

SUBMISSION No. 10

SUBMISSION TO THE

Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety

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AUSTRALIAN PARENTS COUNCIL INC.
PO Box 5011, Launceston, TAS 7250
Phone: 03 6334 8886
Email: admin@austparents.edu.au
Website: www.austparents.edu.au

Preamble

The Australian Parents Council (referred to throughout this submission as APC) is the national federation of organisations representing the parents of students attending non-governments schools in Australia.

Note: In this submission, the word 'parent' includes carers and legal guardians.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Joint Select Committee inquiry on Cyber Safety. Our submission focuses on the role of parents and schools in addressing cyber safety issues in the current online environment.

The four key goals of APC are Choice, Quality, Equity and Parental Voice in education and this submission is underpinned by the following key principles:

- Parents are the primary educators of their children;
- All students have a right to access and receive a quality education to enable them to attain their potential;
- Effective partnerships are central to the success of schooling outcomes and;
- Active and empowered parent groups and parents can, and do, make a significant difference.

The Parent Role in cyber-safety

Recognition and support for the crucial role of parents as first and continuing educators of their children is an essential factor in any approach to cyber safety and the safety of young people online.

In a rapidly changing and expanding online world, parents as partners with schools and the community and armed with current information are in a position to guide their children in civilised and safe use of digital and online tools just as they are in a prime position to promote children's well being in the wider spectrum of civilised and safe behaviours. Promoting civility and respect, promoting good behaviours and marginalising bad are as important in cyber safety strategies as they are in day to day life.

In the online environment, current information and evidence-based strategies which take into account the way youth (and parents) now actually use the internet and social media platforms are key to this aspect of parenting, along with knowledge of the range of tools that are available to assist in keeping their children safe online.

Parents need to be informed of the current online and digital environment and the relative dangers of predators online, sexting, cyber bullying and the technology available to guard against inappropriate content material, such as hate sites. They need to be aware of issues of cyber crime, computer security, identity theft, the consequences and sanctions which may be imposed for bad or criminal behaviours and the ways in which inappropriate use of technology

can interfere with other important activities and responsibilities in the lives of their young people.

Points to consider

In developing information and strategies for parents on the current cyber environment for children and young people, the following points emerging from recent research are helpful:

- the risks faced by children and young people are multifaceted and generally not significantly different from those they face in day to day life. As they get older they themselves can contribute to some of the problems. Successful strategies and programs addressing day to day problems, especially those promoting resilience and well-being, are useful
- bullying and harassment, most often by peers, are the most frequent threats that children and young people face both online and offline, with the significant difference that online bullying may have no respite. It occurs at any time, night or day in many ways and can be difficult for parents to detect. However, while prevalent, it is not the norm. Research appears to show that scare tactics to curtail bullying are not effective. Promoting the norm is a more effective strategy
- as in the off line environment, children and young people are not equally at risk online. Those most at risk often engage in risky behaviours and have difficulties in other parts of their lives. Vulnerable children for cyber bullying appear to be those with low self esteem or the socially excluded, those with body image issues, or mental health issues – generally the social and psychological factors of vulnerability are the same online and off
- while children and young people see the online environment differently from adults, their incorrect assumption of anonymity online needs to be addressed, with an understanding of the long-term impact that bullying and harassment online (and off) has on the perpetrator and the victim
- schools are an essential focus in cyber safety but much happens outside the influence of schools
- regulation is difficult and under constant review. The Internet is global, instantaneous, diffuse and not under any centralised control. Access to mobile phones, instant messaging and social networking platforms, netbooks, web enabled smart phones and wireless networks have revolutionised the digital environment within the last ten years
- parent use of the internet and social networking platforms, particularly those with children is now catching up to usage by children and young people so parents have a better understanding than 10 years ago
- those involved in investigating increasing cyber crime believe that the community needs to be informed and aware of crime and the emerging technologies available to try and ensure greater measures of cyber safety
- there is general agreement about the importance of continuing research on all aspects of cyber safety and for disseminating updated research to parents and the community at large.

Current initiatives in schools

APC notes that the 2003 National Safe Schools Framework is being reviewed to take account of the emergence of the new technologies and the need to incorporate changes to legislation regarding online crimes. The result of the Review is due shortly. The Framework has been influential in the creation of safe and supportive school environments.

Victorian primary school students have recently participated in cyber safety lessons aimed at engaging them in boosting their online awareness.

Deakin University has launched a pre-service teacher program provided by The Australian Communications and Media Authority's (ACMA) 'Cybersafety Outreach' aimed at equipping pre-service teachers with the skills and knowledge to educate students about cyber safety. This is to be made available to all universities in Australia.

APC believes that schools have been at the forefront of efforts to incorporate principles of resilience and well-being in their students in the offline environment through a number of programs and cross curriculum initiatives over past years. So perhaps it is not a change of the culture of schools that is needed but the expansion of existing prevention and intervention strategies that have proven successful in offline environments to promote cyber safety.

APC sees also that comprehensive information and strategies are available online from the websites of:

- the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), and their associated websites www.cybersmart.gov.au and Hector's World;
- the Department of Education Early Learning and Work Relations (DEEWR);
- the Alanah and Madeline Foundation, <http://www.amf.org.au/>;
- netalert <http://www.netalert.gov.au/> and associated websites;

and from many overseas websites.

Engaging Parents

One element missing from the school effort, however, appears to be the systematic engagement of parents in developing consistent whole school approaches to cyber safety, despite the engagement of parents being essential to efforts that are directed towards cyber safety.

The national parents organisations, APC and the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) have extensive state and territory networks, and have built up the understandings, knowledge and the language necessary to enable the meaningful engagement of parents. APC and ACSSO also jointly govern and direct the activities of the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau, which was established and is funded by the Australian Government.

Parent Initiatives

APC suggests that the national parent groups are in a position to tap the significant potential for greater parent engagement through:

- the conduct of a national survey to assist the understanding of levels of awareness among parents of current cyber safety risks and to discover strategies parents are adopting in the home
- the development of a cyber safety leaflet for parents incorporating principles of digital citizenship and best practice
- a national meeting of parent groups to design and distribute a charter for parents to guide Internet and digital platform use.

Complementary initiatives

To ensure broad understandings and mutual support in the area of cyber safety it would be useful if systems and schools developed integrated policy responses (e.g. use of ICT, personal responsibility/behaviour management, child protection, etc.) to adequately capture the role and responsibilities of students, staff and parents in regard to the appropriate and safe use of Internet and digital platforms.

All cyber safety strategies should acknowledge and reflect the value of peer to peer training and/or modeling and youth to adult training.

IAN DALTON

Executive Director APC

Sites and reports consulted

www.acma.gov.au

www.cybersmart.gov.au

deewr.gov.au

www.aph.gov.au/iscc

Alanah and Madeline Foundation website, <http://www.amf.org.au/>

Netaalert, <http://www.netaalert.gov.au/> and associated websites;

Enhancing Child Safety and Online Technologies: Final Report of the Internet Safety Technical Taskforce: to the Multi-State Working Group on Social Networking of State Attorneys General of the United States December 2008 <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jssc/subs.htm>

Covert Bullying Prevalence Study: Child Health Promotion Research Centre, Edith Cowan University, May 2009

EU Kids Online: Final Report: The London School of Economics and Political Science
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/EUKidsOnline/Reports/EUKidsOnlineFinalReport.pdf>

Youth Safety on a living internet: The final report of the Online Safety and Technology Working Group (OSTWG), <http://www.scribd.com/doc/32541059/Online-Safety-and-Technology-Working-Group-Final-Report>

Hackers, Fraudsters and Botnets: Tackling the Problem of Cyber Crime
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/coms/cybercrime/report>