



Department for Communities



Parents and Cyber Safety

in the Middle Years



Government of **Western Australia**
Department for **Communities**

POLICY ISSUES PAPER

PARENTS and CYBER SAFETY in the MIDDLE YEARS

1. What is Cyber safety?

Cyber safety is the safe and responsible use of information and communication technologies.

Common emerging issues arising in the cyber safety area include the issue of cyber bullying, sexting¹, unwanted contact, scams and fraud, identity theft, and offensive or inappropriate material. Serious concerns include the vulnerability of children and young people to grooming and sexualised contact and solicitation by paedophiles, and the consequences of psychological harm experienced as a result of cyber bullying and negative on-line experiences, such as depression, anxiety and suicide.

2. Development of the middle years child (9–14 years) and parenting

Children and young people are still developing neurologically and emotionally. Studies on the brain and its development during the last decade show that there is a surge of production of the brain's grey matter prior to puberty. We now know that the area of brain growth in adolescence centres on the frontal lobe. This is the control centre for "executive functions" such as planning, impulse control and reasoning. Maturation of the brain occurs very gradually and uniquely, and is not complete until the mid-twenties.

In effect it is as if two systems are operating during the middle years; egocentric nature and thinking towards executive functioning—the one processing pleasure and reward, and the other starting to regulate impulses.² Adapted from Laurence Steinberg, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology at Temple University, USA.

During the middle years, there are many social and emotional changes unfolding, such as children transitioning to secondary school; seeking out their peers; and wanting more independence from their parents. There can be an increase in risky sensation-seeking behaviour. It is with the maturation of the brain, that the regulation of impulses, thinking ahead, planning and weighing risk and reward lead to improvements in self-regulation and can permit the young person to put the brakes on the sensation-seeking behaviours.

Knowledge about brain development can help parents understand the behaviours and abilities of this age group, and work with their children to grow together. The best way to maintain a positive influence with your developing child is to be a hands-on parent, which means staying involved, even though it may not seem as if he or

¹ Sexting is the sending of provocative or sexual photos, images, messages or videos using a mobile phone or posting online. Once you've sent a picture or message, it's out of your control. Images posted online can be almost impossible to remove and they may come back to haunt you anywhere and anytime well into the future. www.cybersmart.gov.au

² Laurence Steinberg, Ph.D.(2004) The 10 Basic Principles of Good Parenting, Simon and Schuster USA

she wants it. Communication is also key: being ready to talk and listen to your child. For more information consult Department for Communities Parenting Guide – Cybersafety (2012).

3. Cyber context

The internet is a powerful resource enabling children and young people to learn and communicate in a huge variety of new ways. It now forms an integral part of education and socialising, with an Australian internet penetration rate of 83 percent of households having computer access³. The internet has become even more accessible and mobile with the growth in smart phones and tablets.

See **Attachment 1: Facts at a Glance**: Use of the electronic media by young people.

For young people, living their lives online is perfectly natural. It is very appealing, and thanks to their encounters with the internet from an early age through school and home life they feel naturally at home there. There are many benefits that children and young people can gain from having access to such a wealth of information. Young people are now within clicking distance of so many opportunities to express their creativity and to interact with their peers.

While the digital media revolution has provided a huge range of benefits, it has also provided an extra platform and communication culture which can be exploited. This new vehicle gives children and young people the potential to reach and be reached by a much wider audience than merely close peers within the school or neighbourhood. Technology enables one email for example, to be sent to everyone in the school within a matter of seconds. The speed, reach and persistence of on-line communication means that social isolation, bullying and inappropriate behaviour can be perpetrated on a much broader scale, in the heat of the moment and without consideration of long term consequences.

This is the first generation of young people that has never known a world without the internet. Consequently, many of them are often working out for themselves what is acceptable and what is not. It is also redefining issues of identity, privacy and appropriate behaviour which are specific to 'digital youth' and challenges existing off-line viewpoints⁴.

As a consequence of feeling so at home online, children and young people may not always recognise that the internet can also be a dangerous place.⁵ The internet allows for a sense of anonymity which can create a false sense of distance between actions and consequences. Children and young people may not have the necessary knowledge or skills to recognise and respond safely to risks to which they may be exposed to online.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics 8146.0 - Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2010-11

⁴ James, C., Davis, K., Flores, A., Francis, J.M., Pettinghill, L., Rundle, M., & Gardner, H. (2010). Young People, Ethics, and the New Digital Media. *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice*, 2(2), 9. 215–284.

⁵ <http://www.knowthenet.org.uk/knowledge-centre/personal/online-safety#tabs-300>

Dr Julian Dooley, Associate Director Sellenger Centre for Research in Law, Justice and Social Change; Head of Social Wellbeing and Technology (SWaT), Edith Cowan University discussed these issues during his presentation 'Is this really just a phase? the impact of the middle years on social and emotional development' at the May 2012 interagency seminar hosted by the department, the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Australian Research Alliance for Children and Young people. See [Julian Dooley - The impact of the middle years on social and emotional development](#)

Advances in technology occur with great momentum, with rapidly evolving forms of communication, gaming and networking. Many parents find that their children are more knowledgeable about the internet and information technology than themselves.

The issue of cyber safety is one that is fluid, but the overwhelming issue for parents is how to keep their children safe, in the ever changing on-line environment. This is further complicated by young people being reluctant to report inappropriate contact or incidents of cyber bullying for fear of having their access to the internet restricted, when it is such a core part of their lives.

4. Research

An AVG Digital Diary report in 2011 studied technology use among young Australian children and found out that 51% of Australian children use social networks to keep in contact with each other and that they spend more time online than the global average. Yet the study found that most parents (58%) still aren't fully aware of their children's social networking practices. Two percent said that they don't have the slightest idea of what their children are doing online.

This report also found that 13% of Australian children have suffered from some kind of cyber bullying, affecting children most frequently in the 8–9 years age range. Further research conducted overseas has suggested even higher numbers of young people have experienced cyber bullying, up to 33%, with adolescent females being most at risk ⁶⁷.

Data collected by the Child Health Promotion Research Centre in Western Australia suggest that approximately 7% of school students in Years 4 to 9 are cyber bullied every few weeks or more often. Both perpetrators and victims of cyber bullying are found to have greater involvement in drinking and smoking, and a higher incidence of depression, social anxiety and lower self-esteem, while victims were also more likely to be absent from school and eight times more likely than other students to have carried a weapon to school in the 30 days prior to taking the survey. The Centre also has found that bullying and cyber bullying both peak during times of transition, for example from primary to secondary school.

⁶ Kraft, E.M., & Wang, J. (2009). Effectiveness of Cyber Bullying Prevention Strategies: A study on students' perspectives. *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*, 3(2), p. 513–535.

⁷ Willard, N. (2010). Sexting and Youth: Achieving a Rational Response. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(4), p.542–562.

See **Attachment 2:** Western Australian Research in cyber bullying and cyber safety.

In the 2011-12 financial year, 121 offenders were charged with online child sex offences in Australia, totalling 130 offences, including grooming a child under 16, and indecent communication with a child under 16 years, from the Australian Federal Police (2012).⁸

One in three parents (32.7%) report that they are very concerned about the safety risks of their children accessing the internet, while another third (38.8%) are slightly concerned.⁹

A study has been undertaken by the Australian Government and the Australian Communications and Media Authority, to understand parents' preferences for cyber safety information based on the current attitudes and behaviour of Australian parents of children in the 4–17 years age band. Results of this study showed that the majority of parents expressed a preference for cyber safety resources that were 'brief and to the point'.

Parents wanted brief resources that provided quick 'solutions' to the cyber safety problems identified by the resource. Their preference for cyber safety checklists and/or tip sheets was directly related to time pressure they were under and their assessment of the relative risk of a cyber safety incident relative to other risks to their child's welfare.

In addition, parents clearly stated that to educate their children, they wanted resources that appealed to both parents and children, and prefer educational resources they could use with their child.

5. Emerging Issues

Cyber safety is already a key issue for schools. An educational approach to cyber safety should be founded on:

- maintaining a positive approach about the many benefits brought by technologies
- identifying the risks associated with technologies
- putting in place strategies to minimise and manage risks
- recognising the importance of effective teaching and learning programmes.¹⁰

However, most harmful on-line incidents occur out of school hours, in the home. Students need parental supervision and to be educated in appropriate on-line behaviour and empowered to deal appropriately with incidents that occur outside school.

⁸ The number of charges/offenders for online child sex offences, was retrieved at <http://www.afp.gov.au/media-centre.aspx>

⁹ Australian Children's Cyber-safety and E-Security Project prepared for the Commonwealth Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy
http://www.dbcde.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/132691/Security-Projectreport_on-the-results-of-a_parents_survey.pdf

¹⁰ <http://www.cybersafety.org.nz/kit/welcome/cybersafety.html>

Cyber bullying occurs when the internet, gaming devices, email or mobile phones are used to deliberately and repeatedly engage in hostile behaviour to harm someone. Cyber bullying can result in those involved experiencing social, psychological and academic difficulties.

For young people, their behaviour on-line can result in legal consequences, affecting educational and employment opportunities in the long term. In 2012, the Department for Communities held a social media event in conjunction with the Women's Advisory Council. Predominant concerns arising in this forum surrounded the need to make young people aware of the long term implications of them leaving a negative 'digital footprint'.

The parents' role in cyber safety is centred on discussion, guidance, and role-modelling appropriate on-line behaviour. Young people will be more likely to report incidents to parents, if parents are approachable and informed. Ongoing dialogue with young people regarding appropriate and safe on-line behaviour is most effective for reducing risky on-line behaviour and encouraging reporting of incidents, as supervision and moderation becomes increasingly difficult¹¹.

6. What information is available for parents who are seeking information on cyber safety?

The Australian Communications and Media Authority recently released a report commissioned in May 2011, regarding International Cyber-security Awareness Raising and Educational initiatives Research. The research found that a diverse range of education and awareness campaigns have been conducted on Cyber-Security issues.¹² In addition, Australia has placed significant focus on developing digital literacy, building online safety websites, promoting awareness campaigns and filtering content¹³. There is a diverse amount of information available relating to Cyber safety for parents, children, young people and educators.

Some major initiatives include:

- The Australian Communications and Media Authority's dedicated cyber safety website, Cybersmart. Cybersmart provides activities; resources and practical advice to help young children, children, teenagers and parents safely enjoy the online world. Cybersmart also offers training and resources for schools and materials for library staff. Developed by the Australian Communications and Media Authority, Cybersmart is part of the Australian Government's cyber safety program. <http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/>
- The Alannah and Madeline Foundation, National Centre Against Bullying, is a peak body working to advise and inform the Australian community on the issue of childhood bullying and the creation of safe schools and communities,

¹¹ Oxley, C. (2011). Digital Citizenship: Developing an ethical and responsible online culture. *Access*, 25(3), p. 5–9

¹² www.acma.gov.au/webwr/_assets/main/lib310665/galexia_report-overview_intnl_cybersecurity_awareness

¹³ Family Online Safety Institute, State of Online Safety Report 2011

including the issue of cybersafety. The Centre works closely with school communities, governments and industry. <http://www.amf.org.au/bullying/>

- The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations provides information for students, teachers, parents and the broader community about creating safe online environments. Their website offers access to practical information to make homes and schools cyber safe places. www.deewr.gov.au/schooling/digitaleducationrevolution/pages/cybersafetyinschools.aspx
- Kids Helpline is a free, private and confidential, 24 hour counselling service for young people aged 5-25 years. In addition, cyber safety information is available on their website. <http://www.kidshelp.com.au/teens/get-info/hot-topics/>
- The Australian Government's Easy Guide to Socialising Online provides information on how internet users can protect themselves and their information when using social networking sites, search engines and online games. The guide covers social networks, online games and internet search engines. www.dbcde.gov.au/easyguide
- The Australian Government's cyber security website provides information for Australian internet users on the simple steps they can take to protect their personal and financial information online www.staysmartonline.gov.au/
- The Australian Government's Cybersafety Help Button provides internet users, particularly children and young people, with easy online access to cyber safety information and assistance available in Australia. It offers counselling, reporting and educational resources to assist young people deal with online risks including cyber bullying, unwanted contact, scams and fraud, and offensive or inappropriate material. The help button is a free application that is easily downloaded onto personal computers, mobile devices, and school and library networks. Once the help button is installed, young people can access it any time for help or advice about something unsafe or upsetting that they have encountered on the internet. www.dbcde.gov.au/online_safety_and_security/cybersafetyhelpbutton_download/
- The Bullying. No way! website was created by Australia's education authorities. The website provides information for parents, resources for teachers, and offers two zones for children and young people (under 13 years and over 14 years). The site has information and activities relating to bullying and cyberbullying. Young people can also download a free app with information and links to help. www.bullyingnoway.gov.au
- Law Stuff provides information on how to stay safe on-line for young people, and advice for dealing with issues that arise. There is also information on the legal implications of cyber bullying, and identifies potential consequences of cyber bullying behaviour. The website also provides tips on stopping bullying behaviour and what to do if you are being bullied online. www.lawstuff.org.au

- Reach Out is a website for young people that addresses a range of youth issues. Reach Out has a specific fact sheet on cyber bullying to help young people understand cyber bullying and the feelings that are experienced by victims, and strategies for dealing with cyber bullying. General fact sheets on bullying provide further insights, young people can share their stories and find links to other help and resources. <http://au.reachout.com/>
The factsheet is also provided on the Tune In Not Out website for young people. www.tuneinnotout.com

Available resources:

Parenting SA - for other Parent Easy Guides
www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)
www.acma.gov.au

For cyber-safety information and Cyber Smart Kids
www.cybersmart.gov.au

Australian Council on Children and the Media (ACCM) – Information about media and children; age-based guidelines for screen viewing time
www.youngmedia.org.au

Australian Federal Police – Internet safety programs to support parents, carers and teachers; to report concerns
www.thinkuknow.org.au

Crime Stoppers – To report concerns about crime
www.crimestoppers.com.au

Department of Education and Children's Services (South Australia) - cyber-safety policy: 'cyber-safety: Keeping children safe in a connected world'
www.decs.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/CyberSafetyKeepingChildre.pdf

Netalert, Internet safety body of Australia, set up by the Australian government to provide independent advice and education on managing access to online content. New ways of filtering content on the internet are being developed and tested all the time.
<http://www.netalert.com.au/>

The Alannah and Madeline Foundation – cyber-safety programs
<http://www.amf.org.au/bullying/>

Facts at a Glance, Use of electronic media by young people

Internet in the home

- 79.83 per cent of households have a computer in the home equating to approximately 673 000 households in Western Australia.
- 74.26 per cent of these households have access to the internet (n=626 000), with 63.7 per cent having a broadband connection (n= 537 000).
- 81.3 per cent of young people (aged 9–14 years) participate in ‘other screen based activities’, such as using computers, gaming consoles, tablets and other electronic devices.

Accessing the internet

- In 2009, 88 per cent of children aged 9–14 years accessed the internet out of school hours.
- Children who access the internet will do so at school and at home at approximately the same rate.
- As they get older, children are more likely to find other locations to access the internet also.
- Children living in regional or remote areas still access the internet at similar rates to metropolitan children.

How children use the internet

- One third of children use the internet for two hours a week or less. The next largest group use the internet for between 5–9 hours per week. As children get older, they will spend more time on the internet.

Time spent on the internet per week, children aged 5-14 years (2009)

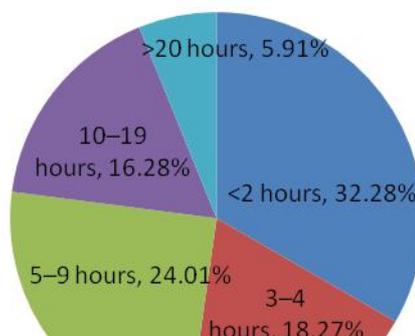


Figure 1 Proportion of time per week children use the internet (5–14 years)

Internet use per week	Participation rate		
	5-8 years	9-11 years	12-14 years
2 hours or less	66.0%	46.6%	19.6%
3-4 hours	14.7%	20.7%	16.1%
5-9 hours	12.1%	20.2%	27.4%
10-19 hours	3.9%	9.0%	22.7%
20 hours or more	0.8%	1.5%	9.8%

Table 1 Proportion of time spent per week using the internet by age group, children 5-14 years (2009)

- In 2009, educational purposes, playing on-line games, listening and downloading music and general surfing were the most popular on-line activities for children aged 9-14 years.

Internet activity	Participation rate		
	5-8 years	9-11 years	12-14 years
Emailing	10.1%	30.7%	59.9%
Using chat rooms, forums or instant messaging	4.6%	23.0%	59.5%
Playing online games	76.7%	73.3%	59.4%
Listening to or downloading music	17.9%	42.8%	73.3%
Watching or downloading TV programs, videos or movies	16.8%	26.1%	39.7%
Using eBay, auction sites or Internet shopping	2.0%	5.6%	11.4%
Educational activities	64.3%	90.8%	94.4%
Visiting or using social networking sites	2.8%	10.5%	47.9%
Creating online content	0.8%	5.2%	24.0%
Making phone calls online	5.9%	6.9%	6.7%
Visiting news, sports or weather sites	11.2%	24.8%	37.2%
Other general surfing or browsing	28.7%	47.9%	67.7%
Other activities	4.5%	3.0%	3.8%

Table 2 Proportion of children participating in selected on-line activities by age group, 5-14 years (2009)

Children and Mobile Phones

- In 2009, 91 400 children in Western Australia aged 5-14 years owned a mobile phone (32.7 per cent).

Mobile phone ownership in Western Australia, children aged 5-14 years

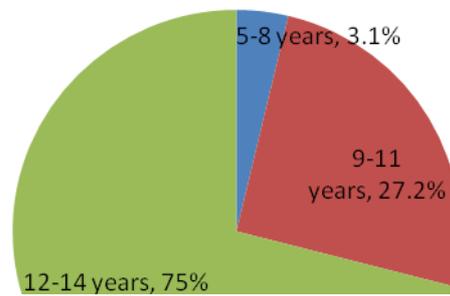


Figure 2 Proportion of children possessing a mobile phone by age, 5–14 years (2009)

- Younger children typically use their phone to contact family.
- As they get older, they are more likely to contact their friends and access the internet.
- In 2009, there was only minimal use of the internet on mobile phones by children.
- Children are more likely to use their mobile phones for texting (approximately 70 per cent) rather than voice calling
- Mobile phone use increases in frequency significantly after the age of 12.

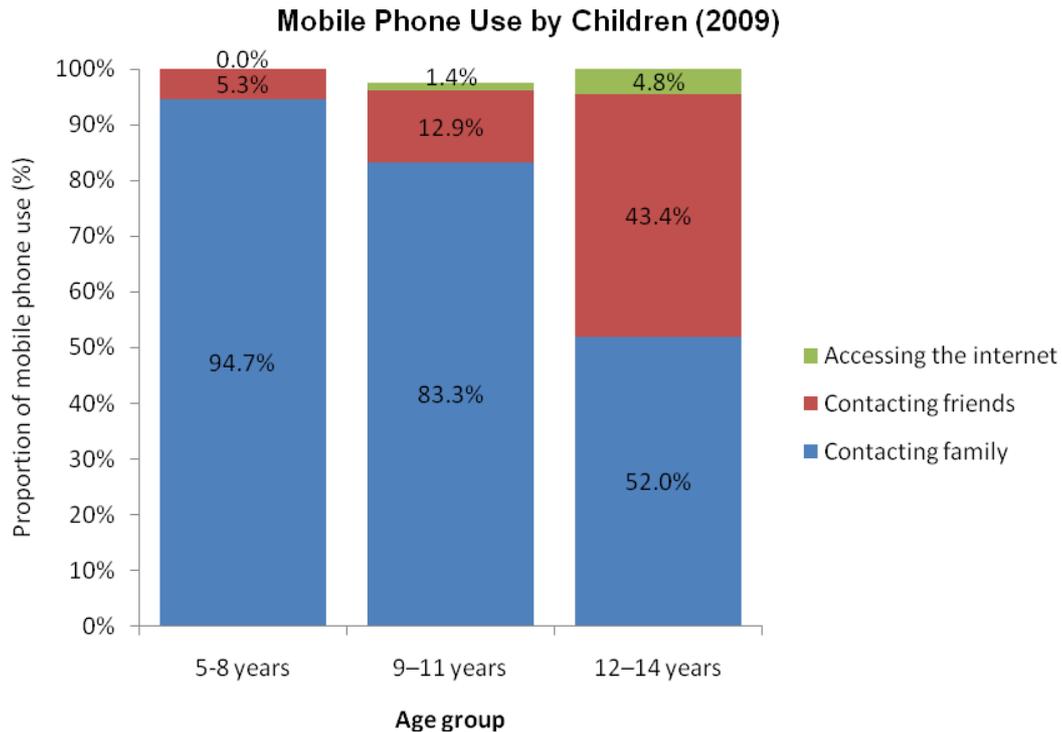


Figure 3 Mobile phone use for each age group, children 5–14 years (2009)

Mobile phone use to access the internet is likely to have increased significantly with the recent introduction of smart phones. More recent reliable data is not yet available.

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Attachment 2

Western Australian Research in Cyber bullying and Cyber safety

Edith Cowan University, Child Health Promotion Research Centre under the direction of Professor Donna Cross is concluding a three-year group randomised controlled trial to test the effectiveness of an innovative school cyber bullying prevention program that actively engages young people in its development and implementation. The intervention will provide whole-school policy and practice to ameliorate the harms associated with this form of bullying and will be implemented with a trained group of Year 10 student leaders in cooperation with trained pastoral care / IT teams within schools supported by online and written materials and training for teachers (and parents). This research will help to develop effective interventions in the area of cyber bullying, an identified national priority for young people's health, and help to translate these research findings into policy and practice to increase their public health impact and enhance prevention and early intervention.

[An empirical trial to reduce cyber-bullying in adolescents](#)

Other Current Projects with the Child Health Promotion Research Centre

- [Cyber 8 - An online learning experience for Year 8 students](#)
- [Cyberbullying and the Bystander project](#)
- [Developing social conventions of online image sharing: For youth, by youth](#)
- [Development of a scale to measure harms associated with cyberbullying](#)
- [Investigating the use of social media as a methodological communications technology tool for researching cyber bullying: An assessment of feasibility and acceptability among young people of an innovative research method](#)
- [Solid Kids Solid Schools bullying prevention project extension: Formative social marketing campaign](#)
- [Strengthening student bystanders' capacity to respond to covert bullying](#)
- [Strong Schools Safe Kids: Building school capacity to reduce social aggression among students](#)
- [The relationship between mental health outcomes and bullying trajectories of students transitioning from primary school to high school](#)



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