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Position Statement

The Churchill School and Center views the need for digital well-being education as essential to our curriculum. Our goal is to develop students and families who are responsible digital citizens who understand and use technology ethically, safely, and responsibly.

Building on the work of our families outside of school, we aim to develop skills in our students that foster healthy relationships and critical thinking in digital and physical spaces. A primary goal is to promote a healthy media balance in order for our students to make the right choices in their lives.

Digital technology is not inherently good or evil. We believe providing digital well-being education will help our students make safe, ethical, and responsible decisions in their use of technology. We aim to achieve this goal by applying an honest, even-handed approach with practical applications.
Goals

The following is a brief summary of the many goals of our curriculum.

Students will be able to:

- Critically examine the media we encounter
- Evaluate media for trustworthiness and relevance
- Understand the relationship between our “online” lives and our “offline” lives
- Explain how what we share can impact our lives and the lives of others
- Recognize appropriate digital communication and relationships
- Differentiate between instances of cyberbullying and digital drama
- Locate appropriate online content
- Apply strategies to cope with seeing inappropriate content
- Define risky behaviors and possible outcomes
- Understand, analyze, and critically examine stereotypes presented in media
- Evaluate the ethics of data collection by corporations and governments
- Apply basic online security measures protect ourselves
- Apply strategies to protect our data and privacy
- Properly use and credit other’s work
- Understand what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it
- Make smart decisions regarding screen time and develop a healthy media balance
Themes in Digital Well-Being

There are several major themes and topics in the umbrella of digital well-being. Many of the themes are related to social-emotional or technological knowledge, while others are a combination of both categories. This section explains several of the topics and subtopics we cover at Churchill. These themes have been identified by Common Sense Media and are adapted from their website.

Information Literacy

Information Literacy, sometimes referred to as “Digital Literacy” or “Media Literacy”, refers to identifying, finding, and evaluating various forms of media - blogs, news websites, videos, advertisements, and more. The amount of digital noise and media one must sift through has intensified in the last decade. By understanding various types of media and how media works, our students will be able to critically examine the abundance of media with which we interact, and evaluate its trustworthiness and relevance. Students will build their knowledge of information literacy through explorations and examinations of media “texts” they interact with online and in real life.

Digital Footprint

Our students live in a world where everything they post, share, comment on, like, and view is permanent. With every digital artifact they create, our students add to
their digital footprint. As a result, privacy concerns emerge. Anything posted can be shared, remixed, and reshared. Something originally meant for one person could end up on thousands of screens. Awareness of these facts is an important step towards becoming a responsible digital citizen.

The creation and permanence of the digital footprint is discussed along with reinforcing the importance of appropriateness throughout the coursework. Students begin to understand how communities formed online can influence life “off-screen.” Being a responsible digital citizen requires an awareness of how the content we share impacts our lives and the lives of others.

Digital Communication

Cyberbullying may be the most discussed theme in the realm of Digital Well-Being and is often conflated with the term Digital Citizenship. Reports of cyberbullying have been on the rise\(^1\), and are often cited as the cause of school shootings, teen suicide, and depression\(^2\). Bullying has always existed among children, but today’s digital world often intensifies the effects. Digital drama, which differs from bullying, describes the normal everyday spats teens may have with others, whether online or in real life. Bullying, on the other hand, is defined as repeated and targeted harassment - both online and in real life. Digital drama, though less harmful than bullying, can still have negative effects and consequences and can be especially magnified due to the permanence and ubiquitous nature of digital technology.


Helping students learn about the consequences of cyberbullying and how to control our online relationships (we all choose to be cruel or kind in these interactions) helps to prevent harassment. In tandem with learning the consequences, students are presented with the opportunity to analyze scenarios and to differentiate between instances of digital drama and cyberbullying to prepare them to act responsibly.

In addition to bullying, anxiety around social communication increases during adolescence. This anxiety is natural and evolutionary, but today's increased digital communication has intensified this anxiety. Being left out of a group chat, being “ghosted”, or just not getting the response you want can cause severe anxiety in young people. Helping students learn what appropriate communication looks like, how much contact is appropriate, how and when to respond to communication, and how to deal with so called “FOMO” (fear of missing out) or a situation that causes this anxiety is an important goal of our program.

Internet Safety

An often discussed issue among parents is how to keep their child safe on the internet. The threat of sexual solicitation from a stranger rightly terrifies parents everywhere. For instance, the typical media depiction of this online predator is a middle-aged basement dweller, when in actuality teens are more likely to be solicited by another teen or young adult. This misconception can lead to uninformed young people who may not be concerned with their risky online behavior.

Helping our young children learn what online spaces are appropriate for them to visit can help prevent most risky behavior. However, even seemingly “safe places”

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may expose children to content they are not ready for. We work to make sure our students have the strategies for dealing with these difficult situations.

Making our students aware of the ways to protect themselves online, defining risky behaviors, and outcomes of those behaviors are the goals within Internet Safety. Providing tools that help our students navigate these murky waters will help them stay safe.

**Self Image & Digital Identity**

As we live more of our lives in digital spaces, many create online personas that differ from our real world identities. For some, these personas can be greatly beneficial. Trying out new identities when the stakes are low can help individuals build a sense of identity and increase their self esteem. For others, pseudonymity can lead down a dangerous path that may negatively impact their real-life persona. Some may develop an online persona that provides them with positive feedback they may begin to rely on. Teens and tweens are affected by social media in a myriad of ways, reflected by the ambivalent attitudes towards social media reported by teens.4

During adolescence, a period of increased awareness of their peers coupled with an increase in risk taking, the importance of understanding how online behavior can affect offline lives becomes paramount. We want students to understand how people’s identities can affect what they share online. Behaviors and identities

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based on hatred, violence, illegal activities, and risky sexual behavior are discouraged.

Combating the racial, gender, familial and other stereotypes presented to young people in modern media is another goal of our curriculum. Throughout our curriculum, students learn about advertising tactics and the racial, gendered, heteronormative and misogynistic undertones in the content we consume. Students are given the tools to help them understand, analyze, and integrate what they see into their worldview.

**Privacy & Security**

There are frequent news reports of organizations and companies being hacked and user data being compromised. As our lives become more virtual, maintaining the safety of that virtual life becomes as crucial as the safety of our offline lives. To prepare our students, they learn about creating strong passwords, understanding website and app privacy policies, and understanding how to avoid online scams. Our students also learn how and why data companies, advertisers, social media companies and the government collect and store data and what is done with it.

Additionally, the Churchill School has the responsibility of vetting the software, websites, and systems with which we trust student and employee data. These steps help to protect the identity of our students and allow for a positive learning environment to flourish.

**Creative Credit & Copyright**

The increased accessibility to the massive amounts of free information and content has made it much easier to take other’s work and pass it off as your own,
remix it as something new, or share that content with no regard for the content’s creator. Technology has facilitated an abundance of creative content built on the work of others, but it is important that our students learn how to properly use the work of others, as well as protect their work.

Our students learn about public domain and fair use, how to credit others and the stipulations for using other's work. This will help our students prepare for a world where they can consume and create information. Every post, Tweet, Snap, etc. is an example of our students as creators, and it is important that as creators they follow proper guidelines of use.

Additionally, students learn about plagiarism as it relates to school work and professional work. Reinforcing the potential consequences of plagiarism helps guide students to make the right choices when using someone else's work in their own original creations.

**Media Balance & Health**

Research\(^5\) shows that American teens consume roughly nine hours of media per day and that “kids who spend more time on screens report lower grades, get into trouble more frequently, and have lower levels of personal contentment, including more boredom, more frequent feelings of sadness, and less satisfaction with school”\(^6\). Whether the screen time caused these feelings, or the feelings cause teens to withdraw into their screens is debatable. But the fact of the matter is that

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the majority of our days are spent in front of screens which can have physical and mental health effects. 

Monitoring and limiting our screen time, knowing the proper time and place to view screen-based media, and striking a balance with physical and other non-screen-based activity are all part of healthy media consumption. Our goal is to make sure our students recognize the negatives of unregulated screen time and how to balance their media consumption with other non-media based activities.

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The Churchill School provides access to digital devices in Kindergarten on a limited basis, while students in Clusters A and B have access to a classroom set of iPads. In Cluster C, students are issued an iPad on a 1:1 basis, which continues through 8th grade. When students enter the high school they are provided with a laptop as part of the 1:1 program. As a result of this access, our curriculum in Digital Well-Being begins in Kindergarten and continues until our students graduate. The following takes a closer look at the curriculum in each division.

Elementary School

The elementary school students learn about digital well-being in their Health and Human Relations groups (HHR), library classes and technology courses.

As many of our students’ first online interactions occur with video games, Clusters A and B focus on how to be a safe gamer and avoid cyberbullying. In Clusters C and D, students spend 6-8 weeks exploring internet safety, being responsible and respectful online, how to respond to problematic communication (being safe and kind), and what is a digital footprint.

During library class, students learn about public and private information, cyberbullying, and online responsibility. These conversations are based on students' lives and discussions around online behavior in games and other familiar interactions. Teachers use a variety of tools including Nearpod, Brain Pop and BrainPop Jr., and the Common Sense Education curriculum.

In elementary school STEAM classes, students develop the framework to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages in a variety of forms- from print to
video to digital content. They learn how to identify, gather, and evaluate information on the internet. They practice analyzing biases and intent as they complement their research across different subjects with design projects. It is important for students to understand the role of media and technology in society, and develop skills of inquiry and mindful self-expression in their formative years. This lays a foundation for the progression of skills they encounter at the middle and high school levels.

**Middle School**

Continuing the work of the elementary school team, our HHR and middle school technology classes integrate digital well-being into their curricula.

Our 6th-grade students begin discussing online safety and awareness, online personas, age-appropriate content, how to cope with seeing inappropriate content, digital media addiction and balance, the positives and negatives of social media use, and reinforcing the importance of appropriate communication, boundaries, and interactions with others.

In addition to continuing conversations from previous years, HHR for 7th graders centers on how we present ourselves online vs. in real life, facilitating discussions about body image, a media literacy unit focused on gender and race stereotypes, and the credibility of online sources. These topics are reinforced in technology classes, where students explore the role of digital media in society and the positive and negative effects of technological advancements.
Building on 6th and 7th grade work, in the 8th grade, HHR discussions are centered around the effects of internet pornography. In technology class, students continue to learn about online safety by exploring hacking, the trustworthiness of websites and online communications, metadata, digital footprints, navigating online communities and how to regulate our screen time.

Woven throughout the middle school curriculum are lessons about finding and citing appropriate and relevant sources. Students get their first exposure to fair use of other’s work in their own, original work.

**High School**

In HHR courses, students focus on the social and emotional aspects of digital well-being. Students cover mature topics such as sexting as well as handling difficult interactions involving issues of self-esteem and cultural issues on social media. Building on work begun in 8th grade, students have conversations about online pornography. Based on a curriculum developed by researchers at Boston University, students are presented with a “media literacy” approach to online pornography, in which no judgement is placed, but rather perspective and information, allowing students to consider for themselves if it will support their positive development.

In 9th grade, students take a mandatory five-week media literacy course that discusses the ways that governments and corporations collect our data, the power and danger of social media, finding and evaluating sources for legitimacy and salience, and how to better understand the media we consume. Additionally, students explore how real-world identity impacts a person’s online behavior, the gender and racial biases in media, and the resulting sexist, racist, and oppressive ethical dilemmas that stem from algorithmic decision making.
Technology electives are offered to all students in grades 9-12 which further explore many of these topics. In these classes, more direct technology instruction takes place, including learning to write code, creating digital art, the environmental consequences of technology, and video game design. However, these courses are not mandatory, therefore not all of our students are exposed to the curricula.

Throughout the high school core curriculum, students are taught how to properly evaluate, cite, and incorporate sources from a variety of media into their own projects, preparing them for research based work they will encounter in higher education.

**Community Outreach**

In 2018, Churchill became a partner school with Common Sense Media. This relationship entitles the Churchill community to several benefits, including three yearly educational presentations for parents, faculty and the community at large. These presentations, which are spaced throughout the school year, cover topics such as managing screen time, getting personal devices, cyberbullying and social media, and digital well-being for tweens and teens.

The Churchill Technology team sends periodic updates to the community about current events and topics which affect our community. Additionally, the technology team provides professional development to the faculty to keep everyone to date on hot topics in digital well-being.

The Churchill School and Center also offers parent nights, where parents are invited to participate in a forum, screen a film, or receive general technology help. We believe knowledgeable and responsible families are integral to achieving our goals.
Things to Consider

While we do not want to prescribe certain rules for every family and community member, we would like to share some best practices as a way for you to begin conversations or create your own plans for digital well-being in your home.

1. Hold off as long as you can on giving your child a smartphone, ideally not until middle school.

2. No devices one hour prior to bed and all devices must charge outside of the bedroom. (AAP recommendation)

3. Create a family media plan together. It is important to give them a voice in the process. Create rules with your kids about using screen devices at home, including limiting screen time and establishing consequences for violating the guidelines. Regularly update the rules with them as they mature or as devices change. Common Sense Media has a few examples.

4. Moderate your own screen time and set an example for your kids. When they see you following the rules, they will be more likely to take your lead.

5. Stay informed about what your kids are doing with technology. If they play video games, play with them, etc.

6. Encourage a balance of activities that do not require screens.

7. Thoughtfully consider when you give technology as a gift. Avoid creating expectations that the release of a new device means they get one.

8. Use the privacy policies of social media companies as a guideline for when your child can have an account with them.

9. Monitor what device(s) and apps your child uses.

10. Create “Tech-Free” zones and/or times in your house where nobody can use any digital technology (bedroom, dinner table, etc.) as part of your family media plan.
References & Resources: Annotated


Susan Bearden approaches digital well-being through the lense of community-based methodologies to support our growing digital world. The book guides parents, students, and teachers through how to approach digital literacy and citizenship inside and outside of school environments.


boyd's book is a wealth of ethnographic research about how teens use social media, connect with one another both digitally and physically, and the effects digital media has on our children. boyd's approach is even-handed and not alarmist.

Chapman and Pellicane provide strategies for bridging the gap between screen time and building strong character traits. The goal is for children to create a healthy relationship with digital media and real-life interactions.


Common Sense Media is the industry leader in digital media research and education. The Churchill School is a partner school, with access to additional resources, trainings, and professional development.


Dunckley is a reactionary and extremist with an anti-screen outlook. She presents problematic arguments in her book, filled with outdated and misleading data in an attempt to sell her invented diagnosis of “Electronic Screen Syndrome”. And while much of her book can be ignored, she offers advice for using screen devices that are not without merit. We only offer this book as a perspective, not a prescription. Take Dunckley’s advice with a grain of salt.


Article written by Common Sense Media’s Christine Elgersma with concerns, facts and statistics, and suggestions for dealing with this topic with children.


Deborah Heitner guides parents and educators through navigating screen time and digital engagement. The author offers the perspective of looking at digital engagement and worlds as a vehicle for social skill development. The book seeks to provide supports for understanding our own interactions with digital spaces.
The International Society for Technology in Education develops standards and resources for digital learning for students and educators.

Itō, Mizuko, and Judd Antin. Hanging out, Messing around, and Geeking out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media. MIT Press, 2013.

An ethnographic examination of young people's everyday media behaviors.


A description of an administrators implementation of a 1:1 laptop program at a school in California. While a majority of the book may only be of interest to educators, there are several chapters regarding parenting with devices and striking a balance between privacy and parental involvement that are valuable.


An in-depth study of the ways media has been twisted and manipulated into a recruiting tool for hate, as well as the ways in which technology has allowed and amplified the spread of misinformation, and the various groups seeking to use digital spaces to distort the truth, lie, and harm our society.


Generation Like explores the modern phenomenon of social media celebrity and how social media shapes the behavior of the American teenager. Rushkoff focuses on users as both consumers and advertisers to examine how corporations use teens on social media to sell their products to themselves in ways never possible before.


From Common Sense Media: “explores how teens interact with each other using electronic device (smartphones, computers, social media, etc.) and looks at whether parents can -- or should -- try to limit or control this behavior."


A scientific and psychiatric look at why teens behave the way they do and solutions that work.

### Websites and Apps Used at Churchill

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