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Creating a positive digital footprint

I frequently remind our learners that the things they do and say online won't go away. However, curating a positive online presence is better than having none at all. Here are some top tips for helping your child create a positive digital footprint as they get older:

Think before sharing

It's not new advice, but thinking carefully before sending or posting is one of the most important parts of looking after your digital footprint. Instead of just holding back from posting inappropriate comments, your child should think about how everything they share fits into their online persona – does it represent how they want others to see them?

Use the right settings

It's best to only post things you're happy to make public, but that doesn't mean there should be no separation between what you share with the world and with your friends. It's natural – and important – for your child to share some things publicly and restrict others to a smaller group of friends and family.

'A good digital footprint should reflect the things that are important to them'

Get involved

Especially as young people get a bit older, a good digital footprint should reflect the things that are important to them. If your child is interested in writing, for example, they could start a blog to build up an online portfolio. They don't have to accept comments or posts from people reading it if they don't want to. And you don't have to share your own work to make your interests part of your digital footprint – the things you like and the people you follow matter too.

Stay on top of things

If your child is working to have a positive digital footprint they should check regularly to make sure it stays good. They can Google their name, or use tools on some social media platforms to see their activity or their profile from someone else's perspective.

Be safety-conscious

It's hard to have a positive online presence if you're not in control of what 'you' share. Your child should use good passwords and keep them private to keep anyone else from getting access to their accounts.

Delete old accounts

Social media platforms go out of fashion quickly, and yesterday's craze might be out of favour with your child today. Nothing posted online ever disappears completely, but it's best to delete old profiles instead of leaving them unattended.

Stay careful

Your child shouldn't overshare online in the interest of having a good digital footprint. They still need to think about using privacy settings and avoid giving out too much identifying information.

For some young people, like those in care, it might be more important to focus on privacy than building an online presence – and that's completely fine. A positive digital footprint is a bonus, not a requirement.

It's also worth reminding your child that their digital footprint isn't just what they share, it's what others say about them too. As a parent or carer, you might want to keep this in mind for your own posts as well.

Stay safe,

Tom Burke

Computing Lead

Twitter account: @EducateICT



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