

Data Privacy Basics for Teen Builders

What you need to know about handling data responsibly. Print this and reference it whenever your project touches personal information.

THE 5 PRIVACY PRINCIPLES

1. Collect Only What You Need

If your project doesn't need someone's email, don't ask for it. Every extra field is extra responsibility. Ask: "Can my project work without this data?" If yes, remove it.

2. Be Transparent

Tell users what you collect and why. Use plain language, not legal jargon. A 3–4 sentence privacy notice is enough for most student projects.

3. Get Real Consent

Consent means the person understands and agrees. A wall of text nobody reads isn't consent. A clear explanation with a real choice ("yes" or "no") is.

4. Keep Data Safe

Don't put personal data in publicly accessible places. Check sharing settings on Google Sheets. Don't commit API keys or passwords to public code repositories.

5. Give Users Control

If you store information about someone, they should be able to see it and ask you to delete it. Design with this in mind even if you don't fully implement it yet.

SENSITIVE DATA — EXTRA CAUTION REQUIRED

These types of data require special care. For student projects, avoid collecting these from other people:

- **Health information** (medical conditions, mental health, medications)
- **Financial information** (bank accounts, credit cards, income)
- **Location data** (GPS coordinates, home addresses)
- **Identity information** (Social Security numbers, government IDs)
- **Private communications** (messages, emails, call logs)

Tracking your own data (personal habit tracker, your own spending) is fine. Collecting this from others requires legal compliance.

LAWS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

COPPA (US): Restricts collecting data from children under 13. Requires parental consent. If your project could be used by kids under 13, be extra careful.

GDPR (Europe): Requires explicit consent, data minimization, and the right to delete data. Applies to any project used by people in Europe.

CCPA (California): Gives California residents the right to know what data is collected and request deletion.

For student projects: You probably don't need to comply formally with these laws unless your project collects personal data from many users. But understanding the principles makes you a better builder.

YOUR PRIVACY CHECKLIST

- I only collect data my project actually needs
- I know where every piece of data is stored

- Sharing settings are restricted (not public) for any personal data
- I haven't put API keys, passwords, or secrets in public code
- If others use my project, I have a plain-language privacy notice
- I'm not collecting sensitive data from other people
- I have a plan for what happens to data if I stop maintaining the project

SAMPLE PRIVACY NOTICE (Copy and Customize)

"This [project name] collects [what data] to [why]. Your data is stored in [where] and is not shared with anyone. This project was built with AI assistance as part of a learning course. If you have questions or want your data removed, contact [your email]."

Remember: Privacy isn't a checkbox — it's a design principle. Build it in from the start, and you'll never have to bolt it on later.