


# Chapter 13

## iCitizen: Promoting Technology Safety and Digital Citizenship in School Counseling

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### ABSTRACT

*School counselors are tasked with promoting the responsible use of technology in collaboration with families and educators to increase student safety. However, there are significant challenges dealing with technology use in the schools. Youth from underserved backgrounds, including LGBTQ+ youth, youth of color, and youth living in poverty, may find support and connection through technology. This chapter includes an overview on technology use among youth, cultural considerations in technology and digital media use, and collaborative interventions to promote tech safety and digital citizenship. Final case examples outline culturally responsive, student-centered interventions to promote tech safety and digital citizenships within schools.*

### INTRODUCTION

Technology use has revolutionized education in the United States (US) and across the globe. In a school-based setting, one side of technology integration can include virtual learning platforms, classroom portals, and streamlined communication between teachers and parents via email. An emerging body of research indicates promising outcomes for educational technology (i.e., ed-tech) in particular, including improved learning outcomes when used for individualized instruction matched to students' pace of learning (Escueta et al., 2017). Students' use of personal technology, including cell phones, tablets, laptops, and social media and online gaming accounts that go with them, has delivered a whole new set of problems. Such problems include student safety concerns for school counselors, teachers, school administration, parents, and care providers.

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School counselors face significant challenges in guiding and supporting students' increasing use of technology. Excessive or inappropriate use of technology can pose several concerns to students' physical and mental health and wellbeing. Such concerns may include gaming or social media addiction, breaches of privacy and personal information, age-inappropriate communication, access to adult material, **cyberbullying**, and targeting by online sexual predators (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2017). School counselors may also report frustration and discomfort when addressing their student's social media use (Gallo et al., 2016).

Particularly for pre-adolescent teens (i.e., tweens) and teenagers, excessive time spent playing video games (i.e., gaming) and using social media can negatively impact physical and mental health, school attendance, academic achievement, and increase family discord (Allison et al., 2006; Choo et al., 2010; Gentile, 2009; Kuss & Griffiths, 2012). Social media and video chat applications, including Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Marco Polo, offer tweens and teens instant communication with friends and strangers alike.

Youth from marginalized backgrounds including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth, youth of color, and youth living in higher poverty areas may find support, connection, identity exploration, and affirmation through social media (Hillier et al., 2012; Singh, 2013). However, there is an arguably equal risk in excessive consumption or unmonitored digital media use. Such risks can include predatory sexual harassment, bullying, and doxing (i.e., publishing private information about an individual in an online public forum with malicious intent). These risks require school counselors to engage in **cultural responsiveness**.

The push-pull relationship between technology use and students can be extremely stressful and confusing for school counselors. Establishing firm boundaries around personal technology use for students can be a losing battle faced with push back from students, parents, and families who desire the ease of connection brought by smartphone use. Additionally, the connection, social support, creativity, and ease of communication that comes from social media and gaming may help promote resilience to the impact of systemic oppression (Aventin, 2014; Hillier et al., 2012; Ybarra et al., 2015). Professional ethics position school counselors as foundational to leading efforts to promote technology safety and good **digital citizenship** in schools across the country (ASCA, 2016).

According to the ASCA ethical guidelines, professional school counselors are responsible for promoting the responsible use of technology in collaboration with families and educators to increase student safety (ASCA, 2016). This chapter aims to provide school counselors with an overview of technology safety concerns among school-aged youth and provide specific, practical, and student-centered collaborative interventions to support students and promote the responsible use of technology.

This chapter will contain a brief literature review of current tween and teen digital media use, demographics, and cultural considerations; examples of common problems, challenges, and risk behaviors associated with digital media use in schools; examples of relational, collaborative, and student-centered interventions to promote technology safety and good **digital citizenship**; and two narrative case examples demonstrating problem identification and strategic intervention to promote technology safety and **digital citizenship**.

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