Staying Safe Online

Helpful information for parishes

Each year in February across the globe, Safer Internet Day is celebrated as an event to raise awareness about online safety. Whilst having a specific day to mark this event is important, ensuring that our online communication with children and young people is conducted in a safe and appropriate manner is something that we need to be mindful of each day we turn on our computers and access our devices.

Did you know?

- The eSafety Commissioner reported a 90% increase between 2019 and 2020 in illegal online content – majority involving child abuse material.

- From March–September 2020 the average teen (12-17 year olds) spent 14.4 hours a week online with 9 in 10 teens using the internet to research topics of interest, watch videos, chat with friends and listen to music; 8 in 10 teens played games online with others.

- In Australia during 2020 reports of the non-consensual sharing of intimate images increased by 114%.

- Serious cyberbullying of children in Australia was up by 30% in 2020 compared to 2019, and the number of adults reporting online harassment increased by nearly 40%.

- In the six months leading to September 2020, 4 out of 10 teens had a negative online experience.

- The top three negative experiences described by teens were being contacted by a stranger or someone they didn't know (30%), receiving inappropriate or unwanted content (20%) and being deliberately excluded from events/social groups (16%).

- Six out of 10 young people who reported a negative experience online identified emotional and/or psychological impacts as a result.

Sources:
https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b6dadb47-7f22-4a1e-863c-ba7649204e00/aihw-cws-76.pdf.aspx?inline=true

https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/corporate-documents/CCYP-Annual-Report-2019-20.pdf

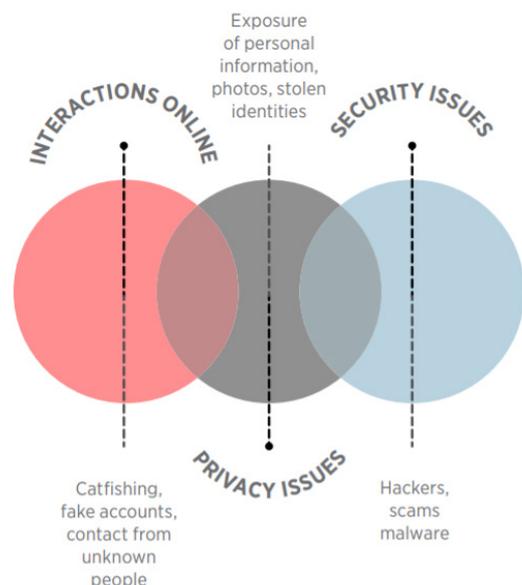https://www.esafety.gov.au/research/digital-lives-aussie-teens

https://www.news.com.au/national/crime/covid19-lockdowns-cause-disturbing-spike-in-online-child-exploitation-activity-in-australia/news-story/a8a2e904ae7f4704bc4484e81d470890

https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australias-esafety-commissioner-targets-abuse-online-as-covid-19-supercharges-cyberbullying/
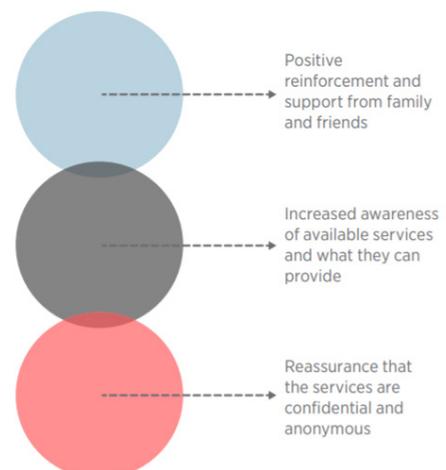
Microsoft Word – Youth_kids_and_digital.docx (esafety.gov.au)

The following infographs show us that young people are more inclined to seek help when experiencing matters of online safety, if they have positive reinforcement and support from family and friends; if they are aware of available services and if they have reassurance in these services for their confidentiality and privacy.

Young people's top three online safety concerns

INTERACTIONS ONLINE

Exposure of personal information, photos, stolen identities

SECURITY ISSUES

PRIVACY ISSUES

Catfishing, fake accounts, contact from unknown people

Hackers, scams malware

Top three factors increasing young people's help-seeking behaviours

Positive reinforcement and support from family and friends

Increased awareness of available services and what they can provide

Reassurance that the services are confidential and anonymous

Source: https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-01/YRRC%20Research%20Report%20eSafety%202021_web%20V06%20-%20publishing_1.pdf

What can we do?

Here are some questions to consider for any programs and activities that involve online communication with children and young people:

- Are guidelines established for online programs, groups and activities which address inappropriate and behaviours?

- Are the behavioural expectations outlined in the Safeguarding Children and Young People Code of Conduct, shared with parents, carers, children and young people who participate in online programs, groups and activities?

- Do you have a registration process in place for children and young people, which seeks consent to participate online?

- Are parish, agency or entity devices and accounts used rather than personal accounts of clergy, employees and volunteers?

- Do you 'copy in' and include parents, carers and other parish, agency and entity representatives e.g. parish priest, program coordinator, manager in communication to children and young people?

- Are you aware of what to do if there was a safety concern with inappropriate online behaviour and/or content?

- Do we promote support services for children and young people when experiencing online safety concerns? For example, speaking to a trusted adults (parents, teachers, police) in the first instance; if the child is in immediate danger contact the Police on 000. Report any online abuse or content to the eSafety Commissioner or to the social media platform where the issue occurred. Seek out professional services such as Kids Helpline or Headspace and report any online child sexual abuse to the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE).

For further information please see our Electronic Communication including Social Media - fact sheet

Useful CAM resources

- Webinar recording (2020): Staying connected online with children and young people
- *Melbourne Catholic* news article (2021): Helping our children to connect safely

Other resources and webinars

- Register now for the eSafety Commissioner's Webinar: eSafety's parent guide to helping kids thrive online

- The Australian Federal Police's Think U Know website has a range of educational materials about preventing online child sexual exploitation

- The Australian Human Rights Commission has a checklist for online safety for child safe organisations.

- Resources from ACU about safeguarding children during COVID-19

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Staying safe online

Use these tips to find out how to respond to online abuse and take control of your online safety - whether you're in the workplace or at home.

1. Manage the voices you engage with

You can control what you see and hear online. Conversation controls help you manage your social media feeds and make sure these platforms are a more positive place for you to spend time with your community online.

Check out the available conversation controls for some popular social media platforms:

- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Instagram

For other apps and to learn how to mute, block or unfollow people to minimise the harm of online abuse, check out The eSafety Guide.

2. Update your security and privacy settings

It's a good idea to regularly check security and privacy settings. eSafety recommends using different, strong passwords for each online account, and signing out when you're finished.

You can add two-step verification (also known as two-factor authentication) for extra protection. Your answers to security questions should be things that no one else can learn. Find out more about how to secure your accounts in our how-to videos.

Take a moment to check the privacy settings on all your devices and apps. Social media sites have privacy settings to help you control who sees your posts. You can also adjust your settings to manage who can send friend requests.

Check out The eSafety Guide for more information on privacy settings.

3. Take charge of your location settings

Location settings are important for map apps and all types of technology, but they can also be used to track you – with an intent to cause harm. You can choose when and who to share your location with.

Remember, social media apps and Bluetooth technology that's used for sharing files and connecting to devices, can also track your location. You can turn these features off when you don't feel safe.

Get more information on **locations settings**.

4. Make it a habit to collect evidence of online abuse

Our research shows that people, particularly women, typically downplay online abuse – especially when they experience it as part of their working lives. You can change this by collecting evidence of the online abuse you receive and this will help others to help you.

Take a screenshot and save a URL – which you can use if you choose to report online abuse.

eSafety offers step-by-step guidance on **collecting evidence** if digital technology is being used in an abusive or threatening way. Although it is important to collect evidence, it is even more important to stay safe. Make sure evidence is only collected when you feel it is safe to do so.

5. Raise your voice about online abuse

Online abuse should always be reported to the relevant platforms and, depending on the level of harm, you can also **report to eSafety** or the police.

Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and other social media sites provide community rules to follow. If you or someone you know sees something that's not respectful, you can anonymously make a report and ask the site to remove it.

For advice and support or to report online abuse, go to eSafety.gov.au