

Why we need to upskill educators in eSafety

eSafety Commissioner, Julie Inman Grant, discusses how schools and educators can work with parents to deal with online challenges faced by young people.

Guiding young people to positively shape their digital practices has never been more important. Whether it's for school, socialising or entertainment, almost everything they do is enabled through an internet-connected device. And it's happening from a younger age – our survey of 3520 Australian parents revealed 81 per cent have allowed their pre-schooler access to the internet.

While this exposure to digital technology can create diverse and rich experiences, our research shows that young people also encounter a range of negative experiences online, such as being contacted by strangers, being left out by others or having mean things posted about them. Of these young people, only 8 per cent spoke to a teacher or Deputy Principal and just 8 per cent spoke to a school counsellor about their online issue. However, a larger number reported speaking to their peers (28 per cent) or their parents (55 per cent).

At eSafety we are dedicated to helping Australians have safer online experiences, especially young people. We operate the world's first (and still only) legislated cyberbullying complaints scheme, where young people under 18 can report serious cyberbullying and then we work with social media providers to get the harmful content removed. We also run a legislative-backed reporting tool for victims of image-based abuse – or the sharing of intimate images/videos without consent.

From the complaints we receive, we know many of these online issues are closely linked to social conflict occurring at school. But the problem of bullying – online and offline – extends far beyond the school gates. It is embedded in the values and norms of wider society. So to effectively address this behaviour, we need to

take a holistic approach, including a whole-of-school and whole-of-community approach.

To assist educators with this, eSafety has developed an accredited Teacher Professional Learning Program, empowering teachers with the confidence and competence to guide their students through a range of online challenges they may encounter.

The live-webinar sessions help teachers understand the current trends in technology, the latest cyber-related laws and the education resources and strategies that can empower students to deal with online challenges. They also cover the common online safety concerns of families, and the resources and strategies available to help families address these concerns, including ideas for how to engage the whole school community in online safety awareness.

Educators play an increasingly important role in helping shape positive online experiences for young people. Not only can teachers initiate important discussions about online safety issues in the classroom and help students deal with these issues by using eSafety resources like the The YeS Project, they can also help bring parents along on the journey.

Understandably, parents are grappling with a generation who do not know a world without the internet and connected-devices. Issues like screen-time, gaming and access to online pornography are primary parenting concerns – and represent a set of challenges our own parents did not have to deal with.

While three in four parents from our nationwide survey say they took some form of action to try and keep their child safe online, there is a significant knowledge gap, as time-poor parents struggle to keep up with the ever-



changing online trends of young people.

Less than half of parents feel confident dealing with cyberbullying, or managing online threats, like contact with strangers – which we know one in four Australian teens have experienced. A whopping 96 per cent of parents told us they need additional online safety information to help them manage the online risks children are exposed to.

Schools are a key gateway to getting essential online safety information to parents and carers. But they are also time-poor, so a variety of channels to reach busy parents can be looked at – whether it's having them acknowledge technology and cyberbullying policies, holding parent-information seminars, or including regular articles about online safety in the school newsletter or app.

As digital technologies continue to infiltrate our lives, for the good and the bad, we all need to take responsibility for keeping children safe online. I encourage teachers to step up to the challenge – register for eSafety's Professional Learning Program, explore the resources, support and reporting available, and pass on our advice and information for parents and carers.

Teachers who are competent and confident in dealing with online safety issues not only help more students effectively deal with online issues; the whole community benefits by being engaged and informed about how to help young people stay safe online. **EM**