

Friday, 2 February 2018

Early education crucial to keeping kids safe online

With 14% of young people contacting Kids Helpline worried about online safety also experiencing suicidal thoughts, this Safer Internet Day Kids Helpline is urging the Australian community to put early education about cybersafety at the top of the agenda.

According to **yourtown/Kids Helpline** CEO Tracy Adams, last year, more than 3000 (3,187) contacts to national counselling service Kids Helpline were by children and young people aged 5-25 worried about cybersafety issues, with an alarming 14% of these experiencing suicidal thoughts at time of contact. Over 950 (956) said they were being cyberbullied.

“Young people being cyberbullied can experience anxiety and depression, and tell us they feel ashamed, isolated, powerless, scared and humiliated with devastating consequences,” Ms Adams said.

“Of young people contacting us about cybersafety, four hundred (400) were from children aged between 5 and 12 with 9% of these very young children telling us they were experiencing suicidal thoughts.

“While these statistics are alarming and such experiences clearly unacceptable for children, we are thankful that children and young people are reaching out to Kids Helpline for help. Teaching and encouraging help seeking is exceptionally important.

“We know that children and young people generally do not disclose to adults that they are experiencing cyberbullying. Research has told us that only 40% of children aged 5-9 will tell their parent or carer they are experiencing cyberbullying and this drops off to only 25% for young people 15 years and older (**yourtown** 2009).

“We believe that early intervention via education is key to protecting children and keeping kids safe online. Safer Internet Day is a good reminder of this important issue but it’s an issue that we need to put on the top of the community agenda every day of the year.

“As a community we need to teach children to not only seek help at a young age but also about how to stay safe online by equipping them with the skills and knowledge to make their use of digital devices and technology first and foremost a positive one.”

Kids Helpline in partnership with Optus supports the Australian community to do this via its unique digital education program. Digital Thumbprint with Kids Helpline is available free to primary schools nationally.

“Professional counsellors talk with students and their teachers in group class sessions via digital technology about issues such as digital media literacy, respectful relationships online, online safety and cyberbullying,” Ms Adams said.

“Since 2013, over 27,000 (27,243) students across Australia have benefited from the program, with close to 300 (296) schools taking part in digital sessions.

Digital Thumbprint with Kids Helpline is accredited by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner and was delivered by Kids Helpline counsellors to close to 12,000 primary schools Australia-wide in 2017 alone.

Kids Helpline in partnership with Optus is committed to providing even more sessions in primary schools in 2018 and are calling on the Australian community to take advantage of this free program.

“We’re urging parents and caregivers to talk to their children about being safe and responsible online,” said Helen Maisano, Associate Director - Community at Optus.

“Programs like Digital Thumbprint are crucial to ensuring children at an early age learn about online safety and most importantly how to reach out for help from adults if they need it.”

To find out more about the **Kids Helpline @ School** and the **Optus Digital Thumbprint with Kids Helpline** program see <https://kidshelpline.com.au/schools>

Kids Helpline’s website has tips for young people and parents and carers about cyberbullying.

CYBERBULLYING TIPS

For young people: <https://kidshelpline.com.au/teens/issues/cyberbullying>

For parents and carers – what to do if it’s your child:

- Take the time to talk to them. Be open to listening and understanding their experience of cyberbullying.
- Teach them that cyberbullying is never ok
- Reassure them that they’re loved
- Report the activity to the relevant social media platform. If this does not help, you can lodge a complaint via the safety website eSafety
- Support them to speak to another trusted adult or counsellor if they want to
- Advise them to avoid opening emails or responding to cyberbullies
- Respect that they may not want to limit online access as this can seem like a punishment and lead to greater social isolation
- Most importantly, reassure them they are not alone and that help is always available.

Go to <https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents/issues/cyberbullying> for more about how parents, carers and others can help.

Kids Helpline is Australia’s only free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service specifically for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years. **FREE call 1800 55 1800** or www.kidshelpline.com.au

Kids Helpline works closely with the Office of the eSafety Commissioner to support children and young people who are experiencing online safety issues. Young people can report cyberbullying at www.esafety.gov.au

Parents or carers in Queensland and the Northern Territory looking for support can contact Parentline on **1300 30 1300** or parentline.com.au

Kids Helpline would like to remind media to include [Kids Helpline](#) contact details at the end of coverage and articles where children and young people may need support.

-ENDS-

INTERVIEW/PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES

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Kids Helpline and Kids Helpline @ School VNR available

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