



YOUNG DIGITAL LEADERS

Parent Guide

This work is licensed under the CC-BY 4.0 International license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) is a company limited by guarantee, registered office address PO Box 75769, London, SW1P 9ER. ISD is registered in England with company registration number 06581421 and registered charity number 1141069. All Rights Reserved.

Contents

About Young Digital Leaders? _____	1
Why is Young Digital Leaders important? _____	2
How can Young Digital Leaders make a positive impact? _____	3
How can you get involved? _____	4
Glossary of key terms _____	6

About Young Digital Leaders



Young Digital Leaders is a European programme aiming to empower young people aged 12-15 years old through digital citizenship, critical thinking and media literacy skills, so that they can become tomorrow's digital leaders. The programme, developed by the [Institute for Strategic Dialogue](#) (ISD) and supported by Google.org, was created in order to equip young people with the skills they need to be safe, powerful and effective online citizens in the 21st century, and to explore new ways of teaching digital citizenship in formal educational settings in Europe.

The programme is delivered in partnership with local non-governmental education organisations, and has pioneered a unique, collaborative partnership model between students, teachers, parents and local civil society organisations across Europe. In Romania, local partner GEYC (Group of the European Youth for Change) is delivering Young Digital Leaders.

Through a series of thought-provoking activities and real-world examples relevant to their everyday lives, Young Digital Leaders aims to teach young people to be critical consumers of information online, respectful and effective communicators online, and champions of theirs and others' rights and responsibilities online.

Building on the [success of the programme](#) in 2019, Young Digital Leaders seeks to influence positive behavioural change among students, empowering them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to play a positive role in their online communities.

The curriculum covers the most relevant topics of digital citizenship today, and is specifically tailored to young, digital native audiences across their country contexts.

These topics include fake news, echo chambers and filter bubbles, understanding prejudiced content to challenge stereotypes and hate speech online, and how to communicate effectively to different audiences to promote positive change online.

Throughout the five sessions, several key questions will be posed to the students. These questions will inform the final activity, offering students the opportunity to create a digital campaign which responds to a social issue that is important to them.

Why is Young Digital Leaders important? 🤔

On average across Europe, [among 12-15 year olds, 74% have internet access at home](#). In Romania, [93%](#) of young people between the ages of 9-16 will use the internet weekly, while over 60% will access the internet on a daily basis. Young people use it mainly to search for information, use social media, browse videos and talk to their friends.

These digital natives are incredibly tech savvy, but often do not know how to approach some of the key challenges they face online. Nearly a third of children aged 11-17 have reported seeing and hearing hateful speech online, but many struggle to understand how to respond. Despite having a high level of knowledge when it comes to how to use technology, young people can often lack solid knowledge of its effects, such as how content can be created to deceive and misinform online.

This can leave them unprepared for a number of social issues that are amplified online, such as social polarisation, hate speech and disinformation. It can also leave them vulnerable to manipulation.

We believe that society as a whole would benefit from the de-escalation of these negative impacts. Divisive political views and conspiracy theories, augmented by the proliferation of fake news online, have threatened to undermine the democratic process in European countries.

The increasing divisions across Europe are further exacerbated by hate speech in comments sections across social media platforms, making people feel unsafe online. Each of these issues feed into and develop the other in a complex web of interactions that must be stopped at the source: through the education and empowerment of our youth.

Although parents and carers are the best suited to educate, protect their children and raise them to become empowered and responsible citizens, it can often be hard to address these issues because of the gap between their children's offline and online actions, and their lack of visibility on it.

Digital citizenship is still rarely or little taught at school, and teachers are often not equipped to tackle these issues with modern and non-formal education impactful approaches.

That is why it is crucial to arm both educators and parents and carers, so they can help bridge the gaps between citizenship education and digital literacy education, by being part of a comprehensive approach on digital citizenship.

How can Young Digital Leaders make a positive impact?

In order to empower students as digital leaders, we have developed a curriculum based on five different sessions. These sessions can be taught as a comprehensive day-long workshop, or can be divided across two days. These sessions are centred on fun and engaging exercises that allow the students to bond with their classmates in an interactive way, while equipping them with the right tools to navigate and positively respond to the complex harms that are relevant to their individual experiences online.

Local expert facilitators from GEYC have been selected to deliver the curriculum in Romania, based upon their experience of working with students in a school setting and using similar interactive learning approaches. These facilitators have been trained by ISD, with further pedagogical guidance on how to best deliver the sessions and ensure the most effective learning outcomes for the young people involved.

Session	Aim of the session
One: Critical Consumers	Students will be able to identify and positively respond to fake news, echo chambers and filter bubbles.
Two: Resilient Citizens	Students will be able to understand what prejudiced content is in order to challenge stereotypes and positively contribute to the online space.
Three: Effective Communicators	Students will be able to understand how to communicate effectively online with a range of audiences, and recognise the impact of language and tone used.
Four: Rights Experts	Students will be able to understand their rights as citizens online.
Five: Digital Leaders	Students will be able to understand how to positively exercise their right to free speech and promote their voice to affect positive change online.

How can you get involved?



As primary educators of your children, parents and carers are best positioned to have the greatest educational impact on their children. Getting parents and carers involved is paramount in order to ensure sustainable behavioural change of children, both offline and online, so this next generation of young adults paves the way for safer, more responsible uses of the internet.

Parents and carers may sometimes feel that their children are more adept at using technology, however young people need support and encouragement when it comes to managing their lives online.

We understand that striking the right balance between protecting your children and respecting their privacy can be challenging, but they will be more likely to develop and maintain safe, online behaviours with your help.

Your support in this comprehensive education programme and its continuation beyond the classroom is essential. We hope this session will be useful in empowering you to have these discussions with your children. Please see the suggestions below, for tips on how to start these conversations:

1. Guide them to become critical consumers online — 5 top tips

- ① *Offer to explore sites and apps together. Talk through the kinds of decisions you make when you are online and explain the reasons why.*
- ② *Talk to your children openly about fake news, echo chambers and filter bubbles; you can use the attached glossary of key terms for guidance. Discuss examples of where you have both seen these things online.*
- ③ *Ensure they know and acknowledge the sources from where they get their information. Guide them to use trustworthy content, and to remember to give credit when using other people's work/ ideas.*
- ④ *Ask your child about how they stay safe online. What tips do they have for you, and where did they learn them?*
- ⑤ *Encourage your child to always talk to you about any problems, online and offline.*

2. Support them to become effective communicators online — 5 top tips

- ① *Show them the different ways in which the internet can be used (research, watching the news, talking to their friends) and how the tones differ according to platform and audience.*
- ② *Show them how they can communicate positively online, perhaps through a blog post or creating a video.*
- ③ *Encourage your child to be respectful and responsible when communicating with others online, and to consider how what they share may reflect on them.*
- ④ *Guide them to be attentive to both their emotions and the feelings of others when they communicate: this is essential for effective communication both on and offline.*
- ⑤ *Teach your children to really think critically before they post or share information. Rather than automatically share and click, young people need to pause and reflect.*

3. Encourage them to be champions of their own and of others' rights online — 5 top tips

- ① *Encourage them to look out for the wellbeing of their friends online, if they feel they need support. Help them find out what options they have, and support them in their actions.*
- ② *Encourage them to use the internet to make their voice heard, perhaps by sharing a post on an issue they are passionate about, or by starting or joining online campaigns against fake news or hate speech. This can give them the confidence to lead by example, as well as inspire them to share the knowledge they have gained with their peers online.*
- ③ *Discuss the importance of reporting inappropriate conversations, messages, images and behaviours and how this can be done.*
- ④ *Show them how to keep information private, report comments and block users if they are not sure how.*
- ⑤ *Build trust and confidence so that your child does come to you if something happens.*

Glossary of key terms



Fake News – Fake news or fake content describes articles or posts that appear to be factual, but which contain intentional disinformation with the intention of attracting viewership, influencing people and/or deceiving them.

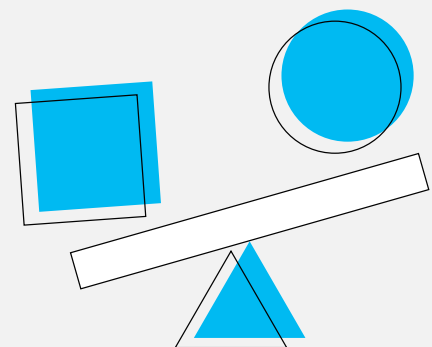
Those who create fake news can be motivated by financial incentives (often the advertising revenue that sensationalist stories can generate), by political goals (a desire to influence opinion for or against a group, party or candidate) or by personal motives (a desire to spread mischief).

Fake news stories are designed to appear legitimate, often adopting the appearance of mainstream news sources. They can appear as social media posts, but are most often website pages shared over social media. They are often shared in multiple formats or from different accounts, making it more difficult to sort truthful stories from fake ones.

Biased Writing – Biased writing occurs when a writer shows favouritism or prejudice towards a particular opinion, instead of being fair and balanced. It is used to push people towards a particular point of view.

Bias writing isn't new, but now more than ever people need to be able to separate facts from opinion. When not signposted clearly, the mixing of fact and opinion in media has significant negative outcomes.

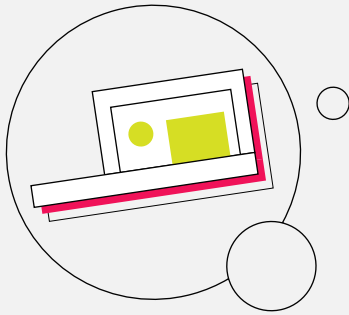
Biased content can lead people to develop a poor understanding of important issues, particularly based on a lack of understanding of opposing viewpoints, making it harder to solve difficult problems as a society.



Echo chambers – Echo chambers are social spaces in which ideas, opinions and beliefs are reinforced by repetition within a closed group. Within echo chambers, dissenting views are unexpressed or unrepresented, dismissed or removed.

Most people have had first-hand experience with echo chambers, which can be found in everything from discussions conducted on news sites to small discussions between peers on social media.

Echo chambers are comfortable, because it's easier to agree with people in a discussion than disagree with them. Yet they can be harmful, reinforcing social division or political polarisation by reducing opportunities to interact with people who disagree with you, or with people from different backgrounds. Echo chambers can reduce individuals' understanding of other opinions and empathy for those who hold them.



Filter Bubbles – Filter bubbles are the result of personalised search and newsfeed functions. They can be useful, directing you to the content you want to consume, but they can also be harmful, separating users from information that disagrees with their viewpoint.

This can isolate users in political, social or ideological bubbles, in a phenomenon closely related to the echo chamber. It can push people towards more extreme positions and reduce their empathy for people who think differently.

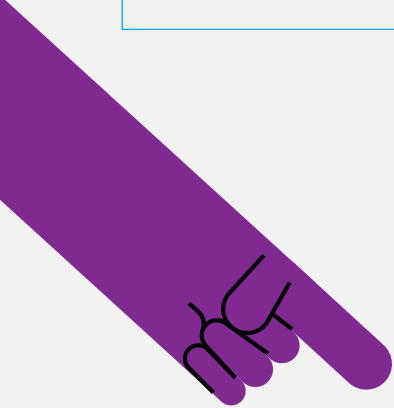
Stereotyping – Stereotyping occurs when people use an oversimplified and over-generalised set of characteristics to describe a group of people. People often adopt stereotypes because they offer a simple way to perceive the world. They become embedded in people’s thinking because they assume that the characteristics of one person are true for every other person who shares one or of the same identifying characteristics, e.g. race, religion, gender, class or sexual orientation.

When we use stereotypes we reduce people’s individuality and character nuances to a list of characteristics that are made easy to fit into a particular category. This has the negative effect of distorting someone’s understanding of another person or group and stops them from recognising similar traits and commonalities they may have.



Prejudice – One of the most damaging consequences of stereotyping is that it can lead to people forming prejudiced points of view on other groups and individuals. Prejudice is a unjustified, preconceived attitude towards a person or a group, based on stereotypes, rather than actual experience. When we display prejudice towards others we perceive as belonging to certain groups, we create an ‘us vs them’ mentality.

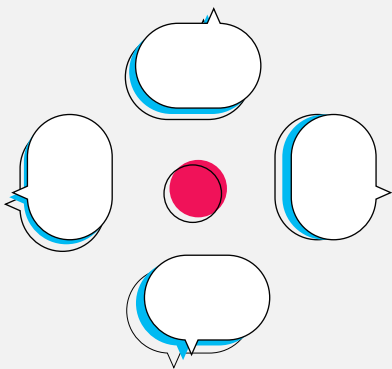
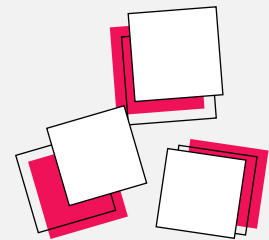
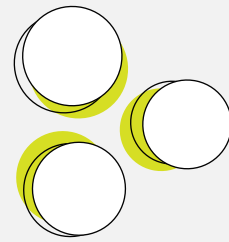
Prejudices can be based on a number of factors, such as race, religion, ethnicity, class, gender and sexual orientation. Our prejudices can be strengthened when we believe ourselves to be part of a positively viewed ‘in-group’, composed of people who share similar characteristics and beliefs. Prejudices can be exploited and manipulated by the media, politicians, extremists, or even our friends and family, for political or social gain. Manipulation of people in society negatively impacts community cohesion and drives polarisation.



'Us and them' thinking – An 'us and them' mentality divides the world into a negatively viewed, stereotyped out-group (them), and a positively viewed in-group (us). Divisions can be based across a wide range of identities such as race, religion, gender, class, nationality, and political views. Differences are often projected through the use of stereotyping, and all members of the out-group are characterised as the same.

This tactic is often used to polarise people, both online and in real life, forcing individuals into a binary view of the content creator's own making. The out-group is often blamed for the problems experienced by the in-group, and this is used to strengthen the way the in-group views themselves.

The division into 'us' and 'them' has existed throughout human society. It is present in sports, politics, and even where we live in a town or city. When it is deployed for negative means it becomes a powerful weapon which can negatively impact community cohesion and generate hatred within our societies.

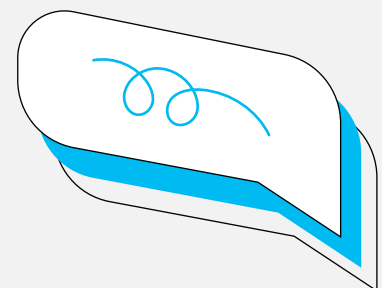


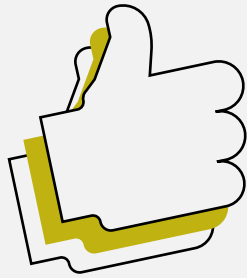
Scapegoating – Scapegoating is the practice of singling out a person or group within society for negative treatment and blaming them for social or political problems.

Scapegoating is a key driver of intolerance. Scapegoating a group and blaming them for social problems presents a simple and clear narrative that can drive polarisation and hatred within society. Examples of scapegoating include the treatment of Jewish people by the Nazis, or the blaming of ethnic minorities for social or economic problems.

Effective Communication – Effective communication online occurs when someone's message is successfully delivered, received and understood by their intended audience. In order to communicate effectively, the person delivering the message needs to clearly articulate the point they are trying to make, consider the various audiences who will receive the message and adjust their tone and language in accordance, model positive and constructive attitudes, and demonstrate a willingness to listen to responses.

The spread of digital technologies has introduced a wide range of options for communications that have arguably reduced the need for face-to-face interactions. While there are many positives that stem from these developments, they also bring with them risks of distancing ourselves from the consequences of what we say and dehumanising those who we communicate with. Part of effective online communication means bringing the social norms and courtesies that we use offline into the digital world.





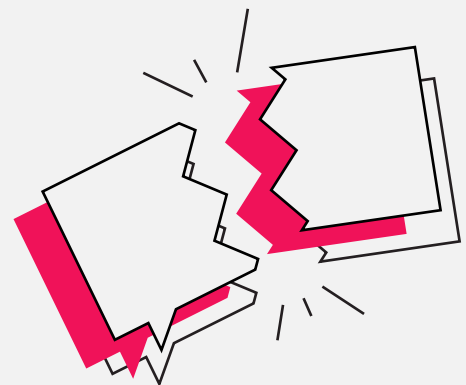
Online Consent – The digital world enables anyone to share information about themselves and others. Young people around the world take full advantage of this to share photos, videos and other multimedia content through their social media profiles and pages. But they often do so without understanding the full scope of their right to privacy, or their role in both giving and receiving consent to share information and content.

Young people must be taught how to do so responsibly, in keeping with the guidelines set out by the social media platforms that they use that they use. This means making sure that they have the consent from those who are captured in photos and videos they share online to do so, or whose content they are sharing as their own. Similarly, young people should be empowered to control how others share information and content that involves them. This includes both giving permission to others who wish to store and share your information, withdrawing that permission when you want to, and reporting content that you have not given permission for others to use.

Hate Speech – Hate speech is speech which attacks, intimidates, humiliates, discredits or promotes violence against a person or group based on their disability, gender-identity, race, religion or belief, nationality, age, social status or sexual orientation. Online hate speech is a major problem and something the majority of individuals will encounter at some point.

Many countries have laws forbidding certain types of hate speech. In order to respond to hate speech in an informed, responsible and effective way, it is crucial that young people are able to correctly identify hate speech when they encounter it. In particular it is important for young people to be able to correctly distinguish between hate speech and free speech.

Hateful online content can divide communities and drive individuals towards discrimination, hatred and violence. Discouraging the creation of such content, reducing its viewership and promoting positive alternatives can play an important role in ending cycles of hate.



Free Speech – Free speech is the ability and right to express and share your opinions and ideas without fear of retaliation or censorship. Free speech is vital because it allows us to share ideas, discuss social, political and cultural issues openly; it underpins our freedoms. Freedom of expression is recognised as a human right under article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and is recognised in international human rights law in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Free speech is also guaranteed in article 30 of the Romanian Constitution: “(1) The freedom to express thoughts, opinions or beliefs and the freedom of creations of any kind, either vocally, in writing, or by means of images, sounds or any other means of communication in public, are inviolable”.

