Protect Your Digital Footprint

WHAT IS A DIGITAL FOOTPRINT?

A digital footprint is the permanent trail or record you leave behind in a digital environment. This is the result of your actions and the actions of others online.

A digital footprint is created by everything said, posted, and shared online. A digital footprint can also be added to by others.

Protect your digital footprint to protect your future.

Why?

"Your child's digital footprint is how the world perceives them, not who they really are."

Each one of your children will have a digital footprint. It will be their choice as to whether they have a positive one or a negative one.

A digital footprint can be used to make judgements for all of the following:
- Employment
- Sporting selection
- University placement
- Property managers when deciding who rents a desired property
- International travel and visa applications in some situations

Your digital footprint has become part of your resume.
Make sure you control what's included.

A positive digital footprint will give you a head start; a negative footprint will take you out of the running, and you will not be told why.

A POSITIVE FOOTPRINT

What the community wants to see in your digital footprint:
- Respect for self
- Respect for others
- An understanding of how technology should be used – not excessive use
- Positive activities – sport/family/school/community activity
- Positive attitudes – encouraging friends; forwarding appropriate articles, blogs, and images; contributing to a healthy online culture

A NEGATIVE FOOTPRINT
What the community doesn't want to see:
- Lack of respect for self – drunken photos, silly comments, inappropriate photos
- Lack of respect for others
    - Aggressive or bullying behaviour
    - Endorsing topics that include homophobia, racism, violence, pornography, or criminal activity
    - radical political or religious views
    - poor language
- Any images you wouldn't want a parent, grandparent, or employer to see
- Speaking poorly of your school, teachers, or employer
- Disclosures that make you seem unreliable; for example, not going to work or school and bragging about it

POINTS TO CONSIDER

Employment
It is common practice for organisations, be it government, private, community, or sporting organisations, to conduct a 'digital reputation search' of prospective and current employees or participants. Recruiters may request the following information:
- Names of all social media, online games, and groups or forums
- Passwords for these accounts
- How long per week these programs are used
- How many friends or contacts in each account
- How much money is spent online each week

Comments made online, in your private accounts, and after hours **can be grounds for dismissal and even criminal charges.** This has been tested in Australia, and the decision was upheld.

Relationships
Your child's relationships should not be played out online for future employers and partners to see.

ACTIONS FOR PARENTS

1. Set a good example. Clean your social footprint.

2. Talk to your children, and explain about the importance of their digital footprint.

3. Encourage your children to delete information that may have a negative impact on their digital footprint.

   - Get rid of mistakes or the bad stuff.

4. Check photos and chat history regularly.

   - Is this consistent with our values?

5. Check online associates/friends.

   - Others' behaviour reflects poorly on your children through association. In Facebook, it is possible that messages or posts made by other contacts can appear on your children's profile pages.

6. Insist privacy settings are used where available.

   - This can limit access by certain people to some of your information.

7. Check what interest groups and websites your children are associated with.

   - These groups may not be in line with who your children really are (e.g., drugs, violence, racism).

8. Check that photos and, in particular, profile pictures are appropriate. This is the first thing others will see.

ACTIONS FOR TEENS

1. You will be judged by the virtual company you keep. Read their profile before 'friending' or following. Visit their website, blogs, and connections. Make sure they are what they seem as you will be judged by the association.

2. Show maturity in what you share. Choose positive articles, share accomplishments, and like/favourite your friends' positive accomplishments. Create a positive culture in your virtual friend world. Be aware of the content you endorse, and be a positive influence.

3. Never share passwords or leave your accounts open. Your friends may think it's funny to post inappropriate comments or images in your accounts.

4. Keep your phone number, address, and bank details offline.

5. "Untag" photos of you in other people's Facebook accounts if they are not ones you would choose to share.

6. Don't share copyrighted materials without a reference to the original source.

7. Find people you respect and admire online. See how they present themselves.

8. Keep your profile as simple and non-descript as possible to create an impression you want others to have of you.

9. Remember, the online world is not private. Your teachers, coaches, bosses, future partner, and parents can see everything you put online.