media release

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Worrying internet use risks child safety nationally

Children as young as five are unwittingly accessing inappropriate online content with long-term, damaging consequences, warns Australian children's charity, Kids Helpline, on Safer Internet Day.

During the rollout of Kids Helpline's @ School (KAS) Digital program (supported by Optus), counsellors have witnessed five and six year olds from different schools and regions, raising their hands to answer 'yes' to the question, 'has a stranger ever spoken to you online'.

This has come off the back of 2016 research by Kids Helpline into harm done to children in Australia through access to pornography, which suggested that viewing online pornography had played a key role in two sibling abuse scenarios involving four and five year old victims by eight and nine year old perpetrators.

yourtown Kids Helpline CEO Tracy Adams said it was imperative parents knew what children were accessing online.

"You may think they're watching a YouTube video of 'My Little Pony' but with a press of a button there may be a link that takes them to a very different video," Ms Adams said.

"Parents must be aware not only of the types of content children are accessing online but also what information children are sharing online about themselves.

"It's important for parents to check the amount of personal information that your child is sharing, or in some cases, over sharing about themselves online and ensure that privacy and security settings on phones and devices are set to the strictest levels. Not only does this protect from exposure to strangers but also helps to protect from viruses and scams."

Operations Manager for the Queensland Police Service's Task Force Argos, which specialises in the investigation of online child exploitation and abuse, Detective Inspector Jon Rouse, said the rise in use of phones, laptops and handheld devices by children for educational purposes can lull parents into a false sense of security when it comes to online monitoring.

"Our message to parents has always been to prioritise the time to understand your child's use of the internet and social media," Inspector Rouse said.

"It is important you know the Apps they are using and sites they visit. Familiarise yourself with these platforms and identify those that could allow your child to be contacted by a stranger. Communicate with your child and discuss the risks and the dangers of chatting with someone you don't know online."

Children who access inappropriate content online can often experience a range of changes which can include an increase in rude, aggressive or violent behaviour. Such content can also normalise aggression and violent attitudes as well as distorted thoughts around sexuality and set unhealthy sexual practices and expectations.

KAS Digital, sponsored by Optus and an eSafety certified program, has already delivered digital program to 5,540 primary school students in the past six months and aims to reach 7,000 students by July 2017.

"Through our cyber-safety programs, Optus has helped 167,000 students to be safer and more responsible online. We're urging everyone to take steps to protect themselves and talk to their children about being safe and responsible online," said Helen Maisano, Associate Director - Community at Optus.

With teens significantly increasing the amount of time spent online[i], there has been also been a 75% increase in serious cyberbullying complaints reported by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner[i].

In the 12 months to June 2016, 19%[ii] teens and 8% of kids were cyberbullied whilst 9% of kids and 17% teens were exposed to inappropriate content.

Helpful information about cybersafety is available from the Kids Helpline website at www.kidshelpline.com.au, Facebook Safety Centre https://www.facebook.com/safety where parents can check privacy and security options, and the Office of the eSafety Commissioner's iParent site https://www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources/iparent

<center>ENDS</center>

KHL gives children and young people choices, support and someone to listen. It is Australia's only national 24/7 counselling service specifically for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years – free call **1800 55 1800** or **www.kidshelpline.com.au.**

INTERVIEW/PHOTO/FILMING OPPORTUNITIES

- Tony Fitzgerald, Kids Helpline Centre Manager
- Prue Alexander, Kids Helpline @ School Counsellor
- Leo Hede, Kids Helpline Counselling Centre Supervisor
- John Dalgleish, Head of Strategy and Research
- Detective Inspector Jon Rouse, Queensland Police Service's Task Force Argos
- VNR footage available of Kids Helpline call centre and interviews with counsellors

MEDIA CONTACTS

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Kids Helpline's Tips for Keeping Kids Safe Online

1. Educate yourself about the internet and Apps

2. Talk with your children about using the internet in a safe way:

   - Talk about safe searching
   - Use child-friendly search engines
   - Use safe search settings
   - Bookmark preferred websites

3. Take a hands on approach and help your children with online tasks and activities

4. Monitor what your children is accessing:

   - Friend them on any social media
   - Watch what they do online
   - Check browser history
   - Check social media profile
   - Check friends and groups

5. Limit your child's use and set rules about:

   - Length of time online
   - Websites that can be accessed
   - When they can go online
   - Types of social media accounts
   - Suitability of apps and search engines

6. Use available parental controls on devices and filtering software

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[i] 83% Australian teens going online 3 or more times daily vs. 2014 report. Report on Aussie teens and kids Online.

https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-the-office/newsroom/media-releases/cyberbullying-complaints-on-the-rise

[ii] Survey commissioned by the Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner, June 2016.