



The Next Click:

What's Influencing Student Digital Behaviours and Safety in 2025

This year, our ySafe team spoke to 100,000 students, staff, and parents across the country. Here's what they told us, what we've learnt, and how you can approach 2025 with confidence. Let's dive in.



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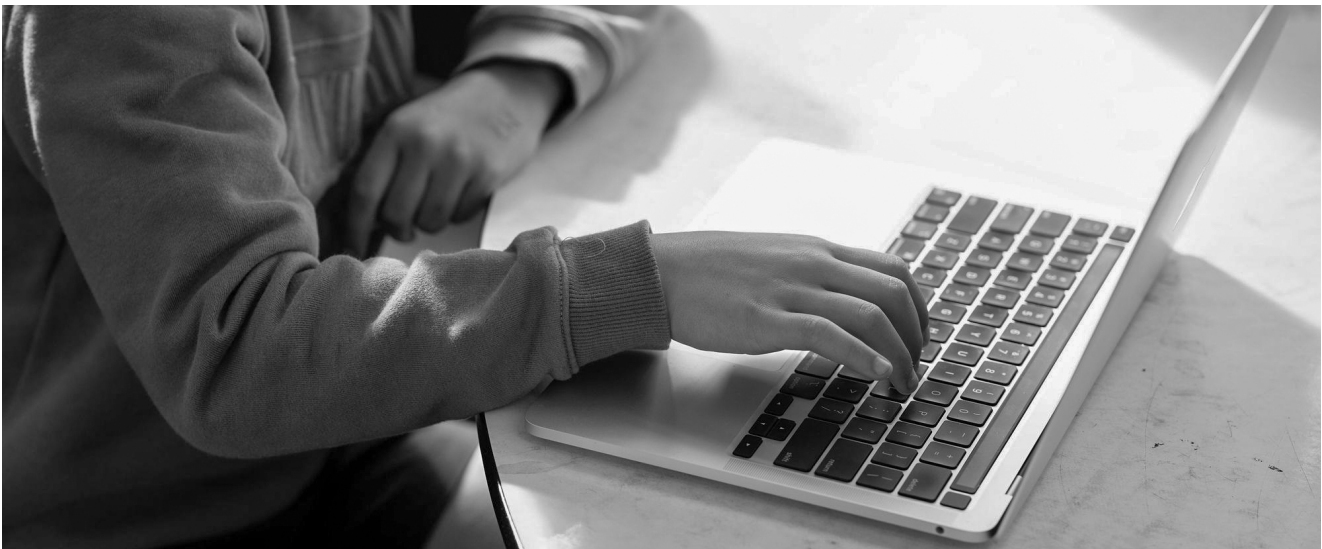
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At ySafe, we know that navigating the fast-changing world of online safety is a constant challenge for schools and their communities.

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.

Join Forces with the Experts Behind This Paper

This paper 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 wellbeing.



With over a decade of experience, ySafe is Australia's top cyber safety education provider. We work closely with schools like yours to create programs that fit your needs—because when you work us, you're not just getting a service; you're gaining a partner.

Whether it's student roundtables, Instagram deep dives, or setting up cyber safety councils, our programs spark real conversations and help students take ownership of healthy digital habits. Schools working with us are already seeing fewer issues and stronger engagement.

Want the experts who created this paper to work with your school? Get in touch.

enquiries@ysafe.com.au



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.

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.

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



600,000
Students



80,000
Staff



2,500
Schools



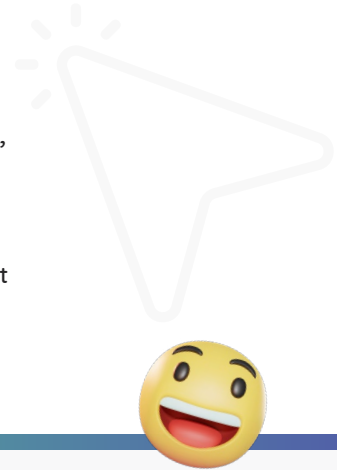
300,000
Parents

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."

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.

Millennials	Gen Alpha
Stealing food	Fanum tax
Swagger	Drip
No kidding	No cap
That’s true	Facts
Won (beat someone)	Cooked
New at a game	Noob
Impressive	Flex
Embarrassing	Negative aura
Lame	Selling
Cool	Sigma
Bad	Skibidi
Charm	Rizz
Awesome	Fire
Lie	Cap
Basic	Mid
Crazy	Ohio
Suspicious	Sus
Honestly?	For real AKA: fr?
Chiselled jawline	Mewing



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. **AI-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

Student Insights

What We've Learned From Group Chats to AI Bullying

There's far more happening for our young people online than many realise. We've identified the struggles that, if prioritised, we believe would have the greatest impact on their lives and wellbeing.

Each issue is unpacked and explained in context (through the eyes of the young person), and a recommendation is provided to guide the adults in their lives with the strategies they need to support them. It may be helpful to know that all our recommendations are based upon our tried and trusted ABC model (see following sections).

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.

25% of youth suicides
are directly linked to
cyberbullying reported by
the eSafety Commissioner.

2. AI-powered bullying: Navigating new challenges



Context

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 AI. 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.

Action: Parents and staff

- **Open communication:** Let students know they're not alone. Talk about AI'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 AI-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.

In 2023 there was a **37% increase in cyberbullying** reported by the eSafety Commissioner.

Here are some things to keep at the top of your mind:

Listen and support:

Provide a safe, judgement-free space for students to share their feelings.

Collaborate:

Parents and staff must work together to address bullying effectively.

Document incidents:

Keep records of bullying incidents and communications.

Empower students:

Teach coping strategies and build self-confidence.

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.

School Insights

A Need to Build Stronger Partnerships

Our experience in schools often gives us insights into the needs of the staff (teachers, wellbeing workers, and leaders) who are faced with helping families navigate this environment.

1. School/parent partnership:

A shared responsibility for online safety



Context

Parents and schools often have differing expectations regarding the handling of online safety education and incidents. Schools have reported a trend of decreasing parental involvement and increasing parental expectations for schools to resolve all cyber-related issues. This disconnect can lead to delays in addressing problems effectively.

Issue

Understandably, schools are common ground for social issues among young people, and sometimes, problems can occur on school-owned or issued devices.

Parents tend to believe it is the school's responsibility to address issues that make their way into the playground or originate from school devices, while schools may feel it's the responsibility of parents if the problem occurs outside of school hours.

Action

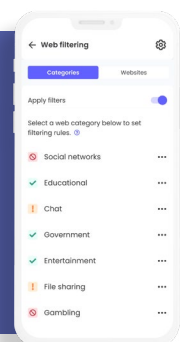
To address these challenges, encouraging a collaborative team approach between parents and schools is essential:

- Parents need access to resources and support, such as expert information evenings for parents to attend and ask questions or online resources to access expert advice at any time. This could also include a technology-based solution for at-home control of a school device or a clear list of boundaries used at school that parents can affirm at home.

- Schools, on the other hand, may need context about incidents outside of school that may impact the school environment. Knowledge of a fight in the park over the weekend could be a helpful insight for a school if the behaviour impacts the school; however, it doesn't mean the school needs to deal with the fallout of the fight directly.
- Through ongoing communication and dialogue, schools can align the values and knowledge taught to students about the digital world with parents, empowering them to make informed decisions at home regarding their child's online safety and potential social conflicts.

Parental controls

Using [parental control tools](#) is essential to involve parents in their children's online safety. By giving parents the right tools and visibility, they can actively guide important conversations at home. However, we recognise that this approach may have limitations depending on the devices used in schools. If your school is thinking about switching from a BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) model to a 1:1 program, this could be the push needed to implement better parental controls.



2. Digital disguising: Hidden behaviours in the digital age

Context

A common problem schools face is students using technology to disguise and sidestep the school's safety network and blocking features with things such as decoy or burner apps, GPS or MAC address spoofing, and VPNs. These are also known as 'hotspotting' or 'filter avoidance'. School networks have built-in safety policies with reporting features designed to protect young people from viewing inappropriate websites and other unsuitable content; however, when a device is hotspotting, these protections are bypassed.

Issue

Keeping young people safe online can be challenging without the right visibility into their online behaviour. While some tactics used to cover their tracks may seem harmless, like wanting to use them for security/privacy reasons, the deception and anonymity they provide can lead to risky behaviours, such as online bullying, sharing nudes, and mental health issues.

Action

To effectively address the challenges of students using technology to bypass school safety measures, schools need clear guidelines for responsible device usage. Establishing boundaries helps ensure that students understand what is expected of them as they navigate their digital environment.

Younger students may benefit from tech-free zones, such as mobile phone policies, which minimise distractions and promote focus. For older students, providing opportunities to develop self-discipline and independence is important. They should also understand the consequences of not adhering to established rules.

Schools are overwhelmed and worried not just about what students can access, but also about what they do in the spaces they gain access to, such as toxic behaviour in Google Docs and unblocked chat forums. This concern goes beyond merely monitoring potentially risky websites or searches.

Implementing early detection and intervention solutions like real-time risk monitoring enhances visibility into students' online behaviour that may be harming themselves or others. These tools help identify potential issues before they escalate, ensuring schools can respond proactively to concerns and maintain a safe learning environment.



3. Cringe conversations: Breaking through communication barriers

Context

Wellbeing staff often find it challenging to connect with young people due to a lack of understanding regarding current trends. This disconnect can create awkward moments when adults attempt to be 'cool' but miss the mark, discouraging meaningful conversations. Creating connections through meaningful conversations helps build a strong foundation for trust and rapport in the eyes of young people, which is especially important when they need to seek advice or support with cyber-related issues.

Issue

Wellbeing staff (and others in similar roles) are usually on the front line when dealing with on-and-offline issues. But as well as performing in their expected work roles, they often face added pressures, including a lack of time and maintaining the resources and skills needed to keep up with the rapidly evolving digital landscape.

It's therefore important to acknowledge that expecting these staff to shoulder responsibility for online safety alone is not feasible.

Action

A holistic approach to online safety is crucial to reduce the burden on frontline staff. Initiatives, such as special online safety days held throughout the year, can provide more timely expert insights, facilitate meaningful discussions, and raise awareness. By equipping parents, staff, and students with the necessary knowledge, we can share the responsibility of promoting a safe digital environment rather than placing the burden solely on wellbeing staff.

Schools should also look for ways to actively engage families and staff to keep important topics front of mind. While educational sessions are beneficial, ongoing conversations are essential for everyone to fully understand the challenges impacting young people's online safety and digital wellbeing.

Offering a central resource hub for accessing the latest trends, insights, and articles will provide valuable conversation tools. Regular updates on social media, featuring conversation starters and engaging content related to current trends, can further strengthen connections and build a supportive community.

Parent Insights

Addressing the Struggles and Pressures of Parenting in a Digital World

Our experience with school communities sees us regularly engaging with parents and carers who seek insights, strategies, and answers to many questions. It is this experience that contributes to the following parent insights:

1. App paralysis: Overwhelmed by options

Context

Children access a large number of sites and platforms every day. It is estimated that the average child accesses nearly 50 apps per week, and the apps used change over time. It is not practical or realistic to expect parents to understand or configure parental settings on all of these apps.

Issue

Understanding the latest trending apps used by young people of all ages can be challenging and overwhelming for parents.

This lack of knowledge prevents them from effectively supporting their children in navigating online spaces safely. As a result, parents may impose fewer restrictions than necessary, leading to increased online safety risks for their children.

Action

It is essential for parents to get to know the online environments where their children spend their time. There are various ways to achieve this, with research being a common first step. However, we also recommend engaging with their digital world and striking up an open, judgement-free conversation. This approach will give parents valuable insights into their children's initial attraction to particular platforms and games and why they stay there. Open conversations help to build trust and agency, providing children with an opportunity to teach their parents something (and we all know children love to teach us new things every day!).

When researching the digital spaces that young people frequent, it's common to come across troubling stories about the risks and dangers associated with many of these platforms. While this information is helpful in setting appropriate boundaries based on the app's features and the child's age, it's not the only research parents should consider.

We suggest using robust parental control tools on young people's devices to monitor the time spent on these platforms and the content they consume. These tools can also help block or alert parents about distressing content when necessary.

Research and playing alongside their children can give parents a deeper understanding, enabling them to make well-informed decisions. The more they know, the better prepared they'll be!

**80% of 12-year-olds
have at least two
social media accounts.**

2. Up-ageing: Preserving childhood in a hyper-connected world

Context

Up-ageing, where young people are growing up faster, at a younger age, is a significant trend that parents, and subsequently schools, are grappling with thanks to students' increased use of and access to digital technologies. Many parents and schools are concerned about children growing up too quickly, but is delaying their access to technology, social media, and apps the answer?

Issue

Many parents find it difficult to delay their children's access to smart phones or social media platforms beyond the start of senior school.

As technology becomes more available and important for learning, children are often left to use devices and tools without adequate supervision, both at school and at home. This leads to the top question we get asked: "How much screen time should I allow?"

Action

ySafe's ABC framework (which we will expand on in the next section) can be invaluable when addressing the complexities of this issue. If screen time is the main concern, establishing appropriate boundaries and engaging in open conversations about device use is essential for safety; however, necessary boundaries and discussions will differ significantly if the focus shifts to accessing inappropriate content.

69% of teenage boys
are exposed to web
pornography reported by
the eSafety Commissioner.



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.



Sometimes, children may feel inclined to use language they hear from older gamers which can lead to harmful conversations at school or home. Teach 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!"

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.



3. Supervision vs. surveillance: Striking the right balance

Context

Both schools and parents often find it challenging to balance the right level of supervision and monitoring for young people. Common questions include “Should I log into my child’s YouTube or Snapchat account to see who they are talking to, what they are saying, or what they are watching?” or “Should I let my child know I can see their messages?” Our advice is that visibility is essential, but so is trust.

Issue

Balancing the right level of supervision with the right level of trust is not an easy task and is made even more complex by the ability of young people to freely access content or talk to strangers, especially when much of it can disappear. Phew!

1 in 4 10-year-olds used social media at least weekly reported by the eSafety Commissioner.

Action

Consider implementing strategies for both passive and active supervision and applying restrictions according to your child’s age and maturity, also taking into account the existing level of trust between you. Be warned, though: The more you block, the harder children will look to find a way to bypass the rules with things like dummy phones, secret burner accounts, and VPNs. These are just a few of the workarounds young people use, which can often lead them down even riskier paths, including the dark web.

Passive strategies:

- No headphones
- Access only on the family computer in public places of the home
- Honesty policy
- Give access, not ownership, when it comes to their first phone.
- Ensure all devices are kept out of the bedroom at night.

Active supervision:

- Install parental control tools, including WiFi network, device, and in-app controls.
- Use ad-blockers
- Use Google safe search and YouTube restricted mode
- Regularly check how accounts are setup. If accounts are still linked, and strict privacy settings are in place

How Does This Play Out in Real Life?



Three real life school stories

Storytelling holds power. While we don't aim to scare or fearmonger, real-life examples are crucial for illustrating the insights and trends discussed throughout the paper.

We'll share stories from partner schools gathered from speaking with staff, students, and parents. All identifying details are changed to protect their privacy.

These narratives highlight how digital challenges and interventions are experienced in real-world settings. This will help you apply the concepts covered in your school environment.

1. Year 5 subscribes to friendship

2. Avatars and abuse

3. The phallic carrot



1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.



Where to From Here?

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 on the next page.



Manage Access

What are they accessing, when are they accessing it and for how long? Tips include:

- Use a parental control tool. Free tools are a good start, but paid tools are always better.
- There is no set-and-forget, one-size-fits-all solution. It will take lots of effort to get it working well.

Set Boundaries

Consistent screen-time and behaviour boundaries. Tips include:

- Co-write a family tech agreement to give your child a voice when it comes to their digital habits, and ensure you model the same habits.
- Set positive goals that encourage independence and character development.
- Use a template to help. Here are two developed by our partners at Qustodio: [Under 8yo, teens & tweens](#).

Openly Communicate

Talk, talk, talk. About everything, all the time. Tips include:

- Start any conversation with a positive before you highlight the negative or danger associated.
- Show genuine interest and get involved through co-play or family video challenges.

Spotlight:

Conversations That Help Students Navigate the Digital Landscape

Over the years we've been asked countless questions but this year, one stood out more than any other: **“What can we do to make more of a difference?”**

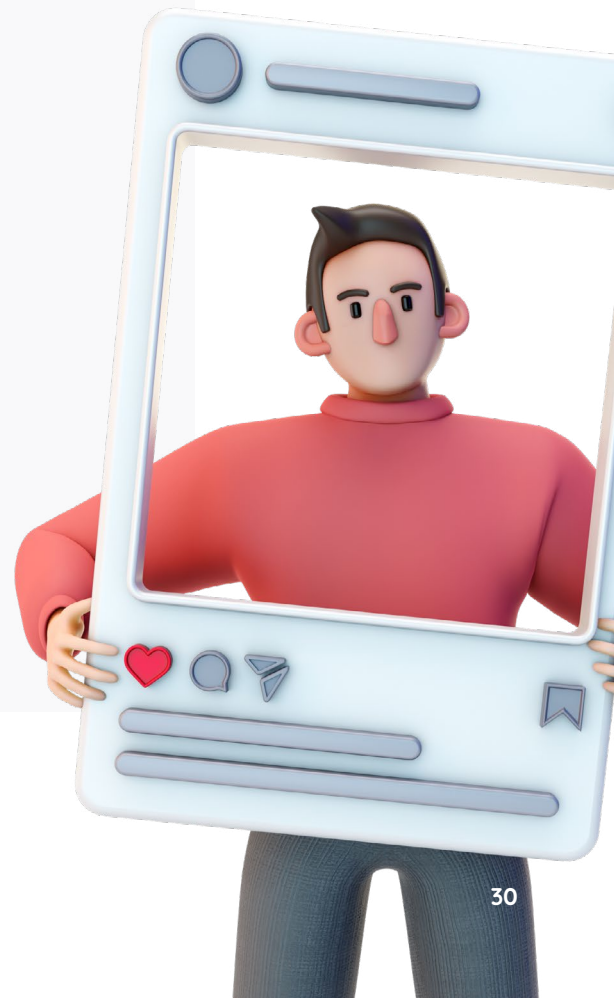
Our answer is simple: Shift the focus from online safety education to online safety conversations.

Conversation is at the core of improving students' online safety. This isn't just a dialogue between experts and an audience; it's a continuous exchange between students, staff, and parents.

From the youngest students to Year 12 leavers, from new parents to experienced educators – everyone has a voice in the cyber safety conversation. **In 2025, we challenge you to create a culture around online safety conversations.**

Here are some practical ways to get started:

- ✓ **Form an online safety leadership or council**
Do you have a designated online safety leader or a student representative body that provides a student voice to discuss and promote online safety throughout the year?
- ✓ **Define healthy digital relationships**
Have you defined how healthy digital interactions look, and do you have a plan to communicate these guidelines to students, staff, and parents? Are older students equipped to share essential online safety information with younger students before they leave?
- ✓ **Expand your digital induction and resources**
Have you developed digital induction videos for new families and planned a parent evening to set expectations and discuss online safety with the wider community?



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 enquiries@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, at home and everywhere in between.

*Let's stay cyber
safe together.*





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 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