

The Next Click:

What's Influencing Student Digital Behaviours and



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The Next Click:

What's Influencing Student Digital Behaviours and Safety in 2025



At ySafe, we know that navigating the fast-changing world of online safety is a constant challenge for schools and their communities.

You might have felt this yourself this year. Trying to keep up with the latest apps, trends, and behaviours can feel like an uphill battle.



Our paper, 'The Next Click", is our response to this reality. Written by our global online safety experts, it will equip you with the insights and strategies you need to have meaningful conversations with students and ensure their safety - regardless of the latest app or craze.

From the trends we've seen in 2024, we've identified key factors shaping student behaviour online. This paper will help you understand what's coming in 2025 and how to prepare your school to stay ahead of the curve.

Ready for the next school year? Read on to stay one step ahead.

Our Global Online Safety Network: Local impact

Next Click is a collaboration between the ySafe team and the broader Qoria family, bringing together the insights of the world's most respected online safety experts. Each contributor is a leader in their field, with rich expertise in psychology, teaching, governance, law enforcement, and digital wellness.



Together, we constantly do all we can to find solutions to support communities with best practices. The more children, schools and families we engage with globally, the more we understand the pace and scale of the challenges they face, and the better placed we are to help Australian schools in a meaningful way.

Hower of us is as powerful as all of us.



Our Approach:

Balancing urgency and acceptance in online safety education

At ySafe, we embrace a pro-technology ethos. While we see the incredible benefits that the internet can offer, we also recognise the real dangers it can pose. We don't aim to instil fear, but we also won't sugarcoat the risks.

Some of the stories shared in this report may be triggering, as they reflect the very real challenges faced by students, schools, and parents.

To protect the privacy of those involved, names have been changed. Along with these insights, we offer practical recommendations for intervention, prevention, and best practices, giving you the tools to tackle online safety with both urgency and balance.



600,000 Students



80,000 Staff



2,500 Schools



300,000Parents

We run an average of 800 sessions each year – that's the equivalent of 24,000 conversations about online safety!

The Language of Today's Students: Slang Glossary

We get asked a lot of questions, but the first one always is, "What does ... mean?"

Adults learning youth slang shows care, builds trust, and encourages open conversations, especially around seeking help. However, younger kids may misunderstand the excitement around slang as approval. While we share these trends, we encourage using them as opportunities to discuss their meanings and origins.



Skibidi: Originally from a short jump-scare video and has become a versatile term. It has no precise meaning but can describe both good and bad situations. For example, "Giving us homework on a Friday? That's so skibidi!"

Brain rot: The result of overconsumption of social media and TikTok. When our day-to-day language is full of TikTok terms and slang, like 'Ohio' 'Skibidi', and 'Gyat' it's a sign of brain rot. Simply, we've watched too much content.

Aura: A person's aura refers to their general vibe. A positive aura feels warm and inviting, while a negative one feels cold and draining. Kind, helpful people tend to have positive auras, while those who are negative and critical give off a negative aura. When someone does something cool, they earn positive 'aura points.'

Alpha/sigma: Originally coined by extreme male influencers to describe traits like independence, isolation, and dominance, terms like "alpha," "sigma," and "high-value man" are now being used to describe something impressive or cool. For example, "Caught a touchdown? That's so Sigma!" or "Aced a test? Alpha move!"

Rizzler: A slang term for someone who is flirtatious or trying to attract somebody. They have 'rizz', therefore making them a 'rizzler'.

Ohio: Ohio has become an internet meme, often linked to weird or wild things without a clear reason. It's likely due to a mix of random news and funny memes. So when you see something odd, you can jokingly ask, "Did that come from Ohio?"

Fanum tax: Originating from a Twitch streamer called Fanum who stole their friend's food and left with it! Therefore we have 'fanum tax', the theft of a friend's food.

Gyat: "Gyat" originally stood for "Girl Your A** Thick" (G.Y.A.T.) but has evolved to express admiration, like "G*ddamm!" for someone's body. It's also popularized by the TikTok song "Sticking out my Gyat for the Rizzler."

Rizzler: A slang term for someone who is flirtatious or trying to attract somebody. They have 'rizz', therefore making them a 'rizzler'.

Ghosting: When someone seems to disappear from the face of the planet. A person can ghost someone by blocking them or just leaving someone on read.

Mewing: Mewing is a jaw-strengthening technique aimed at improving one's jawline. Often paired with a 'shhhh' gesture and a finger along the jaw, it signals "I can't/won't talk right now" or "I'm busy." Some believe it also improves breathing and posture, though scientific evidence is limited.

Printable slang table:

Millennials vs. Gen Alpha

Print this table, stick it on your fridge, or save it as a note on your phone – you may need it more than you think!

Slang is a great way to connect with our young people, close the generational gap, and open up opportunities for conversation and help-seeking.



Real-life Online Safety Insights:

What Your School Needs to Know

Over the past 12 months alone, we have seen US states ban TikTok, multiple state ministers in Australia lobby for huge social media reforms, and the eSafety Commission report a 40% increase in online bullying.

Additionally, the prevalence of AI has continued to evolve and unravel inside school environments and slang terms like 'rizz' and 'ghosting' have become mainstream terms, highlighting the shifting terrain of online interactions. Imagine what the next 12 months could bring.

This paper is your guide.

By exploring the trends and interactions shaping student digital behaviours and safety, you'll be ready to face 2025 with confidence. More importantly, you'll help ensure that your staff, students and parents are equipped to handle whatever new digital challenges come their way.

- 1. Group chats (GC): The unseen dynamics
- 2. Al-powered bullying: Navigating new challenges
- 3. Overconsumption and rage quitting: Managing digital burnout
- 4. Ganging up on people: The social pressures amplified online
- 5. School/parent partnership: A shared responsibility for online safety
- 6. Digital disguising: Hidden behaviours in the digital age
- 7. Cringe conversations: Breaking through communication barriers
- 8. App paralysis: Overwhelmed by options
- 9. **Up-ageing:** Preserving childhood in a hyper-connected world
- 10. Supervision vs. surveillance: Striking the right balance



1. Group chats:

The unseen dynamics

Context

These are regarded as the beating heart of all social media (positive and negative). They can have considerable power and influence over young people and their validity and importance to them shouldn't be underestimated. Group chats are open and active 24/7. This is where young people 'hang' online. Everything that happens during the school day is likely to be discussed and reviewed in the GC later.

Issue

Group chats are a place young people socialise online, sharing memes and photos, catching up on the latest gossip, and ensuring everyone has done the homework due tomorrow.

Not all the content is inappropriate or toxic, but negative online behaviours can fester and grow in this space, largely due to what is known as the online disinhibition effect. Simply put, the perceived anonymity and invisibility when interacting online may cause some people to disclose more or act out more frequently than they would in person.

Behaviours such as embarrassing nicknames, cyber flashing, harassment or online bullying, to name a few, are common GC behaviours. Being forcibly removed or kicked out of a GC leaves a young person voiceless and silenced, wondering what happened.

Admins of a GC can rule with an iron fist and remove people on a whim. We also see secondary, 'private' smaller GCs pop up, with only 'besties' invited. This can lead to whispering outside the main GC as well as exclusion and other cruel, unkind behaviour.

Action

The recommended conversation between parents and young people differs for different age groups:

- For younger children, encourage help-seeking behaviours while setting boundaries around chat groups and what's appropriate. Teach them how to recognise the signs their bodies are giving them when things are not right and how they should seek help. This will assist in the prevention and intervention of negative experiences.
- Middle schoolers who are very curious about social spaces and games need lessons in POV (point of view), perception and the permanency of digital behaviours and how they affect social circles IRL (in real life).
- High schoolers need real-world modelling from adults on how they would navigate tricky work emails or friendship group chats, deal with feelings in healthy ways, and ultimately build resilience and emotional stability.

Measures should also be taken to protect innocence for as long as possible. Both digital parental control tools and analogue methods of written tech agreements or offline time are useful strategies to help.

2. AI-powered bullying:

Navigating new challenges



Bullying has evolved from school yard confrontations to digital platforms, with AI amplifying the harm.

Today, fights are not just happening; they're being recorded, uploaded, and repurposed into harmful content with generative Al. Beyond students, online bullying now targets staff, with reputations ruined and mental health strained. In the last 12 months, this has led to resignations and an alarming rise in stress-related issues among educators.

Issue

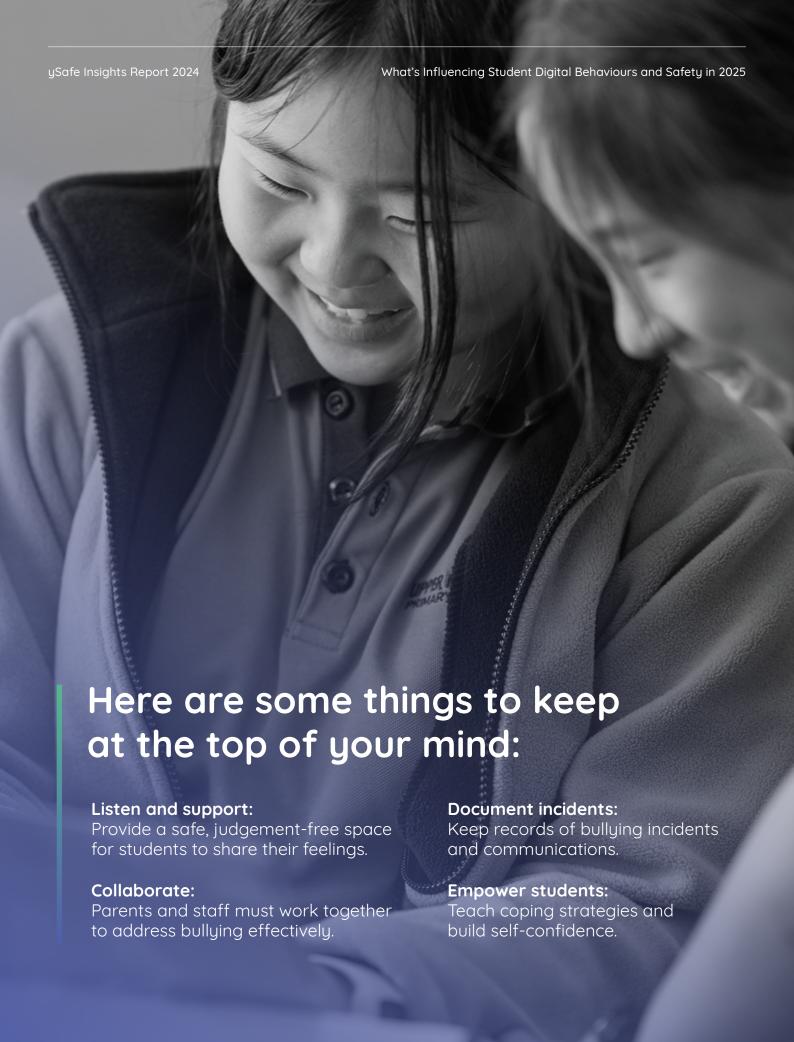
While AI can foster creativity and learning, it also brings risks, particularly in bullying tactics. AI can generate fake photos, videos, and audio, enabling bullies to create deepfakes, fake profiles, or bots that harass victims online. The anonymity and speed AI provides make these attacks more targeted and, in some cases, harder to trace main GC as well as exclusion and other cruel, unkind behaviour.

Action: Parents and staff

- Open communication: Let students know they're not alone. Talk about Al's role in online bullying and encourage critical thinking about online content.
- Teach awareness: Help children recognise fake or manipulated content, explaining that harmful behaviour—physical or virtual—has real consequences.
- **Discuss legal risks:** Ensure children understand the legal implications of online harassment, defamation or child abuse material, even if the content is fake.
- Parental Controls: It's also important to review and update privacy settings on your child's online accounts to ensure their personal information is always secure. For a more proactive approach, parents can use apps like Qustodio, adding a layer of protection by allowing parents to track their child's online activity, block inappropriate content, and set screen time limits.

Action: Schools

- Review policies: Update your school's bullying definitions and procedures to include Al-enhanced and online bullying. Ask, "What counts as bullying? What's missing?" and consider using descriptive terminology like 'negative online behaviours' instead of 'bullying'.
- Stay proactive: Don't let outdated policies and definitions overlook violent online incidents



3. Overconsumption and rage quitting:

Managing digital burnout

Context

Young people consider their devices to be an important part of their social lives and sometimes find themselves overly consumed by online platforms and games. Although balance is key, it can sometimes be difficult for young people to recognise this without a responsible third party offering guidance, support, or even a detox suggestion in extreme cases.

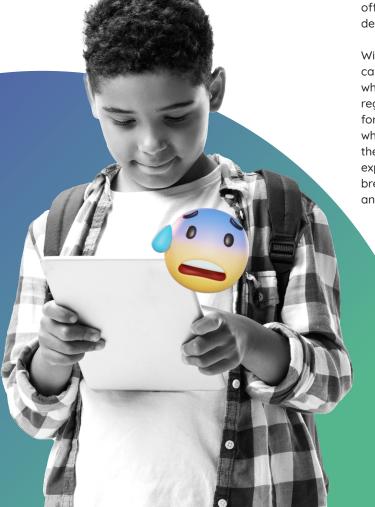
Issue

Many young people need help to recognise when their online content consumption has become excessive, or, if they do, may need to learn how to address the issue effectively.

Action

If you notice declining academic performance, sleep issues, reduced participation in sports or social activities, strained family relationships, or extreme frustration due to slow or failed internet connections, these may indicate behaviour that requires addressing. In such cases, implementing healthier boundaries or having a conversation in real life could offer a refreshing change. In more extreme cases, a detox might be necessary.

Within this thread of thought, online 'rage quitting' can be a common issue for gamers, especially those who are younger and are still developing emotional regulation skills. Gaming spaces online are important for young people to meet, play, and gather to talk while they play. Support young people by helping them identify the signs of frustration, set realistic expectations for themselves and their peers, take breaks, set alarms to keep track of time, stay positive, and adjust to difficult situations or gaming levels.



4. Ganging up on people:

The social pressures amplified online

Context

Reports have emerged of students from different schools and mutual friendship groups messaging others to recommend friends, inundating them with content, group chat invitations, and requests to be friends.

Issue

This behaviour can be considered a form of harassment. Statements such as "Everyone is talking about X!" and "Why aren't you friends with X?" can pressure young people to engage with individuals or activities they wouldn't usually be involved with. Those in middle school are often more susceptible to peer pressure as they navigate the challenges of fitting in and finding their place among their peers.

Action

Adults need visibility to manage this problem effectively; therefore, open communication between young people and adults about the difficulties of peer pressure is recommended.

Empowering young people with the right skills, like conflict resolution and problem-solving, can provide them the necessary support to navigate complex social issues.

Here are some examples to help start the conversation:

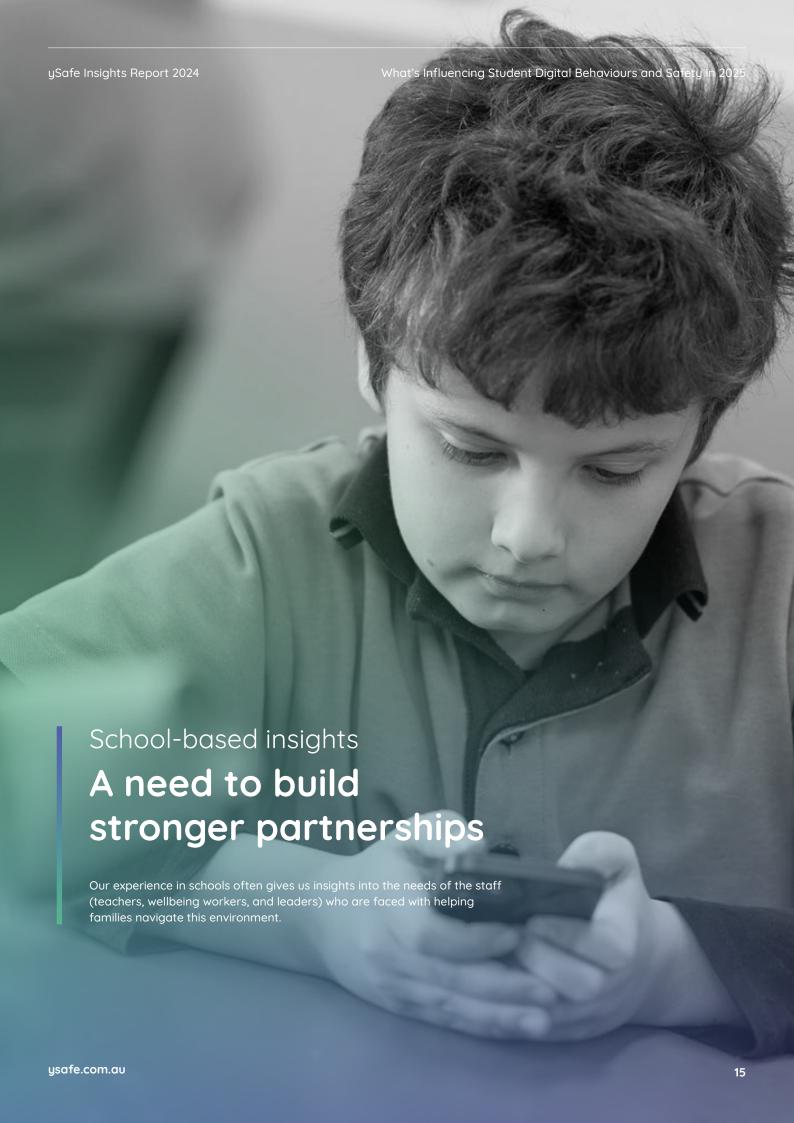
"What apps or games are you into right now? Why do you like them?"

"Have you ever seen someone be left out or kicked out of a group chat? What caused that to happen?"

"Who do you think is the *insert: funniest/leader/ biggest gamer/ rager/* in the group chat?" "What happens when people break the rules or boundaries of the group chat? Like screenshotting private conversations? What usually happens next?"

Remember to avoid passing judgement.

Don't pretend like you know, if you don't. Show interest and give the young person a voice.



1. School/parent partnership:

A shared responsibility for online safety

2. Digital disguising:

Hidden behaviours in the digital age

3. Cringe conversations:

Breaking through communication barriers



1. App paralysis:

Overwhelmed by options

2. Up-ageing:

Preserving childhood in a hyper-connected world

3. Supervision vs. surveillance:

Striking the right balance

Passive strategies: Active supervision:

Tips for parents

Quality over quantity

Focus on the quality of your child's screen time rather than the amount. Consider the content when determining how long your child can spend accessing it. To help, try imagining two children asking for screen time. One requests 15 minutes, and the other asks for an hour. Most parents would likely favour the 15 minutes, but what if that 15 minutes involved violent gameplay, while the child who spent the hour used an app to learn to play their favourite song on guitar?

Expert insights

Use resources like the Online Safety Hub to learn what online safety and digital wellbeing experts say about specific apps and platforms. This can help guide your discussions and decisions regarding your child's digital access.

Plan, don't just ban

Simply banning an app or platform doesn't often work; children will usually find ways around it. Instead, create a plan with guardrails before granting full access.

Co-create tech agreements

Sit down with your child to create a family tech agreement together. Display it prominently on the fridge as a daily reminder of your shared commitment to safe technology use.

If you can, establish parental controls early on. It is far easier to loosen restrictions as your child matures than it is to impose them on a teenager already accustomed to unrestricted online access.

Although enforcing parental controls later can be challenging, especially with older children, don't give up! Explain the importance of implementing them, but establish a clear process to review the parental controls that are in place together regularly. This shows your child that you value their input while prioritising their online safety. Remember, starting with stricter protections that you can adjust gradually is always better than scrambling for control later.



Sometimes, children may feel inclined to use language they hear from older gamers which can lead to harmful conversations at school or home. Teaching them that the right thing to do is often a difficult choice, and even though lashing out in the moment may feel good, negative behaviours never make things better!"



ySafe Insights Report 2024

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1. The Phallic Carrot

There was a young boy (let's call him John) who was accused of sharing photos of his genitals with some of his classmates. His friends were concerned about his wellbeing and approached our ySafe expert after a session.



The photo of John's genitalia was gathering significant attention because it supposedly resembled a carrot, which was very comical to the Year 7 boys in his cohort. Unfortunately, the photo was leaked from the group chat and before long, most of the year group had seen the photo of John's 'carrot-shaped genitalia'.

We promptly followed up with our contact and the school took immediate action, given that risky behaviour of this kind is against the law. As time was of the essence, we advised the school on the right questions to ask in order to conceptualise the incident and take the appropriate course of action.

An appropriate staff member was assigned to gain a proper understanding of the situation, and there was much relief when it was discovered that things were not as they initially seemed. The staff member learnt that John lived and worked on a farm with horses, and one day, while feeding his horses, he found a carrot that was shaped like a penis – not the other way around.

He jokingly shared this photo with his group chat, and one friend decided it would be funny to share it with another friend, so the story began.

Learnings

John walked away knowing that intimate content (real or not), even when shared as a joke, can put people in a very vulnerable position.

The group of boys learnt how quickly content can be leaked, how rapidly a situation can escalate, and that this type of content is illegal to create, share, request, or store on their device as it's classified as child pornography.

The school learnt that while its reporting and incident management procedures were effective, there were a few gaps that needed reviewing.

2. Year 5 subscribes to friendship

A young girl called Sarah approached one of our experts after a session, expressing concern about the bullying she was experiencing at school.



Sarah explained that she had previously attempted to resolve the situation by offering the bullies money in exchange for their friendship; however, the behaviour had intensified despite her efforts. Sarah eventually stopped paying these 'friends' and as a result, they began to share embarrassing photos of Sarah online, use derogatory language towards her, and engage in body-shaming behaviour.

We immediately brought the matter to the attention of the school, who agreed to support the student, investigate, and take appropriate action.

Learnings

Sarah engaged with school support services and, in turn, learnt a few valuable lessons, the first and most important being that she had real support at her fingertips and didn't have to suffer alone. She was encouraged to develop tools to grow her self-worth and was supported in her choices to stand up for herself.

The school encouraged the reporting of such behaviour and educated the bullies on the severity and legalities surrounding these negative online behaviours.

Parents were encouraged by the school to supervise and support the educational messages their children received at school about respectful friendships.

3. Avatars and abuse

After a session, our expert was approached by a year 4 student called Jo. Jo loved gaming online and was working hard to level up and develop her skills.



She often gamed at her dad's house and they sometimes enjoyed gaming together. Jo was creating an awesome new avatar, and as she loved animals, it seemed natural to build her avatar with fluffy ears and a tail. Unfortunately, Jo began receiving strange comments from people online and at school, calling her a 'furry.' The toxic online and in-person behaviour had escalated, and Jo was considering quitting gaming altogether.

Jo didn't understand the meaning of the term 'furry', but was struggling with the bullying and was worried that if she told her dad, she wouldn't be allowed to play anymore.

She googled the term and, without any online safety restrictions in place, was confronted with explicit content, leaving her with even more questions!

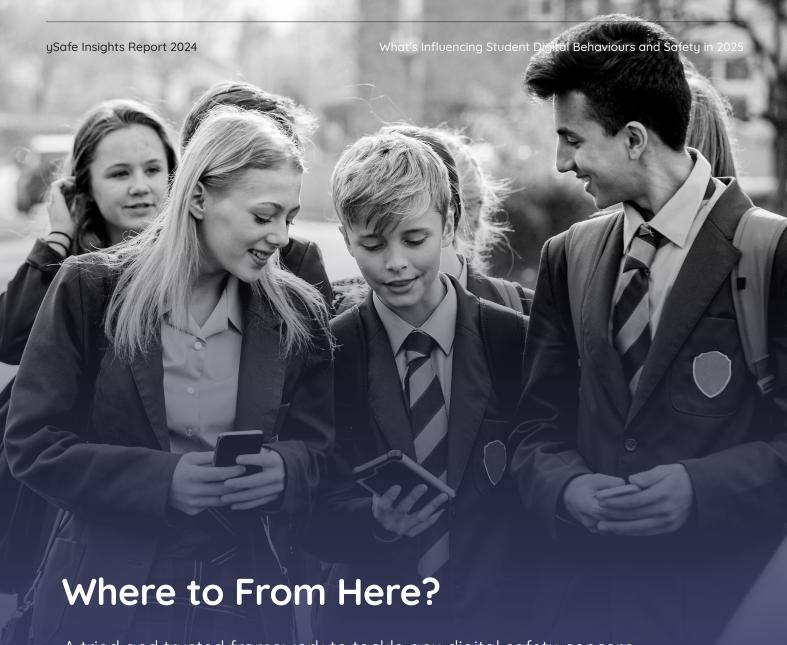
When Jo came to our expert, there was a lot to discuss. Our expert connected her with the wellbeing team, who began supporting her through this difficult time. They explained some of the content she may have seen in an age-appropriate manner and encouraged Jo to report the offensive behaviour to the platform and to talk to a trusted adult so they could keep her safe by intervening or investigating further.

Learnings

Co-gaming is a great way for parents to connect with their children in their digital world; however, it's also essential for them to create judgement-free spaces where their children can feel safe openly discussing 'taboo' topics or things they don't understand.

Parental restrictions on devices can prevent children from seeing explicit content before they are ready. They also allow for supervision and tracking to help make parents aware when things are going wrong so they can start a conversation and intervene where necessary.

Online communities can be great places for connection and play; however, they can also be potentially negative, so it's important to inform children of the possible risks while openly discussing the support available.



A tried and trusted framework to tackle any digital safety concern

ySafe's ABCs of online safety management.

Navigating students' use of technology and online interactions presents schools with numerous challenges, which can often feel overwhelming. However, it's important to remember that small, consistent steps in the right direction usually drive the biggest impact.

As we mentioned at the start of this paper, digital safety challenges are always evolving. Today's issues will differ from tomorrow's, with new platforms, trends, and threats emerging every year. But there's one thing that can remain constant: your approach.

ySafe's ABC framework is designed to help you tackle any digital safety concern head-on. It empowers school staff and parents to take control of online safety through three actionable steps: manage Access, set Boundaries, and openly Communicate.

This framework has been successfully implemented by every ySafe school we partner with, and it delivers results. Discover how it works below:

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Is Your School Ready for 2025?

Booking a visit from our experts is just the start.

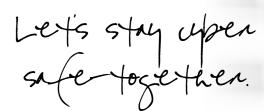
If you'd like to learn how ySafe can help your school evolve its approach to cyber safety education, contact us. One of our consultants will be in touch.

Get in touch at information@ysafe.com.au

Let's take time this term to plan your online safety strategy for 2025.

We can do much more to ensure your school is ready for the digital challenges ahead. In our consultation, we'll guide you in refining your cyber safety education, making sure your initiatives leave a lasting impact, and most importantly, help you see a consistent reduction in cyber safety issues.

All our activities are designed to spark meaningful conversations and empower students to take ownership of healthy digital behaviours at school.







ySafe's award-winning team of cyber safety experts have provided online safety education to over half a million students across Australia. Offering unique insights from clinical child & adolescent psychologists, former police officers and teachers

Find out more ysafe.com.au

Qoria

Qoria is a global technology company, dedicated to keeping children safe and well in their digital lives. We harness the power of connection to close the gaps that children fall through, and to seamlessly support them on all sides - at school, at home and everywhere in between.

Find out more www.qoria.com