAS FOR FAMILIES

- Ask your teen to show you an online space, creator, app, or tool they value and what it adds to their life.
- Choose curiosity and relationship-building over surveillance, moving toward greater trust as your teen demonstrates responsibility.

WAYS TO APPROACH IT IN GRADES 9-12

In Grades 9-12, students are developing values, building relationships, thinking about the future, and making choices that may have short- and long-term effects. Digital experiences can shape learning, identity, relationships, reputation, and future opportunities.

Students are also learning to evaluate AI outputs, protect personal information, use AI transparently and ethically, and recognize when independent thinking or working without AI is more appropriate.

Families can stay connected while supporting increasing independence. Every family has different resources, schedules, access, and experiences with technology; curiosity, conversation, and shared problem-solving matter more than being a technology expert.

- Use digital issues in media, current events, school, or daily life as opportunities for conversation.
- Make it clear that asking for help will lead first to safety and problem-solving.
- Model thoughtful digital choices and be willing to share your own mistakes.

- Talk about influencers, edited content, likes, streaks, comparison culture, fear of missing out, validation, and pressure to be constantly available.
- Discuss healthy boundaries for messaging, notifications, streaks, and response times.
- Talk about AI chatbots or companions that may sound caring or human. They can be useful tools, but they do not replace trusted people or real relationships.

ONLINE ACTIONS AFFECT REAL PEOPLE.

The same expectations for respect, safety, and responsibility apply online as they do in person. Posts, comments, photos, tags, and other online activity contribute to a digital footprint and can shape relationships and reputation over time.

PROTECT PRIVACY, SECURITY, AND DIGITAL REPUTATION.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Digital platforms and AI systems may collect information, personalize content, or build profiles. Online content may also be copied, reshared, or viewed outside its original context. A teen's digital presence can affect relationships, education, employment, and future opportunities.

IDEAS FOR FAMILIES

- Review one privacy, security, advertising, or location setting together.
- Use strong passwords and multi-factor authentication.
- Talk about phishing, scams, fake accounts, impersonation, and suspicious links.
- Discuss what information apps, websites, forms, and AI tools collect and who may be able to access it.
- Talk about consent before sharing another person's information or photos.
- Encourage your teen to consider how a future classmate, instructor, employer, or community member might interpret a public post.
- Before using a new tool, check age requirements, privacy, contact features, data collection, and blocking or reporting options.

Names, photographs, health or school records, workplace or financial details, and other confidential information should not be entered into an AI tool unless the tool and its use have been approved. When unsure, leave personal or confidential information out.

VERIFY INFORMATION AND QUESTION DIGITAL SYSTEMS.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

AI-generated and digitally altered content can look or sound realistic. Students need to verify information, consider who created it and why, and understand how digital systems can influence what they see and believe.

Encourage your teen to check:

- The original source, date, evidence, and context.
- Other credible sources and whether quotations, statistics, or references actually exist.
- Whether content may be edited, AI-generated, sponsored, or targeted.
- What emotional reaction the message is trying to create.
- Whose interests are served and whose perspectives are missing.

Recommendation systems can reinforce what someone already watches or believes. Bots, deepfakes, targeted messages, and AI-generated influencers can also affect public debate, consumer choices, and what people believe.

PAUSE • QUESTION • VERIFY

Before sharing information or using it to make a decision, pause, question the source and purpose, and verify the claim using credible evidence and other perspectives.



SUPPORT BALANCE AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Healthy technology use is not only about time on a screen. Creating, learning, connecting, accessibility, and entertainment serve different purposes. What matters is the purpose, quality, and impact of the activity.

Digital environments can affect sleep, concentration, self-image, identity, belonging, anxiety, hope, productivity, and relationships. Influencers, edited images, AI-generated people, and comparison culture can also shape expectations about appearance, lifestyle, and success.

IDEAS FOR FAMILIES

- Ask which digital activities leave your teen feeling connected, inspired, hopeful, anxious, left out, pressured, distracted, or exhausted.
- Encourage your teen to reduce unnecessary notifications and protect times when they do not need to be available.

- Protect time for sleep, movement, hobbies, relationships, and outdoor activities when possible.
- Talk about influencers, edited images, AI-generated people, unrealistic lifestyles, and social comparison.
- When change is needed, consider realistic options such as device-free meals, overnight notification limits, app limits, or planned offline time.
- Watch for meaningful changes in sleep, mood, friendships, schoolwork, confidence, hopefulness, or activities they usually enjoy.

NOTICE • TALK • ADJUST

If technology is affecting sleep, mood, relationships, responsibilities, or well-being, talk about what you notice and work together on realistic changes to routines, settings, or expectations.

TALK ABOUT HOW TO RESPOND IF SOMEONE ONLINE THREATENS, PRESSURES, BLACKMAILS, IMPERSONATES, ASKS FOR SEXUAL IMAGES, ENCOURAGES SECRECY, OR OTHERWISE FEELS UNSAFE. DISCUSS HOW TO BLOCK, REPORT, SAVE EVIDENCE, LEAVE, AND ASK A TRUSTED ADULT FOR HELP.



USE DIGITAL TOOLS WITH PURPOSE

Digital tools and AI can support brainstorming, planning, feedback, coding, accessibility, language learning, research preparation, communication, and creation. They can also replace the thinking or skill an assignment is meant to develop.

IDEAS FOR FAMILIES

Ask your teen to show how they used a digital or AI tool on a recent task and explain what thinking remained their own. Encourage them to:

- Check school, post-secondary, or workplace expectations before using AI.
- Identify the knowledge or skill the task is meant to demonstrate.
- Check AI-generated information against reliable sources.
- Revise suggestions so the final work reflects their own reasoning, judgment, and voice.
- Keep track of important sources, prompts, drafts, and changes when required.
- Acknowledge or disclose AI use when required or when it meaningfully contributed to the work.
- Explain and defend the final work in their own words.

Responsible use includes protecting privacy, respecting others' work, checking information, and being transparent about how digital and AI tools were used.

IS THIS TOOL SUPPORTING LEARNING?

"Is this tool helping my teen learn, or is it doing the learning for them?"

A polished product is not a substitute for genuine understanding. Students need opportunities to learn with AI, about AI, and without AI.

CONNECT DIGITAL LITERACY TO THE FUTURE.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Digital literacy can help Grades 9-12 students prepare for post-secondary learning, work, community life, and changing expectations around technology and AI.

IDEAS FOR FAMILIES

- Help your teen begin or update a simple digital portfolio with a project, skill, credential, or experience they are proud of.
- Explore how technology and AI are changing careers, trades, arts, services, and community organizations.
- Encourage hands-on experiences such as community projects, volunteering, co-op, mentorship, or conversations with people in fields of interest.
- Discuss post-secondary and workplace expectations for AI use, privacy, citation, collaboration, and academic or professional integrity.
- Practise professional online behaviour, such as respectful email, video-meeting etiquette, and managing a public profile.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CHILD

- Which people, influencers, or communities shape how you see yourself and your values online?
- How would you verify a claim, image, video, or recording that may be AI-generated?
- When does AI support learning, and when might it replace learning?
- What personal or confidential information should never be shared with an app or AI tool?
- How might your digital footprint affect future opportunities?
- When is choosing not to use technology the most responsible decision?

HELPFUL RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

- [MediaSmarts Digital Literacy Fundamentals](#)
- [Common Sense Education Digital Citizenship Resources](#)
- [Canadian Centre for Cyber Security – Get Cyber Safe](#)
- [Digital Moment AI Literacy Resources](#)