

Telstra Submission



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TELSTRA CORPORATION LIMITED SUBMISSION TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON CYBER SAFETY TO INQUIRE INTO AND REPORT ON OPTIONS FOR ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF SEXTING BY MINORS

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Introduction

Telstra welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission in response to the Senate Select Committee on Cyber Safety's inquiry into and report on options for addressing the issue of sexting by minors. Telstra and the broader telecommunications industry are stakeholders in regard to the issues raised in this paper. Furthermore, Telstra is keen to provide our views on how we can contribute to continuing to improve cyber safety awareness among children and young people.

While Telstra does not intend to comment on existing legislation at both Federal or state levels we feel that any recommendations developed by the Senate Select Committee in relation to the issues of sexting by minors need to:

- consider and involve the voices of young people and the variety of stakeholders who work with young people;
- consider how young people use digital technologies;
- consider that sexting, whether by minors or by adults, takes place for a variety of reasons and in a variety of different contexts; and
- consider that young people, under the age of 18, who have *consensually* produced or circulated images of themselves cannot be viewed through the same lens as the *non-consensual* production or circulation of sexual imagery, or child pornography.

The range of benefits and opportunities available to internet users has exploded in recent times with the proliferation of computer networks, mobile devices, broadband connections and virtual communities. Blogging, social networking, gaming, music, videos and texting are just some of the ways children and young people are utilising digital technologies. However, with such exciting opportunities comes the need for all internet users and, in particular, young people, to consider the implications of their use of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Cyber safety is an important public policy issue for all Australians. As Australia's largest internet and mobile phone service provider, Telstra plays a leading role in cyber safety. This includes supporting a wide range of consumer education programs, funding research, partnering with like-minded organisations, assisting both government and industry in drafting policy and codes, participating in global initiatives as well as, in some cases, supporting law enforcement agencies in the investigation of a criminal offence through the provision of telecommunications data upon lawful request. Telstra also provides our customers with relevant information, expertise, tools, products and services so they are better equipped to exercise reasonable care and responsibility to achieve the best value from their digital and online experiences.

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Telstra advocates that addressing the issue of sexting by young people is a responsibility that is shared amongst many different bodies, including government, the education sector, not-for-profit organisations, academia, industry, parents, the young people themselves and end-users. It is, therefore, important that all groups work together to achieve a safe digital and online future for all Australians.

In addition to the cyber safety initiatives which Telstra supports and advocates for, Telstra's view is that:

- A co-ordinated holistic approach to cyber safety and the issue of sexting by minors is required to empower all Australians, especially children and young people, to exercise reasonable care and responsibility in their digital and online activities.
- The key components of a co-ordinated holistic approach include the voices of young people, the education sector, researchers, those who work with young people, policy and regulatory responses, law enforcement, parents and the broader community.
- A smart, ethical and socially aware digital experience requires individuals to learn and adopt responsible and respectful online behaviours.
- While education begins in the home, effective school-based education programs which teach these behaviours require a whole-of-curriculum integration about the importance of trust, privacy, respectful relationships and consequences across more than just the domain of the cyber safety, including integration into personal development-type classes and reinforcement across other aspects of the curriculum.
- While prevention and general education materials about the consequences of sexting are important, equally, information should be made available for young people on how to deal with instances of sexting after they have occurred and what they can do when things have not gone to plan.
- Similarly, schools need to be educated. The Alannah and Madeline Foundation has developed eSmart Schools (pilot funded by the Telstra Foundation) – a system to guide schools on the right policies and practices that helps teachers, students and families to be 'eSmart', a concept that encourages people to be smart, safe and responsible online and develops digital literacy and citizenship.

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Telstra and cyber safety

Telstra has a range of cyber safety initiatives which go beyond our customers and extend to the wider community. Examples of these include:

- Recently refreshed consumer education and awareness materials for parents, children and teenagers that address the topics of inappropriate content, privacy, digital reputation, balancing screen time and cyber bullying. Over 70,000 of the kits were distributed in electronic or hard copy format in 2012–13;
- The provision of products and tools to our customers such as:
 - **Smart Controls**[®], a cyber safety management tool that is designed to complement regular parental involvement in a child's use of mobile phones by encouraging safe and responsible behaviour which allows parents to:
 - Block unwanted calls, SMS or MMS messages by managing a list of numbers a child can call, SMS or MMS, or be contacted by, on their phone
 - Set up a safe list of numbers and websites by choosing numbers and websites which can always be accessed, even when other calls or content categories are restricted
 - Manage time spent online and making calls by placing time-of-day limits on web browsing and phone calls so they can better monitor a child's use of technology
 - Choose the web content which can be accessed by allowing parents to remotely prohibit access to mobile internet content such as adult or gambling websites or, alternatively, allow access to educational sites only;
 - **Safe Social**[™], a network-based tool that can help make it easier for parents to start a conversation with their kids about whom they are chatting with online and stay aware of potentially risky situations. Parents can access a dashboard that lets them:
 - Set up a protection level that suits their family, ranging from young kids just joining the internet, to pre-teens, teens and adults
 - Know when new friends are added so they can be reassured their child isn't 'friending' unsuitable adults or people from outside their network;
- Actively supporting initiatives such as Safer Internet Day, the Australasian Consumer Fraud Taskforce's Fraud Week, Privacy Week and National Cyber Security Awareness Week, and supporting the ACMA's Cybersmart website and associated initiatives;

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- Funding *Everyone Connected*, a community-based digital literacy and cyber safety program. In 2012–13 we trained over 11,000 Australian school students on safe and responsible internet use;
- Membership of the Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI) – an international, non-profit organisation that convenes leaders in industry, government and the non-profit sectors to collaborate and develop new solutions and policies in the field of online safety;
- Co-chairing the Technology and Wellbeing Roundtable, a national forum which brings together thought leaders from academic, corporate, non-profit and government sectors to share insights into how technology can enable the wellbeing of young people;
- Partnering with the Department of Broadband Communications and the Digital Economy to have its Cybersafety Help Button made freely available within the 'Telstra One' area of all Telstra Android, Blackberry and Windows mobile devices at point-of-sale. This will extend the reach of the Help Button resource. It is expected that this functionality will be available from late 2013;
- Supporting *Bully Stoppers*, a Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development program helping to develop sustainable bullying prevention initiatives in schools by offering students and schools the opportunity to engage with technology and other forms of self-expression and, in doing so, promoting student agency in standing up against bullying;
- From 2007–11, the Telstra Foundation put a 'spotlight' on cyber safety, committing \$3.3 million to eight projects that focused on helping children and young people develop the skills and knowledge needed to safely navigate social media;
- The Telstra Foundation was one of the seed funders of the Alannah and Madeline Foundation's eSmart Schools program which is now supported by the Federal Government with a \$3 million grant for a 160-school pilot. eSmart Schools is currently being implemented in 65 per cent of Victorian schools and in a substantial number of Queensland schools;
- In 2012, the Telstra Foundation committed an additional \$8 million to a cyber safety partnership with the Alannah and Madeline Foundation to develop and deliver an eSmart libraries framework across Australia; and

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- Since 2007, Telstra's lawyers have participated pro bono as 'cyber volunteers' for the National Children and Youth Law Centre (NCYLC) which, amongst other things, answers legal questions from children and young people (including about sexting). NCYLC also provides information and advice on issues affecting young people and advocates for the rights of children by participating in policy development and law reform.

To better achieve a safer digital experience for young people, Telstra believes that the most effective measure is to equip children and young people, particularly vulnerable young people, with the skills and knowledge to protect themselves against risk. This requires a combination of technical solutions, education and changes in behaviour underpinned by a collaborative and consultative approach across a broad range of sectors.

Telstra advocates that, while existing cyber safety programs by government, academia, industry and non-profit organisations have been working well to date, more can be done in this area. Programs need to be designed to establish a broad sense of responsibility in an effort to drive change in online behaviour. Focusing on the positives that technology brings to people's lives rather than the risks is an important step in achieving the most value from the online experience.

It is important that parents and carers are aware of the risks their children may face and the steps they can take to ensure a better and more trusted online experience for their children. Parents and carers can help by understanding and using online technologies to reduce the knowledge gap between them and their children.

Parents and carers also need to be encouraged to have open discussions with their children about what is appropriate online behaviour and responsible device use, and to understand that online safety involves more than just monitoring children's behaviours through either technological solutions or their own checking of devices and how they are being used.

Conclusion

The internet and digital technologies have changed the way children and young people socialise, learn and manage their personal lives. To facilitate a positive and safe online experience, all users should be empowered to exercise reasonable care and to take responsibility for their online activities and know what to do and who else can assist should something go wrong.

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Telstra agrees that addressing the issue of sexting by minors, and cyber safety more broadly, is a responsibility that is shared amongst many different bodies, including government, education, not-for-profit organisations, industry, carers (parents), young people themselves and the end-users engaged in online activities. It is, therefore, important that all sectors work together to achieve a safe digital future for young people.

Telstra looks forward to further dialogue and collaboration on this important social policy area.