Cybersmart: Learning online safety

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The internet is an incredible tool. It provides an opportunity to communicate, learn, play and be entertained by content from around the world. It's vibrant, incredibly varied and offers information on any topic at a click of the mouse. While the internet provides many positives there are also risks. Cyberbullying, inappropriate contact, identity theft, scams and exposure to adult content can make the internet a risky place for children. The risks exist for all children, from pre-schoolers who are only starting to use a computer, to more experienced teens, and also adults.

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When it comes to teaching students about cybersafety, Australian schools face some major challenges: knowing what their obligations are in providing appropriate cybersafety care for students, and where to find research-based and reliable advice, strategies and resources.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (the ACMA) manages a national cybersafety education program, *Cybersmart*. This program includes targeted education and awareness activities and resources for teachers, students, parents and children, materials for use in schools and at home, and research into current trends in cybersafety. *Cybersmart* aims to give children, teachers and parents, sound advice on how best to manage risks, so their online experiences are safe and positive.

Online behaviour and risks

Studies into children and young people's online behaviour indicate that they use the internet to undertake a wide range of activities. These include using it for research as well as a range of social, gaming and learning activities. The ACMA's research into young people's online participation identifies a shift as children age, from individual activities such as playing games, which is popular with children aged 8 to 11 years, to social pursuits for young people aged 16 to 17 years.[1]

This research identified important points including:

- Among 16 to 17-year-olds, 97 per cent of those surveyed reported that they had used at least one social networking service. For children aged between 8 to 11 years, only 51 per cent had used a social networking service.
- Using the internet for social interaction is the primary reason 81 per cent of 12 to 17-year-olds go online. Fifty four per cent of 12 to 17-year-olds note that "chatting with friends from school" is their main reason for using social networking services.
- Risky online behaviour increases with age. About 78 per cent of 16 to 17-year-olds claim to have personal information, such as photographs, posted on their social networking pages, compared with 48 per cent of 8 to 9-year-olds.

Children and young people are clearly entrenched in the online world. But how risky is it? According to the ACMA's *Click and Connect* study, children demonstrate a good general knowledge about online behaviours that might be considered 'risky'. Despite this, some young people still engage in risky behaviour, and some perceive these behaviours are common across their peer groups.[2]

It is important to educate young people about the risk, then give them the skills and tools to change risky behaviour. This is particularly relevant in the use of social media sites. The popularity of these sites has grown enormously in recent years, leading to increased exposure to risk for users. Children and young people are better able to evaluate risk and manage difficult situations if they are aware of the consequences of their online actions and understand why they should think before posting online, keep personal information private and respect others.

The UK's Byron Review[3] found that children do not report having major concerns about their online behaviour as they seemingly feel informed and in control about online risks. However, they are still "developing critical skills and need (adult) help to make wise decisions."[4] Report author, Dr Tanya Byron, notes that data shows young people are at an

increasing risk of "exposure to sexually inappropriate content, contributions to negative beliefs and attitudes, cyberbullying and (content which promotes) harmful behaviours."[5] The review recommends "a strong commitment to changing behaviour through a sustained information and education strategy."[6]

These recommendations acknowledge that teachers and library staff, throughout primary and secondary schools, can play a pivotal role in helping students to develop appropriate and ethical behaviour when using digital technologies.

Cybersafety education

The school authority, teachers and other specialists owe a duty of care to students. Schools need to be aware of the key role they have to play in cybersafety education. This is particularly important in the current environment where the internet and online technologies are an essential part of life for students both at home and in the classroom. An educator's duty of care cannot be underestimated, though in a rapidly changing environment, it may be contentious.

Developing school policies

To help minimise risk in the school and classroom environment, schools can identify risks relevant to their students and develop strategies and processes to address them. For example, schools may have policies and processes for use of the internet, email and mobile phones. These policies and processes should be updated regularly and effectively communicated to staff and students.

An effective policy is one that originates from a particular school or organisation and is the result of discussion which ideally engages the whole school or organisation in the process. While an ICT sub-committee may develop a draft policy, a working document only becomes relevant and practical if it is based on broad consultation and has thorough support. Sound policies should look to include:

- a rationale;
- a statement of purpose;
- guidelines for use; and
- a student commitment or undertaking—this should be sufficiently detailed to provide students with key safety messages that reinforce the overall school approach.

Schools are encouraged to contact their state authority about policies and developments in cybersafety education. More policy guidelines along with samples for each state jurisdiction are available online at ***www.cybersmart.gov.au/en/Schools.aspx***.

ACMA Initiatives

To empower administrators, teachers and librarians to help students stay safe online the ACMA has developed a diverse and targeted range of education resources and training programs. These promote key cybersafety messages and support children and young people in their online activities by teaching them essential skills, knowledge and behaviours.

Key ACMA programs for teachers, children and parents aim to help children minimise risk and enjoy their online experiences.

Professional development for educators

The ACMA offers a free cybersafety professional development workshop (PD) for educators that is available to all practising teachers across Australia. Since it was launched in 2009, more than 5,500 educators across Australia have attended the workshop with demand for presentations continuing to grow. Key cybersafety topics covered in the workshop include:

- the profile of a modern student;
- the skills required to develop a cybercitizen the legal responsibilities of educators and schools to mitigate risk and potential liability; and
- cybersafety resources that are useful to support school policies and teaching practice.

Educators need to work closely with their students to embed appropriate behaviour, knowledge and skills. A core foundation of the *Cybersmart* program for schools, shared in the workshop, is the cybercitizen profile. This assists teachers to identify and develop the relevant skills that children and young people need to be safe and responsible cybercitizens.

The cybercitizen profile is based on four capabilities:

- positive online behaviour;
- digital media literacy;
- peer and personal safety;
- e-Security.

The profile provides an outline of what children and young people do online at different ages.

Teachers who attend the PD take home a range of *Cybersmart* resources such as lesson plans, case studies and policies. These help teachers to engage students and to implement effective cybersafety strategies within their school environment.

The PD workshop is accredited, endorsed or recognised in all states and territories. Delivered by an experienced cybersafety trainer with an education background, the PD is offered as either an on-site workshop, held at schools, or an off-site workshop held at a local venue.

Appraisal of the program includes the following comments:

> The Executive and staff…would like to express their sincere appreciation for your involvement in our…Professional Development week. Your sessions on cybersafety were insightful, helpful

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and somewhat confronting, but very much appreciated by all staff members. It is important for us as a staff to be helped to understand those whom we teach as they interact with today's information technology. You certainly assisted us in doing that in an engaging way... We pray that the vital work you are undertaking will impact those to whom you speak for the good of those they teach. —*Principal, Covenant College, Gordon, ACT.*

Just a quick message to pass on my extra compliments to the presenter of the *Cybersafety* workshop training session. The trainer's style of presentation, connection with the audience and practical knowledge of the content was outstanding. It was one of the most useful professional development sessions that I have been to for a long time. —*Teacher, Buderim Mountain State School, Qld.*

The ACMA's materials are brilliant. I cannot recommend them highly enough. There are very few resources and presentations that you hear rave reviews about wherever you go. The ACMA materials are raved about. They are terrific to recommend to parents. —*Dr. Helen McGrath, Deakin University*

I attended a cybersafety session run by the ACMA's trainer at St Vincent's College…on being cybersmart. The presentation was very interesting and informative but also grounded in thorough research and facts…I think the best part of the presentation was that it wasn't just about giving information but was also a call to action and to not be complacent. The steps we can take were also very practical. I had a look at the new *Cybersmart* website…and that is a great resource as well... —*President, St Vincent's College, Parents and Friends Assoc., Potts Point, Sydney, NSW.*

> ***"Recognising that a child's internet activity will depend on their age and experience, the ACMA provides a range of free teaching resources which meet age-specific needs"***

Internet safety awareness presentations

Complementing the PD workshop, the ACMA also offers free Internet Safety Awareness presentations for students, teachers and parents. These presentations are easy to understand, thorough and informative. They cover a range of issues including children's use of the internet as well as other emerging technologies and tips and strategies to minimise risk and help children stay safe online. In 18 months, over 150,000 students, teachers and parents have attended these free presentations.

Registration forms for the PD and Internet Safety Awareness presentations are available online at ***www.cybersmart.gov.au***, by contacting the ACMA by email ***cybersafety@acma.gov.au***, or by calling the Cybersafety Contact Centre on ***1800 880 176***.

Internet safety for pre-service teachers

To support acknowledgement of the significance of safe online environments associated with schooling, the ACMA has offered presentations to universities to meet the needs of pre-service teachers. Initiated at Deakin University in June 2010, this type of interaction currently includes a lecture (50 minutes) and tutorial (90 minutes). It is available free to all universities throughout Australia.

Through this interactive program pre-service teachers can gain the skills and knowledge required to confidently teach their students about cybersafety. Topics covered include cyberbullying, sexting, safe social networking, identity protection and digital citizenship.

Universities can request and arrange a presentation by emailing ***cybersafety@acma.gov.au***.

Education resources

Recognising that a child's internet activity will depend on their age and experience, the ACMA provides a range of free teaching resources which meet age-specific needs. These materials include animations, video content, games and interactive activities, as well as lesson plans and other supporting information for teachers. Sources for these resources are identified below, with some description and indication of their potential use.

The Cybersmart website is about how to keep safe and be smart online. It provides cybersafety education and awareness for children, young people and parents. The website features news, resources and information about current cybersafety issues and provides practical advice about how to deal with them (***www.cybersmart.gov.au***).

The Cybersmart Schools Gateway is a web portal offering all Australian primary and secondary schools easy access to the *Cybersmart* education resources. The *Schools Gateway* hosts all current resources and links to national and international resources. The *Schools Gateway* also includes strategic tools for cybersafety education planning (***www.cybersmart.gov.au/Schools.aspx***).

Primary school

CyberQuoll is an internet safety education resource for upper primary school students. It provides a fun, cartoon-style multimedia resource with different episodes explaining the basics of the internet and keeping safe. *CyberQuoll* includes a teacher guide with student worksheets, certificates and contracts. A family contract is also included for parents to use with their children (***www.cybersmart.gov.au/cyberquoll***).

Cybersmart Detectives is an innovative online activity that teaches children key internet safety messages in a safe school environment. Children

work in teams, online and in real time to investigate and solve an internet-themed problem. They are supported by teachers and internet safety experts who act as *Cybersmart* guides in the activity. *Cybersmart Detectives* teaches children key internet safety messages particularly the need to protect personal information (***http://cybersmart.engagelive.net/***).

A second activity, *Cybersmart Hero*, which focuses on cyberbullying and the need for children to support others being bullied online, was recently launched and is now available nationally. It is one of the upper primary resources available from the generic site for teacher resources (***http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/Schools/Teacher resources.aspx***).

Hector's World is an innovative online safety resource for young children featuring Hector Protector, a bottlenose dolphin (***http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/Kids.aspx***). Developed in New Zealand by Hector's World Limited, this animated resource features episodes that can be viewed online. It's accompanied by online puzzles and downloadable storybooks and activities. There are also lesson plans from children aged 5 to 11 years.

Secondary school

CyberNetrix is an engaging multimedia resource designed for early teens. It includes interactive activities designed to simulate popular online activities, such as instant messaging (IM). *CyberNetrix* aims to highlight age-specific risks online and offers advice about how to avoid them. This resource includes a teacher guide with activity guidelines and student handouts (***www.cybersmart.gov.au/cybernetrix***).

Let's Fight it Together is a comprehensive teaching resource to help young people, teachers and parents understand cyberbullying and its impact on others. The resource provides practical advice in a package comprising a short film, supporting teaching materials and links to online activities. *Let's Fight it Together* highlights how technology can be misused, leading to cyberbullying, as well as guidance about how to promote and develop a culture of confident technology users.

Originally developed by Childnet International and the Department of Children, Schools and Families in the United Kingdom, the ACMA has adapted the program for use in Australia. It can be accessed from the resources for lower secondary schools at the site ***http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/Schools/Teacher%20resources.aspx***.

Wise up to IT is a video-based program aimed at secondary school students. The program covers cyberbullying, online stalking, internet security and grooming in four videos which depict young people's experiences online. *Wise up to IT* provides teacher and student resources (***www.cybersmart.gov.au/wiseuptoit***).

Super Clubs PLUS Australia (SCPA) is a protected online social learning network for children aged 6 to 12 years. The ACMA has launched two 'Cybersafety Badges' on the site. Children earn the badges by completing cybersafety activities including an interactive 'spot the problem', a cybersafety quiz and a cybersafety audit of their home.

Many of the ACMA's resources are available on DVD or CD ROM and can be ordered free of charge from the Cybersafety Contact Centre on 1800 880 176. The Contact Centre also provides cybersafety advice and information for a range of audiences.

Smart choices

The internet is a truly incredible tool and as it continues to develop, there will be many more, and varied, opportunities and risks for users. Helping children have positive online experiences requires sound support and education—not only by teachers but also by parents, carers and library staff. With this, children will be better able to make more informed decisions when they see or experience confronting material online. The ACMA's up to date, targeted and useful information can assist and is freely available.

Help children to make smart choices and stay safe online. TEACH

The Cybersmart *program is a national cybersafety education program managed by the ACMA, as part of the Australian Government's commitment to promoting online safety for children and adolescents. The program welcomes all feedback. To comment, please email* ***cybersafety@acma.gov.au***

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Endnotes

[1] ACMA, 2009. *Click and connect: Young Australians' use of online social media*. Available at http://www.acma.gov.au/WEB/STANDARD/pc=PC_311797, accessed 25 February 2010.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Byron, T. 2008. *Safer children in a digital world: The report of the Byron review*. Department for Children, Schools and Families. Available at: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/byronreview/pdfs/Final%20Report%20Bookmarked.pdf, accessed 8 July 2008.

[4] Byron, T. 2008. *Byron review: Children and new technology*. Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2. Available at: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/byronreview/pdfs/Final%20Report%20Bookmarked.pdf, accessed 8 July 2008.

[5] Ibid., p. 4.

[6] Ibid., p. 7.