

FACT SHEET 4

ETHICS AND EMPATHY





ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RISKS

— Schools and teachers tend to avoid topics such as ethics and empathy because they consider that it is beyond their role, and this can have a permanent impact on future digital citizens. If we consider, as discussed in Fact sheet 2, that learning has a much broader vocation than academic achievement and should be preparing children “to be” and “to live together”, then it is urgent that ethics and empathy become an integral element in the school curriculum and an important topic for discussion in families.

— The internet facilitates encounters between like-minded people and can have a major impact on ethics by bringing together people who previously hid certain types of deviant behaviour because it was not accepted by society. When such groups are able to meet and share experiences, the ethical bar is lowered and their deviant practices can become acceptable to them because there are, after all, so many people indulging in this behaviour. One example is the highly lucrative child sexual abuse market and another is hate speech and radicalisation. Digital citizens need to understand the importance of being true to their own ethics and be informed and hence more diligent to avoid lowering their standards because “other people do it”. A search for specific material out of curiosity can rapidly be picked up by social media and news providers’ profiling and filtering mechanisms and lead young people to encounters that can rapidly escalate.

— Class and family discussions need to touch upon the many ways that empathy can be used to manipulate behaviour, cause mob movements and convince people to adhere to values that they would normally consider unacceptable.



IDEAS FOR CLASSROOM WORK

— My well-being and yours: Respect... begins with me (<https://bit.ly/2WlvfE7>) is a recent addition to the [WebWeWant.eu](https://www.webwewant.eu) publication created by teens for teens. It offers a series of activities for 11-17 year olds aimed at promoting reflection on their interactions with others. It looks at issues such as bullying, hate speech, radicalisation and how to develop empathy.

— Moral Games for Teaching Bioethics (<https://bit.ly/3sNdnqv>) confronts young learners with societal challenges related to bioethics through games suitable for small group and whole class situations. The introductory chapters give an informative overview of the educational objectives of the games and a closer look at the competences that underpin them.

— PlayDecide (<https://playdecide.eu/playdecide-kits>) – keywords “environment” and “technology” – will, once you have signed in, provide access to two games, Human Enhancement and Young People in the Media. Both games encourage young people (<https://playdecide.eu/get-started>) to investigate and debate ethics-related themes using a multiperspective role-play approach. The PlayDecide website proposes games built on the same templates on more than 30 topics ranging from digital money to neuro-enhancement.



GOOD PRACTICE/LIVING DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

Take a closer look at the templates provided on the PlayDecide website (www.playdecide.eu) and work with a group of children to help them build their own game on digital citizenship. Assist them in choosing their topics for the Info and Issue Cards, then discuss the different perspectives they should cover to create Story Cards. When your game is finished, you can share it with others by uploading it to the PlayDecide website, maintained by European Commission funding.

Dr Brené Brown uses a short, animated clip to emphasise that we can create genuine empathetic connections if we are brave enough to get in touch with our own weaknesses: www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evvngu369Jw.



FURTHER INFORMATION

The Council of Europe has materials relevant to this fact sheet in the Internet literacy handbook; please see ILH [Fact sheet 21](#), Online harassment: bullying, stalking and trolling.

Empathy: Why it matters, and how to get it by Roman Krznaric (2015, Random House, UK), considers empathy the key to personal and political change, and describes tools, platforms and obstacles that are currently supporting or impeding this. He draws on the latest research, as well as on the innovative work being conducted in this field across the world.

The Shallows – What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains by Nicholas Carr (2010, W. W. Norton & Co., New York) looks at the deeper ethical issues of “our connected existence” and the impact the internet has on every aspect of our lives from the way our brains work to cultural and societal issues. The author describes this in further detail and responds to audience questions at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=It_NwowMTcg.

A recent Council of Europe publication provides interesting insights into causes, effects and ways to tackle on- and offline bullying: Richardson J., Milovidov M. and Blamire R. (2016), *Bullying: perspectives, practices and insights*.

YouTube Creators for Change is a global initiative that supports creators who are tackling social issues and promoting awareness, tolerance and empathy on their YouTube channels. The goal of this programme is to drive greater awareness of social issues and to amplify the voices of positive role models who are tackling difficult social issues with their YouTube channels.