

Common Sense Privacy Program

As teachers, we play a critical role in helping protect student data as we move toward more online resources and digital learning modalities. Here are a few things to think about to help you protect your students' data.

1

Remember that it is still your classroom

When you shift instructional activities to a digital realm, your relationship with the student remains unchanged. You are still in control, and you should manage the technology use the same way you would manage your classroom. The same laws, policies, and guidelines that you follow in your physical classroom don't change when you go online. Plan ahead to avoid any situations that might be problematic in your physical space. If you would not meet a student alone one on one in your physical setting, don't do it online.

3

Compliance with the law still applies

FERPA, COPPA, HIPAA, and all the rest follow you into your digital space. Be careful to keep information secure and avoid sharing something electronically that could violate any of the tenets that you are following now. While it's fine to feature student work on your classroom wall, you should avoid posting any student work online without explicit permission. Even with permission, remove or obscure student names or any other information that could personally identify a student.

2

Master your digital domain

Become familiar with and practice using the tools of your digital learning platform. Manage your online environment as you would your physical one. Just as you can monitor who enters your classroom or close the door, do so in your digital spaces as well. For example, if you use Zoom for video classes, utilize a waiting room, so you control who gets into the Zoom room. Coordinate with your technology department to make sure you know the identity of everyone in the space by requiring students to login with district-assigned credentials. Manage the chat as you would conversations in your regular classroom. Learn how to set up breakout rooms for group work. Know where to go for tech support help and share this information with your students and their parents.

4

Be careful what you share on social media

As a teacher, you are entitled to a personal life, but as a public servant, you need to also be aware that anything you post on your private account could reflect negatively on your professional life. There are many cases of teachers being fired for something that they put on social media. Just be careful. It is okay to post that your group of teachers had a virtual get together last night on a video conferencing platform. It is not a good idea to post about your virtual happy hour.

5

Stop, Pause, and Think before downloading and using new apps

Follow your district's guidelines for downloading and installing applications on your school-issued computer or asking students to do the same. First, check to see if your school already owns something that does what you want it to do. You may not be aware of district or school provided software that serves the same need and has already been vetted for privacy and efficacy. Additionally, be mindful when you post information to your virtual classroom spaces to ensure that it reaches only the intended recipients.

7

Final words

Don't panic! While you may be feeling challenged by new digital learning tools and platforms, teaching and learning haven't changed. Kids are kids, and you know how to help them. The trick is finding tools that allow you to engage your kids in the ways you know are effective.

6

Watch the backgrounds as you use video learning platforms

If you and your students will be using a video platform for class, be careful of your background. Pay attention to others present at your students' homes. They are in your classroom with you and all of your students. Treat them as guests in your classroom. Be mindful of what students can see in the background from your home. For example, if a bottle of wine that you saved from your wedding is prominently displayed on a shelf behind you, that context is lost to students. At the very least, it could be a distraction as students spend time asking you if you like to drink wine, but it could also spiral out of control as kids talk in private. By tomorrow morning, the story could have been embellished and parents are hearing you drank a bottle of wine while teaching class. Remind students that you, and possibly your fellow students, can also see what is happening behind them. Are parents aware of the connection, so they know to be appropriately dressed if they appear on camera? Don't be the teacher who garnered internet fame and millions of views when her husband accidentally walked into the frame in his underwear. Additionally, sound carries very well through the microphones, so other members of the household may be heard discussing topics intended to be private.

To help you find effective [ed-tech tools](#) and how to use them [safely](#), visit us at [commonsense.org](https://www.commonsense.org)