Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications

Best practices: Australia's approach to keeping children safe online

December 2021

Online Safety Act

Australia passed new legislation in 2021 that strengthens the existing online safety framework and provides the eSafety Commissioner with greater powers to counter online harm and hold industry to account for the safety of their products and services. The new Online Safety Act takes effect from 23 January 2022 and contains powers and functions for the eSafety Commissioner relating to the protection of children, including:

- Administering a cyberbullying complaints scheme, including power to order the removal of **cyberbullying material targeting an Australian child**. eSafety has released Regulatory Guidance for the Online Content Scheme.

- Administering an online content scheme to address illegal and restricted online content, including powers to order the removal of seriously harmful online material, such as **child sexual abuse material,** no matter where it is hosted in the world, and to restrict certain online **material that is inappropriate for children to access**, such as graphically violent or sexually explicit content.

- Administering the image-based abuse scheme to assist victims who have had their intimate image shared without their consent. This scheme aims to help all Australians, including children, who have experienced image-based abuse. eSafety has released Regulatory Guidance for the Image-Based Abuse Scheme.

- Providing **educational resources and** information, and conducting a range of **educational and promotional activities** for children, parents, carers and educators, to raise awareness of online risks and encourage more positive experiences online. Further information is available at www.eSafety.gov.au

The eSafety Commissioner also has powers under the Act to request **industry codes of practice** from the online services industry or to create **industry standards** to deal with harmful online material. New codes of practice are expected to raise the bar when it comes to the safety of Australians and should address issues like the detection and removal of illegal content, and put in place measures to shield children from inappropriate material. The eSafety Commissioner's Industry Codes Position Paper includes a series of positions that outline the eSafety Commissioner's expectations for the development of codes, as well as its preferred outcomes-based model for the codes.

The Act also includes a set of **Basic Online Safety Expectations** which articulate the Government's minimum safety expectations for online services, such as social media, gaming and online dating sites, websites and online messaging services. **Mandatory reporting requirements** in the Act will allow the eSafety Commissioner to require online service providers to provide specific information about online harms that occur on their platforms, what they are doing about it, and whether it is working.

The eSafety Commissioner's Fact Sheet provides an overview of the reforms made under this Act.

International cooperation

The eSafety Commissioner has powers to remove **illegal online content**, such as [child sexual abuse material](#) and Abhorrent Violent Material. For the most serious illegal content, eSafety works with and alongside law enforcement agencies, and in particular the Australian Federal Police. eSafety also works with **our international networks**, including the [International Association of Internet Hotlines](#) (INHOPE), to facilitate the rapid removal of illegal content wherever it is hosted. These types of partnerships and collaborative approaches are key to effective online regulation.

The eSafety Commissioner also participates in the following, where it **advocates for the rights of children and their protection** from violence and exploitation on the internet: World Economic Forum - Advancing Global Digital Content Safety Project, WePROTECT Global Alliance, Child Dignity Alliance, APAC Financial Coalition, eSafety Advisory Committee.

Safety by Design

The eSafety Commissioner's **Safety by Design initiative** encourages technology companies to anticipate, detect and eliminate online risks so digital environments are safer and more inclusive. It challenges technology companies to alter their design ethos. For many this means switching from a 'profit at all costs' approach to 'moving thoughtfully', investing in risk mitigation at the front-end and embedding user protections from the outset. This means **putting user safety and rights at the centre of design and development of online products and services**, rather than retrofitting safeguards after harm has occurred.

Children and young people were a focal point in the development of the principles, as research shows that their rights in the online world are far from being met or addressed. This is despite the fact one in three internet users globally are children, children are early adopters of online products and technology, and they are most vulnerable to the potentially harmful impacts. Accordingly, a [vision statement](#) was developed by children and young people to help articulate what they expected of the online industry to help users navigate the online world, freely and safely.

Education and research

The eSafety Commissioner plays a key role in **educating Australians to develop critical digital skills and stay safe online**. eSafety achieves this through providing evidence-based information for all Australians, as well as tailored programs and resources for those at greatest risk of online abuse. This includes advice for [children](#) and [young people](#), as well as their [parents](#), carers and [educators](#).

The eSafety Commissioner also undertakes [research](#) to ensure our programs and resources are based on evidence. eSafety supports, encourages, conducts and evaluates research about online safety for children. These include research on [Digital lives of Aussie teens](#), [Youth and online gaming](#) and [Young people and sexting](#).

Additional resources

Resources for children

[eSafety Kids:](#) Interactive child friendly platform for children to learn about online rights and online safety, the role of the Australia's eSafety Commissioner and to reach out for help related to online risks and harms.

[Swoosh, Glide and Rule Number 5 - online safety picture book:](#) An online safety picture book about the adventures of a fun family sleepover for Swoosh and Glide with their sugar glider cousins, developed by Australia's eSafety Commissioner. The picture book shares some of the common technology experiences of children, shows what to do when something unexpected happens on a screen and highlights safe online practices for the whole family.

[My family rules - online safety song:](#) A fun online safety song for children. Sing along with the music video of My Family Rules. You can also listen to the soundtrack or download and play the recordings and sheet music.

eSafety Young People: Resources and information for young people to learn about online rights and online safety risks and harms.

Resources for parents and educators

Global online safety advice for parents and carers – COVID 19 pack: These booklets provide parents and carers anywhere is the world with information about managing their children's online safety during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Global online safety advice for young children, parents and carers: Parents and carers will find information and practical tips in the online safety advice booklet. Download the editable PDF version of the booklet to add your country's local helplines and support service links. Parents and carers can encourage online safety by helping their children read the story puzzle book, understand the information and follow the instructions for the fun activities.

Toolkit for Schools: The eSafety Toolkit for Schools was developed by Australia's eSafety Commissioner and is designed to help school leaders create safer online environments. The Toolkit is flexible in its design so that schools can tailor how they use it, based on the needs of their community.

Early Years booklet: Online safety for under 5s: This guide covers online safety issues for children from birth to 5 and includes a range of practical tips and advice on how to support and guide them to be safe online.

Online safety education framework: Australia's eSafety Commissioner has developed a framework to guide future Australian school based online safety education initiatives and to help schools assess the quality of programs and approaches. This framework is based on research into existing best practice in online safety education, conducted in 2019 by Professor Kerryann Walsh, QUT, in consultation with the eSafety Commissioner.

Digital parenting: National Survey, 2018: The report was the result of collaboration between eSafety in Australia, Netsafe in New Zealand and the Safer Internet Centre with the University of Plymouth in the United Kingdom (UK). It is part of an ongoing program of cross-agency online safety research.

eSafety guide: Information about the latest games, apps and social media, including how to protect information and report inappropriate content.

Resources for educators including classroom resources: Resources designed to help schools and other educators teach and supplement online safety lessons.

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Diverse groups - including translations: Online safety advice and resources translated for culturally and linguistically diverse individuals and communities.

Guide for Grandparents: Australia's eSafety Commissioner has developed the 'Online safety for grandparents and carers' guide, which has key advice about online safety issues that can affect children and young people. It includes a range of practical tips, to help talk about issues and manage them.

Best Practice Framework: This framework was designed to support the development of online safety education in Australian schools with best practice principles, from Foundation to Year 12.

Resources for policymakers

Strategic Plan 2019-2022: The eSafety Commissioner is Australia's national independent regulator for online safety. eSafety leads and coordinates online safety efforts across Commonwealth departments, authorities and agencies, and we engage with key online safety stakeholders internationally, to amplify our impact across borders. eSafety has worked to define its Mission, Vision and Values and create a dynamic strategic planning framework for 2019-2022.

Safety by Design: Safety by Design is the Australia's eSafety Commissioners global initiative that puts user safety and rights at the centre of the design and development of online products and services. Research and consultation for Safety by Design began in 2018. It now includes:

- a set of principles that position user safety as a fundamental design consideration
- interactive assessment tools for enterprise and start up technology companies
- resources for investors and financial entities
- engagement with the tertiary education sector to embed Safety by Design into curricula around the world.

Tech trends and challenges - position statements: eSafety continually scans for new research, policy, legislative and technical updates. These position statements reflect eSafety's approach to selected tech trends and challenges. Various emerging issues are also discussed in eSafety blogposts.

Research: eSafety undertakes research to ensure our programs and resources are based on evidence. We support, encourage, conduct and evaluate research about online safety for all.

Online safety education framework, 2019: The eSafety Commissioner developed a framework to guide future Australian school based online safety education initiatives and to help schools assess the quality of programs and approaches. This framework is based on research into existing best practice in online safety education, conducted in 2019 by Professor Kerryann Walsh, QUT, in consultation with the eSafety Commissioner.

Youth and digital dangers, 2018: Data in this report is drawn from eSafety's 2017 Youth Digital Participation Survey. The research examines how young people aged 8 to 17 deal with issues such as:

- managing their social media

- contact with strangers online

- sharing of personal information and passwords

- dealing with negative online experiences

It also looks at how the negative experiences of young people compare to those of Australian adults.

Resources for industry

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Safety by Design interactive assessment tools for enterprise and start up technology companies, 2021: Tools to assess how well a company's systems, processes and practices support user safety. The tailored report and the suggested resources can be used to make improvements. The enterprise tool is for mid-tier companies (50 to 249 employees worldwide) and top-tier companies (250+ employees worldwide). The start-up tool is for early stage or start-up companies (1 to 49 employees worldwide).

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