

Pascack Valley Regional High School District

Digital Citizenship

Relationships & Communication

What are Relationships and Communication in the Digital World?

When online “chat rooms” first came on the scene in the 1990s, many thought it was a passing fad, simply a mechanism providing socially awkward people a way to communicate. However, as reported in a **USA Today** article (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/06/03/online-dating-marriage/2377961>) more than 1/3 of today's marriages start online. This report simply takes into account personal relationships, and does even scratch the surface of professional ones.

Our Digital Footprint and Self-image may attract or discourage people from establishing digital relationships with one another, much in the same way these relationships may form or breakdown in the real world. Digital relationships and their respective communications are quite real - they should be taken as serious as the ones we have in our non-digital life.

Why are Digital Relationships and Communications important?

Digital relationships are the foundation for much of the commerce, education and personal relationships in today's world. Gone are the days of “[You've Got Mail](#)” where people hid behind a screen in anonymity; however, many today still conduct their online communications in this manner. Proper communication is vital in assuring tone, inflection and meaning are not misconstrued as we forge relationships. Misrepresentation of yourself, or someone else, in the digital world can be even more damaging to relationships than similar mistakes in non-digital dialogue as there is always a record.

What is the relevance for Students?

Much of the maturing process includes establishing, cultivating and thriving in relationships of all types. Coupling this maturing process with the understanding that digital devices are their main communication tool, now more than ever our students need to understand how to cultivate relationships and foster them through proper digital communications. We need to assure students understand that how they communicate with people online leaves a lasting impression on their relationships as they go through life.

What can we do to help students?

Here is a short list of examples educators may use to discuss the relevance of Digital Relationships and Communications

- Have students pair up with someone in class they do not have a relationship with. Through a closed blog, have them get to know one another, possibly by giving them a conversation starter or commenting on a current event. With student's permission, share portions of online dialogue pointing out proper (and improper) communications
- Start a class Twitter discussion with a subject area expert (someone outside of the school) on a topic. Students would need to communicate formally using what they likely consider a normally non-formal medium
- Evaluate online discussions made by famous people - have students discuss whether the communications were appropriate or not
- Have students find examples of good digital communication in your subject area - they may learn something new about the subject area AND will have a better understanding of proper communication
- Facilitate a discussion on why oversharing online is an issue, especially with personal relationships

Where can I learn more?

- <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/scope-and-sequence#grades-9-12>
- <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/lesson/overexposed-sexting-and-relationships>
- <https://cunedigitalcitizenship.wikispaces.com/Digital+Communication>
- <http://www.toastmasters.org/ToastmastersMagazine/ToastmasterArchive/2010/April/Social-Media-Etiquette.aspx>