Personal Information is...?

Written by Beth Thornton
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The definition of personal information is not so straightforward, especially to young people. Many students, even those who seem tech savvy, might not know how to define the term personal information, and therefore cannot heed the warning "do not divulge personal information online." Per Dr. Mary Ann Sund, educator and founding partner of Lersun Development, "I asked the students about personal information. To a person, the students knew they were not allowed to share personal information online -- that doing so was a bad idea. Then as I drilled down, I realized very quickly that the students had no idea what personal information was and they had no idea of what a stranger was online. They didn't know their home address was personal information; they didn't know their telephone number was personal information... And they thought that if they had chatted with somebody online two or three times, that person was no longer a stranger. (Connections March 2018).

Together as a class, write and display a definition of personal information to use as a guideline for online activity.

AHA! I have more personal information than I thought!
Grade Level: 5-7
Materials: White board for brainstorming, computer/printer or poster board for final product.

Key Question #1: Who created this message?
Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed.
Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent?
Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power

Activity: Prepare to teach this activity by searching for definitions of personal information, you will likely find a variety of answers. The point is to explore this topic with your students and to help them realize and create their own definition.

Ask students to call out their ideas of what personal information includes and make a list for all to see. For example: full name, address, phone number, birthdate, photos, social security number, bank account, etc. Write your own definition as a class called Personal Information is...Then review the Key Questions/Core Concepts and discuss how requests are made for online information. Why are these requests made? What is their purpose? Explain that advertisers target users based on personal information (profit), and sometimes people with bad

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intentions use the information for harmful purposes (profit/power).

Resources: Check out Data Defenders from MediaSmarts in Canada. If your students are older, the report on Teen Identity Theft from   FOSI contains information and statistics on what teens share online.

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