Common Sense on Privacy and Digital Footprints　**For Elementary Students**

Some Facts

- 25 percent of kids and parents say they do not believe their personal information is safe online (Norton, 2009)

- Approximately 30 percent of kids ages 8 to 11 have a social networking profile even though the legal age is 13 on most sites (OfCom, 2007)

- It is projected that advertisers will spend $150 million on virtual worlds by 2012 (Research firm Parks Associates from CNET.com, 2009)

What's the Issue?

Our kids live in a culture of sharing that has forever changed the concept of privacy. In a world where everyone is connected and anything created online can be copied, pasted, and sent to thousands of people in a heartbeat, privacy starts to mean something different than simply guarding personal or private information. In this context, you might think about kids' privacy in three categories: privacy and security, privacy and reputation, and privacy and advertising.

- **Privacy and security:** This is the private information (e.g., Social Security number, first and last name) that could put kids at risk for identity theft if it got into the wrong hands.

- **Privacy and reputation:** The information that could be personally embarrassing or hurtful to them or others if posted publicly.

- **Privacy and advertising:** The information about their habits and behavior online that companies collect in order to target them with ads and other content.

Why It Matters

For good or bad, everything our kids do online creates digital footprints that migrate and persist. Kids share work with others and, as they get older, receive comments and feedback. This culture of sharing is beneficial in many ways. But if kids aren't careful, their reputations can be harmed, or their information used in ways they never intended. For example, your child may think he or she just sent something to a friend, but that friend can send it to a friend's friend, who can send it to their friends' friends, and so on. Or they may innocently fill out an online form without understanding that this may make them vulnerable to identity theft. And their online behavior will likely be tracked without them knowing by the industry, which has little incentive to be responsible.

common sense says

- **Make sure kids get your permission before filling out forms.** Let kids know that you are the gatekeeper. They should ask your permission before filling out online forms, and they should always keep their Social Security number, birth date, address, and full name private.

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- **Help kids think long term.** Everything online leaves a digital footprint. Help them think before they post so that they will be proud of their Internet presence down the road.

- **Remind kids that the Golden Rule applies online.** Remind kids that they will be treated online as they treat others. Whatever negative things they say can and probably will come back to haunt them, in more ways than they can imagine.

- **Help kids see through advertising.** The next time an ad pops up online, or you see that you are being targeted by ads specific to your interests, point it out to your kids. Let them know that some companies advertise to you based on what kinds of things you look at online.

What Families Can Do

Draw a digital footprint with your kid and have him or her fill it in only with the kinds of information they would safely put online (younger elementary).

Bring up an age-appropriate webpage that has ads on it, and have your kids identify the ads (middle elementary).

Show kids how their email or personal pages have ads that differ from the pages of their friends (older elementary).