



YOU PART

Engage. Connect. Empower

DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

TERMINOLOGY

- **DIGITAL MEDIA**
- **DIGITAL DIVIDE**
- **DIGITAL YOUTH WORK**
- **ONLINE YOUTH WORK**

DIGITAL ETHICS

GUIDELINES

DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

1. TERMINOLOGY

1.1. DIGITAL MEDIA

Digital youth work is inextricably linked to digital space and digital media, which complement analogue media. Digital media encompasses all electronic technologies and applications that are based on a digital foundation. Digital media always enable a form of communication (between people, between people and digital technologies or between digital technologies). Digital media that are frequently used by young people include television, the internet, smartphones and tablets, gaming platforms and social networks.

Social media are pervasive in the lives of European children and young people through which they encounter a diverse range of content, contact, conduct and contract risks. Solutions to the challenges that social media pose for children's development are not easily addressed given the complex way in which risks and opportunities are intertwined. Young people are routinely exposed to harmful online content on social media platforms such as cyberhate, sexualised content, gory or violent images, content that promotes eating disorders, and disinformation.

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1.2. DIGITAL DIVIDE

Young people are not born as equal "digital natives", but educational and participation inequalities continue online and create "digital inequality". As a result, socio-economically disadvantaged young people have fewer opportunities to access new technologies and, almost more importantly, exhibit different usage behaviour. The higher the level of education, the more frequently information and career-related applications are used. People with a lower level of education, on the other hand, favour entertainment applications. This means that disadvantaged young people benefit less from the potential and opportunities of digital change.

Referring to the latest data and evidence from Europe, it can be stated that digital skills are seen as essential to benefit from and contribute to a knowledge-based economy and society. By the time young people in the EU leave compulsory education, most of them have regularly used computers and the internet for a variety of activities. In this context, it is important that young people become empowered and responsible digital users with appropriate digital skills. Digital youth work makes a significant contribution to this.

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1.3. DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

Digital technologies are increasingly permeating all areas of human life and are thus gaining in importance. Young people no longer divide into analogue and digital worlds, but live in a hybrid world. However, not everyone is able to keep pace with change and acquire the necessary skills (see digital divide). Some young people have a very high level of skills, but only one-sided skills (insular knowledge). Digital youth work programmes are needed to promote and develop digital skills. An expert group on digital youth work was set up at EU level from 2016 to 2017 and developed the following working definition:

1. Digital youth work refers to the use of digital media and digital technologies in youth work.
2. Digital youth work is not a stand-alone method or form of youth work, but can be integrated into all conventional youth work settings.
3. It pursues the same goals and acts according to the same principles, values and ethical attitudes as youth work in general.
4. Digital youth work can take place in an online or offline setting, as well as in mixed forms.
5. Digital media and technologies can be used either as a tool, as an activity or as content in digital youthwork.

Tool	Activity	Content
The focus is on digitalising youth work to make it more accessible, up-to-date and tailored.	The focus is on learning by doing and practical activities.	The focus is on topics raised by digitalisation.
e.g. participation with digital tools in decision-making processes	e.g. produce digital media content together	e.g. reflecting on online relationships and online behaviour
e.g. reach young people via social media channels	e.g. making projects for the development of relevant competences	e.g. empowering young people to stand up for their digital rights
...

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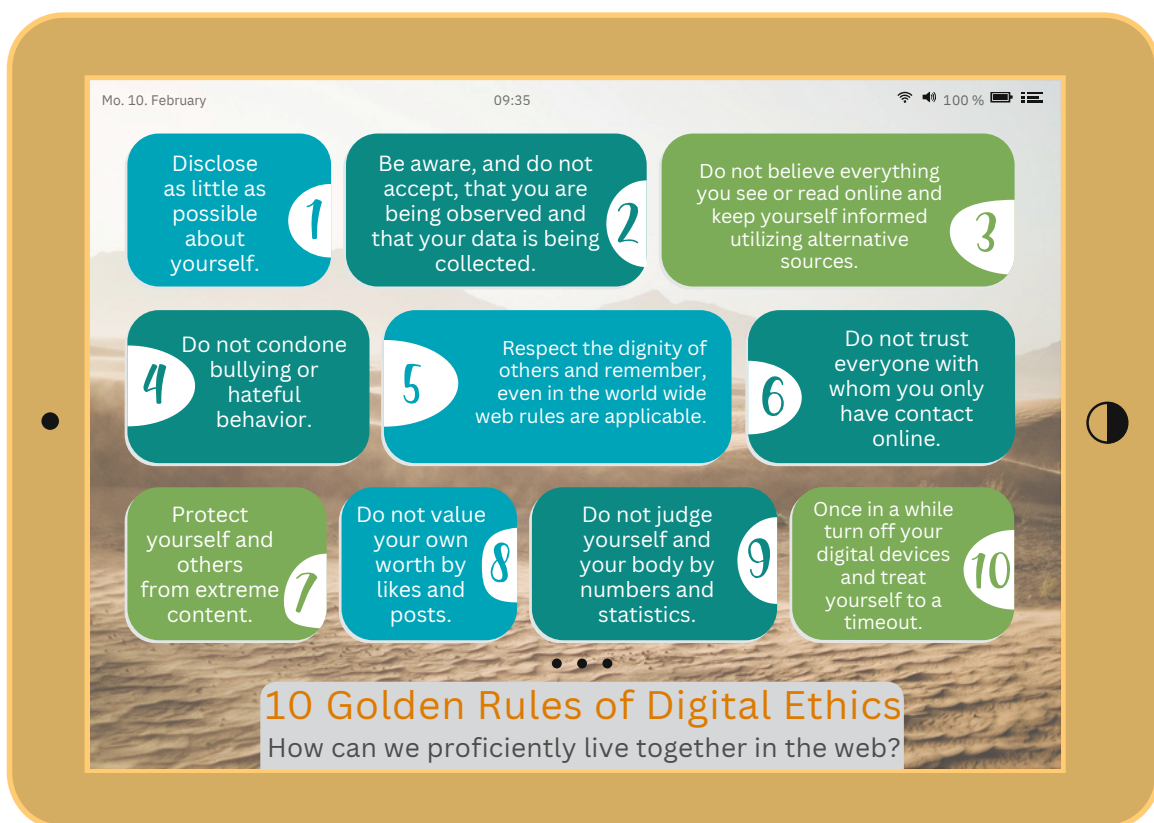
1.4. ONLINE YOUTH WORK

Digital youth work is often equated with online youth work, i.e. youth work in the digital space, although they are different concepts. While digital youth work, as described above, can also take place in an analogue setting, for example as part of a round table on the topic of fake news, online youth work is a sub-area of digital youth work. Offline youth work on digital topics and hybrid variations that mix online and offline methods are the other two sub-areas.

In online youth work, the professionals are active in the digital space and the interaction with young people takes place there. Digital tools and platforms are used as aids. Online youth work became particularly important during the coronavirus pandemic. Services such as online counselling, outreach youth work in the digital space or the relocation of youth centres to online platforms (e.g. Discord) are examples of this.

2. DIGITAL ETHICS

Digital literacy is not just a technical issue, but also a question of attitude and behaviour in the digital world. Phenomena such as online hate speech and cyberbullying have become sadly well known in recent years. But the mass of stored data that is filtered and utilised for commercial purposes with the help of algorithms also calls for an examination of norms and values in the digital world. As an extension of media ethics, digital ethics deals with precisely this and analyses the effects of digital activities on the individual and society. The Institute for Digital Ethics at Stuttgart Media University has drawn up the following guidelines for successful coexistence online:



3. GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

The following recommendations on digital youth work are an open collection of findings and lessons learned from recent years and are intended to help professionalise digital youth work and make it positive for everyone involved:

- **BE AWARE OF YOUR OWN DIGITAL FOOTPRINT**
 - Almost everyone leaves traces on the internet. Google yourself and find out what can be found about your private and professional self and what young people could find about you on the internet.
- **DEVELOP A STRATEGY ON DIGITAL YOUTH WORK**
 - Developing a strategy for the cross-sectoral topic of digital youth work is a good way to give the topic more weight in your own institution, at the level of the organisation or in the municipality and to clarify the "mission". Young people should be involved in such processes as users and experts just as much as all professionals in the team.
- **DIGITAL YOUTH WORK NEEDS SUITABLE EQUIPMENT**
 - As far as the technical infrastructure is concerned, smartphones, laptops or tablets and a good internet connection are relevant. Additional technical equipment (games consoles, sound and event technology, editing programmes, etc.) may also be required, depending on the specific design of the offer.
- **PROMOTION OF FURTHER TRAINING AND REFLECTION IN THE TEAM**
 - Digital youth work is a cross-sectoral issue and should therefore not be delegated to one team member. In order to stay on the ball together, further training is important as well as spaces in which digital youth work can be professionally reflected upon (e.g. as a regular part of team meetings).
- **INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE AS EXPERTS**
 - We are all digital learners. That's why it's important to have a curious and open attitude towards digital media. Having young people show you a new platform or game is a good way to stay up-to-date and at the same time promote young people's self-efficacy. Perhaps this exchange will even lead to a new activity.
- **CULTIVATE A CURIOUS ATTITUDE**
 - It has probably already been mentioned several times, but an open-minded and appreciative attitude towards digital media and the virtual worlds of young people is particularly important, even if some professionals may spend less time in the digital space in their private lives or have been socialised with other media. The willingness to engage with current technological developments, games, platforms and the like is the basis for promoting a critical approach.

- **START COOPERATIONS**

- Nobody is competent in all areas. If support is needed or information on a topic is lacking, it is a good idea to get experts on board - perhaps for a cooperation project or a training course or something completely different. Make contact with NGOs and specialist agencies that specialise in digital youth work or related topics.

- **ONLINE OFFERS ARE NO SUBSTITUTE FOR PHYSICAL OFFERS**

- Relationships with young people are primarily established and maintained in face-to-face interaction and cannot be shifted to the digital space in the long term. Initial contacts in particular often take place in physical space. Online services in the context of open youth work should therefore be seen as a supplement to offline services.

- **SEPARATE ONLINE AND OFFLINE OFFERINGS**

- Programmes in physical and virtual spaces should not be run by the same professionals at the same time. This quickly becomes overwhelming and unsatisfactory for both professionals and young people, as the opportunities for interaction vary greatly depending on the place of participation.

- **MISTAKES ALLOWED**

- Technological development often takes place at a rapid pace. The same applies to digital youth work: it is perfectly okay to make mistakes and learn from them. Innovation can only come about where there is courage to experiment and try out new things.

- **VISIT PLACES OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE**

- Young people do not differ between digital and analogue worlds. Find them where they are and offer youth work services (general relationship building, dialogue, gaming, etc.) in those (digital) places that they find exciting and interesting.

- **SEPARATE PRIVATE AND PROFESSIONAL MATTERS**

- Use different profiles and devices for private and professional interactions (e.g. work smartphone, laptop or tablet). Communicate to the outside world from when to when you are available for work and stick to this (also for self-protection). Professional relationships require clarity and boundaries - also in the digital space.

- **COMPLY WITH LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

- Dealing with the topics of data protection, age restrictions for apps, games and platforms, security settings, but also with the rights and protection of children and young people in the digital space is an important basis for digital youth work and enables them to use digital media safely.

- **IF DIGITAL, THEN THE RIGHT WAY**

- Digital youth work programmes need to be planned in the same way as other programmes, based on objectives and impact. It does not make sense to offer a digital programme just for the sake of it. Authenticity is also important in the digital space.



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