



PO Box 25, Wandong, 3758

Phone: 03) 9380 2158 Fax: 03) 9380 2139 Reg. No A0011711N

ABN 22 989 261 435

Attention: Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety
Department of House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

RE: Inquiry into Cyber-safety

Parents Victoria has been representing and providing support and information to parents and parents clubs in Victorian Government Schools since 1925. We are pleased to be able to provide this submission to the Inquiry into Cyber-safety on behalf of Victorian Government School parents and students. The submission is based on our policy which has been developed democratically over the past 85 years.

On the national platform, Parents Victoria is the Victorian state affiliate of the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) which is a member of the Safer Internet Group.

We would like to begin our submission with several case studies which have been brought to the attention of Parents Victoria to highlight the impact of cybercrime on students and their families.

Case Study 1:

My friend's daughter was in year 11, and was receiving very disturbing and threatening text messages, emails, and messages on Facebook. They tried several times to get the girl sending the messages and making the threats to stop, but she refused and the intensity of the messages increased. The school pretty much said there wasn't anything they could do, as it was generally happening outside of school hours - even though both girls were students from the same school.

This went on for several weeks, with my friend's daughter constantly in tears, and not wanting to go to school (even though she was an excellent student who had always loved studying).

Finally, in frustration, my friend and her husband contacted the police, and were told to keep copies of all the messages they had received. These are all evidence, and can be used in court. Sending threatening messages, in any format, is a crime.

The police contacted the girl, whose parents apparently were unaware of what was going on, and that was enough to scare the girl into stopping her cyber-abuse.

Case Study 2:

I never imagined my child (14) would have been preyed upon. I considered our family to be really diligent with internet use but now I feel we did drop our guard. People would say we were lucky as our school were very communicative and supportive. We have worked closely with them and Victoria Police not just for our child but for any other students at risk. There were signs, we discussed and dismissed these behaviours as typical adolescent changes but unbeknown to us it was far more intrusive and sinister. Now the person has come to the attention of the authorities and it was confirmed our child was being groomed. I advise to all families that where there is information or opportunities on offer to learn prevention or strategies to remain cybersafe please pay attention and attend, you could save a family member from being another statistic.

Case Study 3:

My heart sank when I got the call at work from my husband that our daughter had to be interviewed in regard to child porn. The incident they had evidence relating to was from 16mths prior, Vic Police were only recently able to contact suspected victims, our daughter was 1 of 600+. Nothing can prepare you for what the female police officer shows you. I wish now I had been a more informed parent on these insidious crimes. Yes it is a crime and these predators need to be captured and prosecuted for preying on our children who are often naive and vulnerable. If you suspect anything strange don't be afraid to speak to your young person openly because it could prevent yours and others being future prey .

Case Study 4:

Excerpt from Parents Voice – Parents Victoria's newsletter. The complete article is attached.

This all came to my attention recently when my young primary school daughter was a victim of peer group pressure and in many ways also of internet fraud. She had a "my space" page made up for her by a friend. There were comments made of her as a 14 yr old, photo, her school was identified as was her sporting team. There was language in the site that has never been used by her and other comments about people. After my initial rant, rave and tantrum I calmed a little and discussed it further. After some initial discrepancy I got the truth. She knew it was there but had no idea what to do with it. After many discussions and difficult times it has been deleted to the best of my knowledge and a lot of further research from me has since happened.

This whole experience made me realise how easy it is to set up a site for someone else and start being them. I approached my school and through them and others, have really started to investigate the whole Cybersafety issue and how to stay ahead. I can't; but I can keep up and be the parent I want to be. I attended a few information nights for parents and am always disappointed at the numbers as it is really important to get the message out there. I would recommend to anyone that if there is something in your area get there and be prepared as the tips are easy and really not as scary as you think. One of the biggest tips I got when starting to talk to kids about internet safety was asking them what they understand by "www". Stress it means World Wide Web and anything they post goes out to the world (!), not two streets away to their best friend.

One of the most sinister aspects of cyberbullying is its anonymity. Victims often do not know who the perpetrators are. Parents, who have been referred to as *Digital Immigrants*, are often at a loss to know where to go to for help when their family is a victim of cybercrime. When children are involved, the first place parents usually turn to for help is their children's school. Some schools are very supportive but others are far from helpful. Students, parents and schools all need information, education and access to resources to be responsible cybercitizens and to know what to do when things go wrong.

Students need to be educated in cyber-etiquette. They need to have the realism and consequences of online conduct in general spelt out to them. i.e. point out to them the impact in terms of their "digital footprint". It's not all about bullying and safety. It's about their general conduct/language e.g. don't say online what you wouldn't say to

someone directly. It needs to be Impressed upon kids that their digital footprint is part of their reputation and may come back to bite them in their adult life for example when they are seeking employment. They also need to know what constitutes cyber-bullying and what the penalties are.

Parents Victoria has been very impressed by the program SuperClubs Plus – a moderated social networking site for students under 12 years which teaches appropriate cyber-behaviour. We would also encourage the implementation of peer education programs so students hear the facts and evidence from people their own age or student leaders

Schools need to be supported in terms of where they can turn to for access to information and assistance. Ideally schools should be able to be proactive and run inhouse programs/forums etc for students & parents rather than having to be reactive because an 'issue' has occurred. It is imperative that appropriate support is readily available to schools if an 'issue' does arise. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) does have quite a lot of information and resources around cybersafety on its website but funding needs to be available for schools to access programs in a timely way.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) deliver great free programs (Parents Victoria had Greg Gebhart from ACMA present at our 2009 annual conference). However the demand for speakers from ACMA exceeds their capacity to deliver. There are other programs available but these can be very costly (prohibitively so) and the content may or may not be as good as anybody can purport to be an expert in the field and there is no regulatory body.

Schools also need the resources, the support and the funding to be encouraged to work with the broader school community, especially parents, to develop consistent, whole school approaches to cybersafety. It would be useful for schools to have an educational hotline contact as they do in the emergency division so students, parents, teachers and leaders can make reports as required for an independent authority to investigate/action

Some parents are proactive and have done what they can to be informed and encourage safe, responsible internet and mobile phone use. Attendances at information evenings are often disappointing. When an 'issue' arises, parents need access to immediate help. An information hot-line would be most useful to provide immediate advice and where appropriate alert relevant authorities e.g. the Australian Federal Police so that matters can be investigated. This number could be promoted on fridge magnets so that it is readily available if needed.

Parents Victoria also recommend

- clear, harsh penalties for anyone found guilty of cyber-bullying.
- the establishment of an Online Ombudsman to investigate, advocate and act on cyber-safety issues
- the importance of engaging students in this process and acknowledge the committee for their willingness to survey students
- consistency across all states & jurisdictions on whatever initiatives are implemented.

The IT revolution is obviously happening so quickly that neither education nor the law can keep up, but that has to change. We owe it to our children to teach them how to be responsible users and to keep them safe in this new world.

Parents Victoria
'Our Children, Our Concern'

Article from Parents Voice (Parents Victoria) newsletter (2009)

Cybersafety: Protecting our children is still our job

Cybersafety is a large issue that all parents will have to deal with at some point. Despite the fact that many parents still feel “oh my child is too young for that or won’t do that or even I am always watching them,” they are probably already out there and far more techno informed than their parents.

It is the harsh truth that cyberbullying, access to porn, internet dating and meeting, stalking and grooming are all realities of today’s society. Just in five years we have gone from email, now known as old people’s communication, and landline phones for international communication to instant messaging, instant video messaging and international roaming technology. Children of today want instant answers to everything. If we think that communication can only go as fast as we want then “we’ are wrong. Our kids are the leaders in this up to date technology and they need to be our teachers. We cannot keep up with them but we can remain beside them and be a part of this cyber world. They need our careful and more sensible minds there to keep them safe. We think before we type or add a photo, children don’t - they just jump in. An innocent comment or photo can remain in cyberspace for ever and come out and haunt them 10 years later, but if we become cyber savvy too, we can be a guide.

We must also realise that the internet is not all doom and gloom. The social networking sites, the games and the information provided can be lots of fun. So now is the time to become part of the new cyberworld and enjoy it with your kids at the same time as being the parent and their safety net.

This all came to my attention recently when my young primary school daughter was a victim of peer group pressure and in many ways also of internet fraud. She had a “my space” page made up for her by a friend. There were comments made of her as a 14 yr old, photo, her school was identified as was her sporting team. There was language in the site that has never been used by her and other comments about people. After my initial rant, rave and tantrum I calmed a little and discussed it further. After some initial discrepancy I got the truth. She knew it was there but had no idea what to do with it. After many discussions and difficult times it has been deleted to the best of my knowledge and a lot of further research from me has since happened.

This whole experience made me realise how easy it is to set up a site for someone else and start being them. I approached my school and through them and others, have really started to investigate the whole Cybersafety issue and how to stay ahead. I can’t; but I can keep up and be the parent I want to be. I attended a few information nights for parents and am always disappointed at the numbers as it is really important to get the message out there. I would recommend to anyone that if there is something in your area get there and be prepared as the tips are easy and really not as scary as you think. One of the biggest tips I got when starting to talk to kids about internet safety was asking them what they understand by “www”. Stress it means World Wide Web and anything they post goes out to the world (!), not two streets away to their best friend.

A Few easy tips for parents*:

- *PC’s should be in common room, not bedrooms*
- *Advise kids to leave sites they feel uncomfortable about*
 - *Never answer rude or harassing emails*
 - *If an adult can’t read what is written don’t write it*
- *Spend time with your child online – learn and explore together*
 - *Learn about internet together - share their knowledge*
 - *Set house rules about computer and sites they can visit*
 - *DON’T share passwords and DO change them regularly*
- *Learn the lingo e.g. POS (parent over shoulder), LOL (laugh out loud) - there are many others*
 - *All social networks should be set to private*
 - *No personal information should be shared*
 - *Play online games together*
- *Set up a social network page yourself and make your child have you as a friend*
 - *Block senders*

- Stress that your child should know all their friends not have random friends to build numbers so they look popular
- Do not have “flirty” sign-in names

*Please note that these are by no means the only tips, but a few to help. They are also not fool proof and don’t provide 100% protection and safety.

***Websites:**

www.cybersmartkids.com.au
www.netaert.gov.au
www.police.vic.gov.au/kids



www.ceop.gov.uk
www.cyberbullying.org
www.iSafe.org

These are also just a few sites that you may find interesting, but there are many more and you might find one you prefer (*use google to search*).

May I just finish by saying that this whole experience has made me a more ‘aware parent’ but now not as scared, just cautious. It made me realise, that ‘yes’ our children can be safe out there, it can be a lot of fun and there is so much to learn. However, if they are to be safe, we as their parents must be there to help, supervise and to be the sensible part of their brain.

Parents Victoria Executive Member

(* Tips and websites for interest supplied by Susan McLean salconsultants@hotmail.com)

Relevant Parents Victoria policy

E.16 Information and Learning Technologies

All students should have the opportunity to develop the basic skills needed to operate a simple computer.

Introduction of Information and Learning Technologies should be implemented with careful consideration by School Councils, parents and teachers to ensure that:

1. There is a documented total school program for Information and Learning Technology across the Key Learning Areas.
2. That the Information and Learning Technology policy include guidelines for access to the Internet. This should include: the supervision of students using the internet, the access manager employed for censoring internet material, the confidentiality of users, that parental consent is required for children's work or images to be published, that children are not identified with their full name.
3. All students should have access to computer education.
4. Parents should be involved in as many ways as possible to ensure that they can support and encourage their children's learning.
5. A borrowing process is included in the policy. The school to ensure that items are covered by insurance.
6. Issues of fair and equitable access for all students should be addressed and the range of software should be inclusive of all students taking into account ability levels, culture and interests.
7. The Department of Education should ensure that ongoing professional development opportunities are available to teachers in all subject areas.
8. Parents Victoria urges State and Federal Governments to develop programs to ensure computer purchase is not dependent on fund raising in local school communities. It should be ensured that isolated rural students, Aboriginals, students of non-English speaking background, socio-economically disadvantaged students and students in special education settings do not suffer educational disadvantage.

I.14 Safe and Secure Learning Environments

Many students are subjected to bullying or harassment at some stage of their schooling.

Systematic steps need to be taken to ensure that schools do provide safe and supportive learning environments.

Parents Victoria believes that:

1. Schools should develop anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies. These policies need to be developed collaboratively between the school administration, parents, students and teachers.
2. All schools, including the parents' representatives, need to have professional development in how to produce and implement whole school programs to address bullying.
3. The policies developed include a curriculum component for all children.
4. The policies developed have strategies to deal with both those being bullied and those bullying.
5. Every school should have a trained Welfare Co-ordinator to support students.
6. All teachers require professional development on how to:
 - a) assess their own behaviour to ensure that they model appropriate non-bullying behaviour;
 - b) detect bullying and harassment;
 - c) utilise techniques for managing classroom and playground strategies.
 - d) Pre-service training for all teachers should include anti-bullying education.
 - e) Written information to be given to all parents about: the warning signs of bullying and harassment, how to talk to their children and their rights and responsibilities in relation to teachers and schools.