

St John Ambulance Australia, Australian Youth Council submission to the Senate select committee on Cyber Safety, addressing the issue of sexting by minors.



St John Ambulance Australia is a self-funding charitable organisation active in all states and territories, dedicated to helping people in sickness, distress, suffering or danger. St John is Australia's leading provider of first aid training, first aid services at public events and supplier of first aid kits and equipment. St John runs the ambulance services in Western Australia and Northern Territory. St John also provides a range of community services and youth development programs across the country to over 4000 members who are under 18 years of age.

As an organisation working with children (people under 18 years), St John Ambulance Australia, has national child protection standards, by which St John Ambulance Australia;

- recognises that children, as individuals, have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, free from emotional and physical danger, abuse and neglect; and
- places the highest priority on its responsibility to ensure that the children for whom it has a duty of care are protected against people and events which may cause them harm.

St John Ambulance Australia has developed various resources to aid young members increase their understanding of cyber safety. We have a package of resources for use by our young members called the "Personal Safety Toolkit". The Toolkit is made up of short resources providing age appropriate information to our young members. It covers several topics including bullying, internet safety, child protection, personal space and communication.

In a day by day evolving digital landscape it is often hard to keep up with the latest trends. St John is in constant discussions and consultation with our young members and it is clear as an organisation, we cannot stop new trends in social networking. Sometimes, behaviour on social networking sites or smart phones by young members may not be seen as appropriate and we have found that trying to stop or ban a particular action or behaviour does not work.

St John believes that by providing greater education on the dangers and consequences of sexting, the community will see a reduction in this behaviour. Education can highlight the risks associated with sexting so that young people are aware that what may seem to be a harmless act can often have life changing consequences.

Young Australians are now more aware of the dangers and extreme health risks brought on by smoking cigarettes or by drinking alcohol than any previous generation. Sexting and cyber safety requires the same educational strategy. We should be providing young people with information on the dangers and risks associated with sexting and other organisations who have expertise in this area.

In our experience positive reinforcement and education on safe behaviour is an effective tool to engage young members in making safer choices. Such education can take place using various communication methods, such as support documents, online and social media advertising, viral campaigns and school education. Changing the sexting culture is crucial and increasing awareness is the only way to reduce a growing trend within our communities.

Furthermore, it is important to provide support mechanisms for young Australians already affected by sexting by linking them with organisations and people with relevant expertise. By providing such mechanisms, members do not feel abandoned or trapped in a deteriorating circumstance and can actively receive aid.

In conclusion, the St John Ambulance Australia, Australian Youth Council (AYC) recommends a positive educational strategy is developed to increase awareness in cyber safety and sexting risks. Furthermore a supporting multi media campaign should be launched to support those young members already affected by cyber safety breaches and or malicious sexting acts in order to link them with organisations and people with relevant expertise.

St John AYC will be free to answer any further questions the senate committee may have during this consultation process.

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