Module 3:
Your Digital Footprint

What is a Digital Footprint?

Every time you use the internet, you leave behind traces. These traces make up your digital footprint. It's like footprints in the sand, but on the web. Your digital footprint encompasses the content you share on social media, the websites you visit.

Your online footprint shapes how people perceive you. It can be **helpful or harmful**, depending on what you leave behind. It can be detrimental because it may impact your chances of gaining admission to colleges and securing jobs. It can even get you kicked out/fired.

Understanding your digital footprint means knowing what you share and who can see it. It's about **owning your story before someone else does.**

Why Your Digital Footprint Matters

Your digital footprint follows you everywhere. Colleges, employers, and even friends often check it. A silly post from years ago might still exist. Sometimes it can affect your chances at a job or school. At other times, it can harm your reputation or compromise your safety.

But it's not just about other people... Your digital footprint also affects your privacy. The more you share, the easier it is for hackers or strangers to learn about you. They can use that information to guess passwords or trick you.

The good news is you can control your footprint. With simple choices, you can make your online presence work for you, not against you.

What You Share is Forever (Almost)

You may forget, but the internet won't.
Even if you delete a post, copies might exist elsewhere. Screenshots, archives, or backups can keep your information alive without your permission. That means before you post, think: "Would I want my family, teachers, or future self to see this?" If the answer is no, don't post it. Once something is online, it's hard to take back.
Knowing this helps you share smarter, protect yourself, and build a digital footprint you're proud of.

Privacy Settings Are Your Best Friend

Most social media sites and apps have privacy settings.

These let you decide who can see your posts, photos, and personal info. Some let you block or mute people you don't want to hear from, or simply find annoying. Taking the time to adjust your privacy settings is like locking your front door. It keeps strangers out and gives you control over your space. Don't just accept default settings.

Explore the options and change them regularly. Make your online spaces feel safe and private.

Think Twice Before Sharing Personal Info

It's tempting to share things online!!
But hackers or scammers can use these details against you.
Oversharing makes you a target. They might guess your passwords easier, steal your identity, or find other ways to harass you. So, the less personal info you share, the safer you are.

Keep personal details private and share only with people you trust completely. It's a small habit that makes a big difference.

Remember, don't post anything you wouldn't want your grandchildren to see.

How Hackers Use Your Digital Footprint

Hackers are like detectives.

For example, if your birthday is on social media, hackers might try it as a password. If you post your pet's name, they might use that too. Every piece of info adds to their toolbox.

By knowing this, you can prevent giving hackers what they need to gain access.

Google Yourself. What Do You Find?

One way to understand your digital footprint is to search for your name online. See what shows up... photos, posts, or profiles. Some results might surprise you.

If you find anything you don't like or didn't expect, try to remove it. Delete old accounts, untag yourself from photos, or ask website owners to take down content. Doing this regularly helps you stay in control and keep your online reputation clean.

Protect Your Passwords and Accounts

Strong passwords are the foundation of online safety. Use a mix of letters, numbers, and symbols. Avoid sharing easy-to-guess information, such as birthdays or names.
Don't use the same password for all accounts. If one system is hacked, others are at risk as well.

Use a password manager or write them down safely. Two-factor authentication adds extra security. It requires you to confirm your identity with a code, making it harder for hackers to break in.

Example of a good password: a~Z18I6]"}NO
Example of a bad password: password123

Be Careful with Friend Requests and Messages

Not everyone online is who they say they are. Hackers often create fake profiles to trick people into sharing info or clicking dangerous links.

Don't accept friend requests from strangers. Don't click on suspicious links or open attachments from people you don't know.

If something feels off, trust your instincts!! It's okay to block or report suspicious accounts.

How to Spot Fake Profiles and Scams

Fake profiles often have few photos, very new accounts, or strange messages.

Scammers might:
- Ask for money
- Ask for personal info
- Ask you to click links
- Ask you to run scripts, copy and paste something for them

Be cautious of spelling mistakes, urgent demands, or promises that seem too good to be true.

(Nobody in this economy is willing to give you free stuff.)

Protect Your Devices

Keeping your phone, tablet, and computer safe helps protect your digital footprint, too.

- Use screen locks and never share your device with strangers.
- Keep your software and apps updated.
- Avoid using public Wi-Fi for sensitive stuff unless you use a trusted VPN.
- Try to stay away from risky websites.
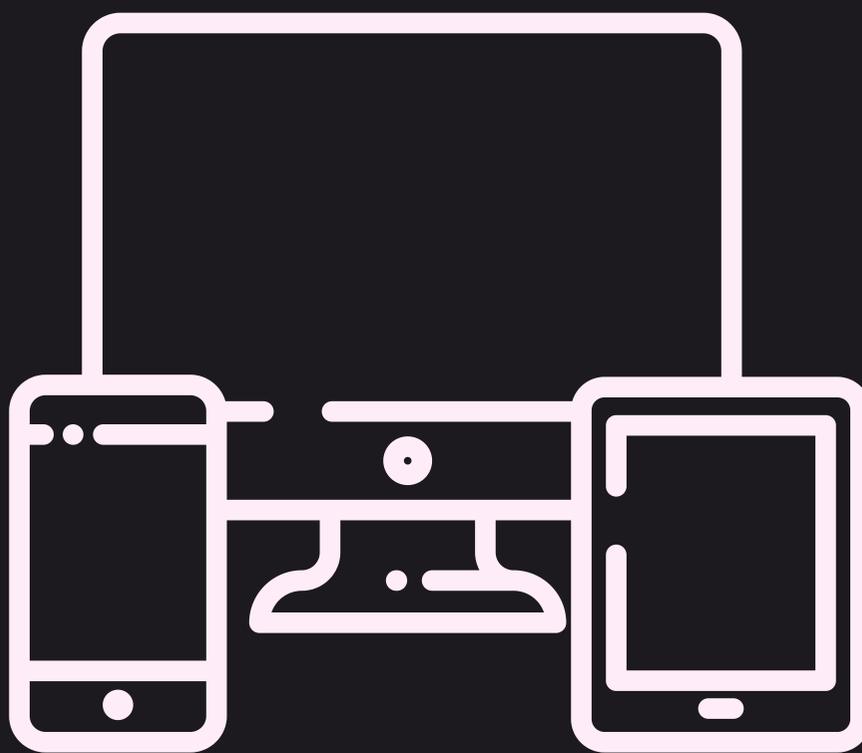
Sharing Isn't Always Caring

Think before you share other people's photos, conversations, or info. Respect their privacy the way you want yours respected!

Sharing without permission can cause problems for others and make you look careless. It might hurt friendships or even lead to legal trouble. Being responsible online is part of being a Cyber Valkyrie.

You Are Not Alone Online

You don't have to handle online risks by yourself. If something feels wrong or scary, talk to someone you trust. A parent, teacher, or friend can help.

There are also organizations and hotlines that help with online harassment and scams. Asking for help is smart and brave!! Do it!

Your Digital Footprint Is Your Power!

The internet can be a place to learn and connect. Your digital footprint is a reflection of you! It can open doors but can alos close them.
By controlling what you share and protecting your info, you take charge. You decide how others see you, and that is power. Please use it wisely. Be proud of the digital story you build.

Your Mission: Clean Up and Lock Down

Today, take 30 minutes to check your online accounts!!

- Adjust your privacy settings.
- Delete posts or pictures you no longer want public.
- Change weak passwords.
- Check haveibeenpwned.com !!

Talk to a friend or family member about what you have learned!
Help them check their own digital footprint, too.