

Common Sense on Plagiarism and Piracy

What's the Issue?

New technologies make it easy for people to download and use creative work, in many different ways, such as movies, music, articles, books, and art. But in a fast-paced online culture, it's easy to forget about copyright law, which brings up two important issues: *plagiarism* and *piracy*. Plagiarism means using someone else's ideas or words without crediting the source and pretending they're your own. Piracy is the unauthorized use, reproduction, or sharing of copyrighted or patented material – typically music, movies, TV shows, and software.

Even though some teens may feel they have the right to take and use anything they find online without giving credit to its creator or paying for it when necessary, the Internet is not a free-for-all. Teens, like anyone else, have a responsibility to follow copyright law and respect people's creative work. But teens first need to be educated in how they can use copyrighted work. For example, knowing that they need to get permission before using copyrighted work, and learning how to properly cite the work they use, are good first steps to being respectful digital creators and consumers.

Why Does It Matter?

Some teens might not consider the hard work that goes into creating things like a movie, song, novel, video game, software, or website. They may not realize that copying and pasting material they find online into schoolwork without citing it is plagiarism. They may not understand that illegally downloading and sharing music, movies, and software is a form of stealing called piracy. Teens need to be educated about these things so they can follow the law and be respectful of other people's hard work.

However, teens should also know about their rights to *fair use*, which is a principle that allows people to use a small amount of copyrighted material without permission in certain situations, such as for schoolwork, criticizing or commenting on something, or parody. People can also freely use material that's in the public domain, which includes work that is no longer copyrighted. Many creators use a Creative Commons license, which allows others to download, copy, paste, and sometimes even change creative work – as long as the work is properly cited. Remind teens to consider how they would want others to use their own creative work. This may help them respect the decisions that other creators have made about how their work should be used.

What Families Can Do

How would you feel if someone used your creative work without your permission? What if they changed it or made money from it? (Some teens might be okay with having people use their creative work, while others may not want people to share it or profit from it. How they feel might depend on the type of creative work in question.)

How does it benefit a musician or artist to have their work cited or paid for? (You can discuss how it's important for artists to get paid for their hard work, and how giving credit to someone helps them receive recognition and praise.)

common sense says

Encourage legal downloading and sharing. Teens should use legitimate online retailers for music and movie downloads. They can also listen to music or watch movies and TV for free on certain streaming sites.

Illegal downloading and sharing sites pose risks. Discourage teens from using peer-to-peer (PTP) sharing sites, which not only raise legal risks, but can make computers vulnerable to viruses, identity theft, and spyware. PTP sites also might negatively affect the content creators who may not get credit or payment for their work.

Help teens give credit to the work they use. If your teen creates something that incorporates others' work, help them to give credit to the work they've used. For schoolwork, students are taught to include *citations*, which are descriptions of the sources they use that include information about the author, title, publisher, and year of publication. Remind them it's just as important to give credit for a video mash-up created for fun as it is for a research paper for school.

Is it fair use? Your teen might be making video remixes, mash-ups, fan fiction, blogs, or artwork and posting it online. Fair use allows creators to use a small amount of copyrighted material without permission, in certain situations. Help your teen decide if work they use is protected by fair use.

Challenge teens to take ownership of their work. Teens should think about how they want others to use their creations. Have they thought about how they'd like others to be able to use their photos, writing, artwork, or videos? If so, do they clearly state this to others when they upload their work online? If they are interested in having their work freely available to others, they can use Creative Commons licenses.