



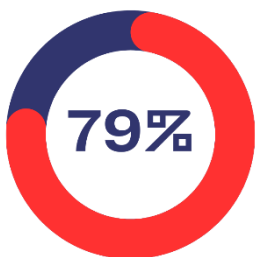
CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE
OF MELBOURNE

Staying Safe Online

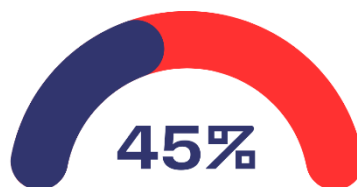
As children increasingly access the digital environment, it brings both exciting opportunities and significant challenges. While the internet provides children with valuable opportunities to connect with peers, play, learn, be entertained, express creativity, and access information, it also exposes them to risks such as cyberbullying, harmful content, and the danger of online grooming.

Therefore, ensuring that our online communication with children and young people is conducted in a safe and appropriate manner is something that we need to be mindful of each day we turn on our computers and access our devices.

Statistics released in 2024 from the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation¹ and Accumulate Australia², highlighted an increase in reported instances of online abuse with a staggering 79% of children aged between 10-years old having experienced online bullying.



**79% of people aged 10–18
have experienced
online bullying**



**Increase in reported
online abuse in 2024**

From 40,232 in 2023
to 58,503 in 2024

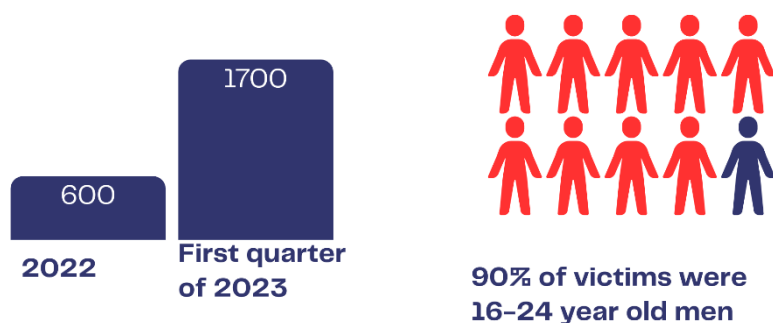


**17.9% of cyberbullying
incidents had racist
undertones**

¹ Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation, 2 September 2024. *Reports of child exploitation to AFP-led ACCCE increase 45% in past financial year.* <https://www.afp.gov.au/news-centre/media-release/reports-child-exploitation-afp-led-accce-increase-45-past-financial-year> (accessed 30 January 2025).

² Accumulate Australia, 8 March 2024. *Cyberbullying statistics in Australia in 2024.* <https://accumulate.com.au/cyberbullying-statistics-in-australia/> (accessed 30 January 2025).

In addition to this, in 2023 the eSafety Commissioner³ published that there was an increase by 180% of sexual extortion reports, with the primary victim in 90% of the cases being young boys or men aged 16-24 years.

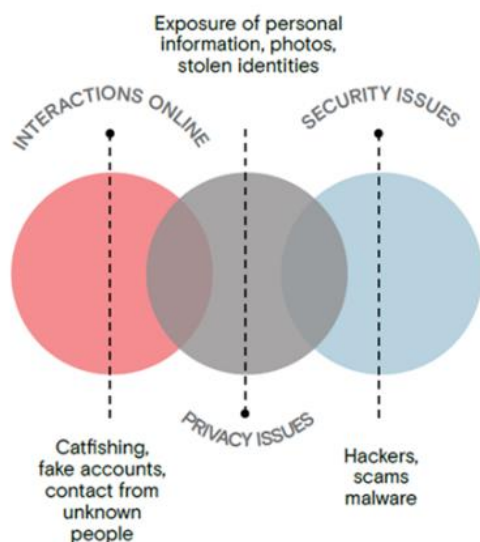


The eSafety commission defines sexual extortion as a person being blackmailed where someone threatens to share a nude or sexual image or video of you unless you give in to their demands.

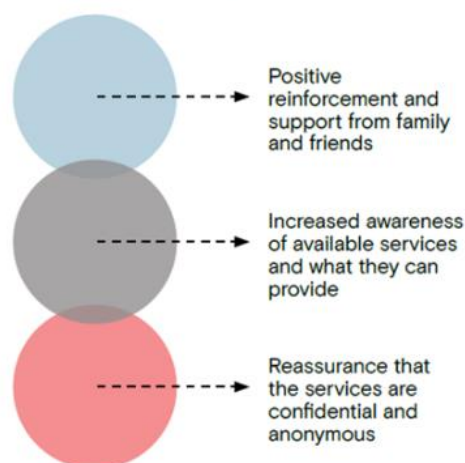
What children and young people are saying

In a 2021 report from Western Sydney University⁴, young people were consulted about their online safety concerns.

Young people's top three online safety concerns



Top three factors increasing young people's help-seeking behaviours



³ eSafety Commissioner, 25 May 2023. *Sexual Extortion and child abuse reports almost triple*. <https://www.esafety.gov.au/newsroom/media-releases/sexual-extortion-and-child-abuse-reports-almost-triple> (accessed 30 January 2025).

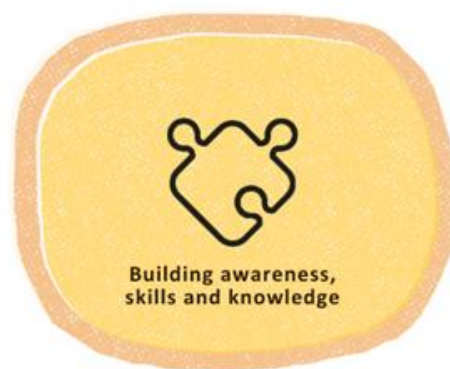
⁴ Western Sydney University, 2021. *Consultations with young people to inform the eSafety Commissioner's engagement strategy for young people*. https://www.esafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-01/YRRC%20Research%20Report%20eSafety%202021_web%20V06%20-%20publishing_1.pdf (accessed 30 January 2025).

As highlighted in the images above, during these consultations conducted, young people expressed that they are more inclined to seek help when experiencing matters of online safety, if they:

- have positive reinforcement and support from family and friends
- are aware of available services, and
- have reassurance in these services for their confidentiality and privacy.

Keeping children and young people safe online

- ✓ Encourage children and young people within your parish, to make informed choices about their online communication and safety, rather than telling them what to do.
- ✓ Encourage positive online behaviours and help children build digital intelligence, along with social and emotional skills such as respect, empathy, critical thinking, responsibility, and resilience, to foster good digital citizenship.
- ✓ Be present and ready to offer them strategies to navigate negative online experiences, helping to build their confidence and resilience.
- ✓ Encourage discussions about digital consent, including the importance of privacy settings, secure passwords, and not sharing personal information online.



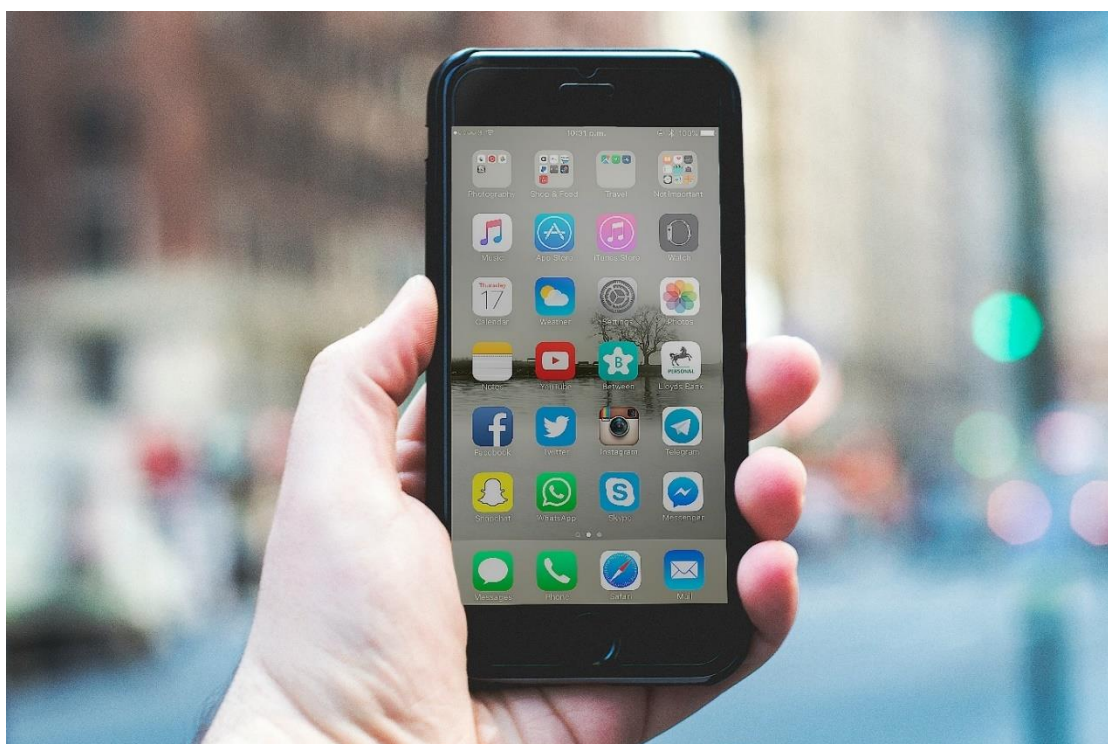
For all instances of online abuse, follow the standard reporting process as outlined in the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne's [Safeguarding Children and Young People Reporting Procedure](#)

It is also important to know that certain information disclosed to you, or information that you become aware of, may be useful to relevant authorities.

This may include information about:

- The online platform where the abuse is alleged to have occurred
- Usernames and location of the material
- The date and time the content was sent, posted or shared
- What the content says or shows.

If the material is on a website or communicated through an app, you should also inform the [eSafety Commissioner](#) and, if applicable, the social media service so that the content can be removed.



Managing online safety risks in a parish

When managing online safety risks for programs, activities and events involving children and young people, here are some safeguarding questions to consider:

- ✓ Are guidelines established for online programs, groups and activities which address inappropriate behaviours?
- ✓ Has the parish referred to the Safe Programs - Practice and Behavioural Guidelines v2.0 and the Categories of Abuse information sheet, for specific guidance about online abuse and online safety risks?
- ✓ Are the behavioural expectations outlined in the Safeguarding Children and Young People Code of Conduct, shared with parents, carers, children and young people who participate in online programs, groups and activities?
- ✓ Do you have a registration process in place for children and young people, which seeks consent to participate online?
- ✓ Are parish, agency, or entity-owned devices and accounts used instead of personal accounts of clergy, employees, and volunteers? Do you 'copy in' and include parents, carers and other parish, agency and entity representatives e.g. parish priest, program coordinator, manager in communication to children and young people?
- ✓ Are you aware of what to do if there was a safety concern with inappropriate online behaviour and/or content?
- ✓ Do we promote support services for children and young people when experiencing online safety concerns? For example, speaking to a trusted adults (parents, teachers, police) in the first instance; if the child is in immediate danger contact the Police on 000. Report any online abuse or content to the eSafety Commissioner or to the social media platform where the issue occurred. Seek out professional services such as Kids Helpline or Headspace and report any online child sexual abuse to the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE).



Resources

Useful parish safeguarding resources can be found on the Safeguarding Unit's Sharepoint site <https://camorgau.sharepoint.com/sites/PAH-Safeguarding>

- eSafety Commissioner's webinars for parents and carers - <https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents/webinars>
- eSafety Commission has a range of [online safety information for parents and families](#) and is available in translations.
- The Australian Federal Police's [Think U Know website](#) has a range of educational materials about preventing online child sexual exploitation.
- The Australian Human Rights Commission has a [checklist for online safety](#) for child safe organisations.

4 things

you need to know
about online abuse



Myth 1

**My child is safe from
online abuse**

Abuse can happen to any child.
Talking early and often about
online safety reduces risks.

Myth 2

**Sexual grooming takes time
and only happens outside
the home**

Abusers can quickly trick children
into trusting them online.
Knowing your child's online
activities helps protect them.

Myth 3

**Strangers are the only
threat online**

Abusers can be known to the
child or someone they don't know.
Review your online connections to
protect your child.

Myth 4

**My child will tell me what they
do online**

Fear of punishment may silence
them. Regular conversations will
encourage them to speak up.



6things

you can do to help
prevent child sexual
abuse online



1

Learn about online risks and prevention strategies to help you talk about them

2

Understand your organisation's policies for device use when working with children

3

Talk with children and young people, without stigma or shame, about their online experiences

4

If something goes wrong, support children to report to eSafety for help and content removal

5

Support parents and carers to talk about this issue with their children using age-appropriate language

6

Help spread awareness within your community about child sexual abuse online and where to get support

