Developing &
Using
Critical
Comprehension

DUCC GUIDE

QUACKING DOWN ON MISINFORMATION

MISSION

DUCC aims to reduce susceptibility to harmful online content by building up critical comprehension skills in youth through digital literacy and social-emotional learning.

VISION

A world free from targeted violence and a new generation of empowered youth.

What is DUCC?

DUCC (Developing & Using Critical Comprehension) is a program for K-5 students that combines digital literacy and social-emotional learning in a comprehensive curriculum to strengthen critical thinking skills. Our non-partisan curriculum will include 24 lesson plans with online games and animated videos for students to develop skills to effectively navigate online spaces using rational decision-making and logical reasoning.

WHY DUCC?

With DUCC, students will be able to understand the evolving online landscape and effectively use modern technology. They will have the critical thinking skills to identify bias, misinformation, and persuasion tactics so when they inevitably encounter it online, they will be able to recognize and reject harmful online content. This will reduce their susceptibility to online radicalization and targeted violence in the long term. In addition to digital literacy, we aim to build a strong social-emotional foundation to build up protective factors against violence so students have strong interpersonal skills, behavioral and emotional regulation, social awareness, problem-solving, logical reasoning, and rational decision-making skills.

To have a strong curriculum rooted in evidence-based research that effectively addresses necessary topics and fills the current gaps, the curriculum is created in collaboration with subject-matter experts on topics such as digital literacy, child psychology, social-emotional learning, critical thinking and prejudice, K-5 education, library media sciences, and technology.

DUCC is unlike traditional digital citizenship or social-emotional learning lessons. We start at a young age, teaching complex topics in a very digestible and age-appropriate way. The lessons can fit into a teacher's existing class schedule, as we will have lessons that teach digital literacy and SEL through history, reading and writing, science, civics, and more. Current programs that address misinformation start in middle school, focus on digital citizenship without a strong SEL component, and do not have the main goal of pre-preventing targeted violence and online radicalization.

Technology is evolving at rapid speeds, so rather than teaching the specifics of current online platforms that will quickly become outdated, we teach skills that can be applied to any current and future digital space. With DUCC, we teach students how to think, not what to think.

TERMS TO KNOW

Digital Literacy
The ability to understand & use digital technology in a responsible and non-harmful capacity

Social-Emotional Learning
The process of developing the skills, attitudes, & behaviors to promote positive interpersonal development and emotional regulation

Critical Comprehension
The ability to analyze information objectively and use logical reasoning to make informed judgements that lead to rational decisions

Misinformation
False information that is spread with or without the intent to cause harm

Risk Factor
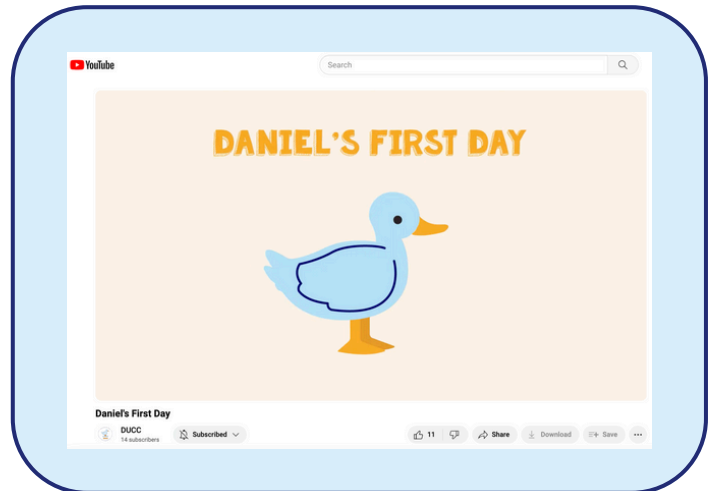A characteristic that increases the possibility of one engaging in violence

Protective Factor
A characteristic that decreases the risk of one engaging in violence

WHAT IS IN THE DUCC CURRICULUM?

DUCC's curriculum includes:

- Multimedia educational materials
- Lesson plans
- Animated videos
- Online games
- Interactive activities

Our lessons are non-partisan, align to national standards, evidence-based, age-appropriate, and fun!

With DUCC, students will develop the following skills:

- Critical thinking
- Logical reasoning
- Rational decision-making
- Problem-solving
- The ability to identify bias, persuasion tactics, and non-factual content
- Social awareness & emotional regulation
- Knowledge of online spaces and modern technology

These skills will help **reduce reactionary or impulsive thinking**, **reinforce individual responsibility for actions, promote intentional information consumption**, and **increase self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-efficacy**.

Our philosophy is that the best defense against harmful online content is prevention through education. This can be accomplished by building up protective factors through critical thinking and social-emotional development.

OUR COMMITMENT TO NEUTRALITY AND TRANSPARENCY

DUCC is committed to reducing educational barriers, which is why our website will offer free resources for students, teachers, and parents to access anytime and anywhere. We welcome suggestions for new lessons and feedback on current resources, and we engage in constant revisions based on new research and consultations with educators and field experts. All content we create is supported by relevant and recent research from leading experts in their field and cited accordingly.

Misinformation

Misinformation is highly politicized and some educators and parents may feel initially uncertain about using this term. However, DUCC remains committed to approaching conversations about misinformation in an apolitical manner that allows for our resources to be used in classrooms nationwide and for students to truly understand the concept. As a term, we teach misinformation simply to mean information that is not true; there is no political association with the term in our content.

Social-Emotional Learning

We remain committed to the core elements of SEL: promoting positive behavior development and emotional intelligence. We are not teaching SEL as a form of identity politics but rather as a foundation for critical thinking, logical reasoning, and rational decision-making so that students will be able to interact in online spaces responsibly.

While these skills are part of social-emotional learning, they are also simply essential life skills. We understand the importance of raising children that are intelligent, competent, confident, aspirational, disciplined, and contribute positively to society. While these skills are modeled and taught at home, schools are fundamental in reinforcing and applying them to academics and interpersonal interactions. DUCC's lessons are also designed to be integrated into existing school subjects so as to not take time away from other class content and the already busy schedules teachers and students have.

HOW DUCC WORKS:
WHY COMBINING SEL AND DIGITAL LITERACY IS EFFECTIVE

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and digital literacy (DL) have each been individually shown to increase **protective factors** and reduce **risk factors** to radicalization and likelihood of violence.

It is critical for children to build a strong foundation of protective factors at a young age in order to reduce the likelihood of acquiring risk factors as they grow up.

Risk Factor
A characteristic that increases the possibility of one engaging in violence

Protective Factor
A characteristic that decreases the risk of one engaging in violence

Increase Protective Factors

- Knowledge of how different online platforms work
- Knowledge of how to spot bias, persuasion tactics
- Problem-solving and logical reasoning skills
- Strong interpersonal relationships and sense of belonging
- Emotional regulation, self-esteem and empathy
- Regular interaction with nonviolent content and beliefs

Decrease Risk Factors

- Susceptibility to believing propaganda and manipulative, persuasive content
- Regular interaction and exposure to violent content and beliefs
- Lack of sense of belonging; loneliness, isolation
- Lack of independent thinking skills
- Low behavioral and emotional regulation skills

WHY SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED ABOUT ONLINE RADICALIZATION?

Children today are accessing all types of technology at much younger ages, and there has been a recent increase in misinformation, harmful online content, and online radicalization. This content is engaging and appealing, and children will often interact with it without realizing the potential harm.

Constant exposure and interaction with this type of content will shape their beliefs, behavior, and values. In cases where young people are consistently engaging with harmful online content, they are more likely to adopt radical thought patterns and behaviors.

Extremist groups may try to radicalize students by offering a sense of belonging, shared values, and community. Anyone can become radicalized as the persuasion tactics these groups use are very effective. They are especially effective if the individual is engaging with a lot of harmful online content, propaganda, conspiracy theories, and extremist views. Additionally, those experiencing loneliness and lack of belonging are targeted to become recruited as they are eager to be a part of a community with shared beliefs. In these cases, it is not uncommon for radicalized individuals to commit acts of targeted violence. Once someone is radicalized, it is very difficult to de-radicalize them, but it is possible to prevent it from happening in the first place.

HOW CAN WE REDUCE THE CHANCES OF YOUTH ENGAGING WITH HARMFUL ONLINE CONTENT?

Increasing protective factors against online radicalization has two parts:

1 Digital Literacy

2 Social-Emotional Learning

In order for students to never become radicalized or commit violence, they need to be equipped with skills that enable them to be capable of recognizing and rejecting harmful online content, and feel secure enough to not seek community in extremist groups.

If students have strong digital literacy skills, they will be able to understand the evolving nature of online spaces, how to recognize persuasion tactics used in harmful content, and how to use technology effectively.

However, in preventing extremist radicalization and targeted violence, digital literacy alone will not provide all of the skills necessary for students to be able to recognize and reject all forms of harmful online content.

The combination of social-emotional learning and digital literacy will equip students with the critical comprehension skills to recognize the harmful online content and not be susceptible to its messaging, stopping the radicalization process before it can start or evolve into targeted violence.

To do this, students must have strong skills in problem-solving, rational decision-making, emotional and behavioral regulation, interpersonal relationships, and in how actions affect the self and other; social-emotional skills will provide the student with the abilities to resist harmful online content.

WHY K-5?

Students need to develop critical comprehension at the youngest age possible as they are starting to develop their worldview so that they can engage with content responsibly. With the rise in technology and children having internet access at much younger ages than ever before, new skills are required to navigate these changing online spaces. It is much more difficult to disengage them once they are already interacting with harmful content than it is to give them skills from the start that will prevent them from believing harmful narratives that can lead to online radicalization. Priming students with these skills at a young age will increase protective factors against violence, so as they grow up they will be less susceptible to harmful online content and never get to the point of radicalization and targeted violence.

CRITICAL COMPREHENSION, DECISION-MAKING, & PERSONAL BELIEFS

Critical comprehension skills will allow young people to understand all sides of an issue and fact-check before they come to their own informed conclusion. Children will be exposed to all types of perspectives as well as persuasive tactics that can shape their beliefs. DUCC aims to give students the skills to spot these tactics and recognize when content is attempting to influence them in misleading ways.

Having a strong foundation of critical thinking allows children to be responsible decision-makers online and offline, making rational decisions that are not solely based on emotion or persuasion. DUCC teaches students to understand where their beliefs come from and why, and encourages them to develop their own beliefs with low susceptibility to biases, persuasion, and propaganda. DUCC is non-partisan and does not advocate for students to adopt a specific political viewpoint, but rather strengthen the tools necessary to become informed and shape their own beliefs.