



**CYBER  
SAFETY  
PROJECT**

**2023  
Digital Habits  
Round Up**

**5490 SECONDARY STUDENTS  
FROM 19 SCHOOLS ACROSS  
AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND**

## OVERVIEW

Throughout 2023, Cyber Safety Project have conducted a targeted anonymous survey of 5490 secondary school students across 19 schools in Australia and New Zealand. These surveys aim to capture insights into the current digital habits of nominated student cohorts.

The Digital Habits Survey explores personal use of digital technologies, including school-based devices and personal devices (such as, laptops, tablets, mobile phones and gaming consoles).

The survey findings include digital use statistics and perception data to enable correlations between access to digital tools and the safety and wellbeing of young digital users.

This report provides a snapshot of how young people in these communities are currently engaging with social networking and gaming platforms. It also provides insights into their experiences when using these tools to connect with their peers and a global community.

### KNOWLEDGE IS POWER.

Whilst painting a broad picture of the experiences of young people, these insights highlight varying needs, challenges and opportunities for targeted intervention to create a safer online world for everyone.

Some results in the report may affirm your current experiences of the challenges that are faced by young people. Some may surprise you. Most importantly, what we have learned from this data is that, overwhelmingly, young people enjoy connecting online. They want to stay safe and do have some knowledge of the risks involved with being a connected digital citizen. It's our hope that this report will assist you to support the young people in your community to safely navigate the online world.

### REFLECT

What does this data tell us?

What do we need to learn more about?

How can we support our community to be safe and healthy digital citizens?



## SNAPSHOT SUMMARY

### Digital Use General Insights

**5490 secondary school students completed the survey.**

2747 students surveyed identified as female, 2378 identified as male and 92 identified as non-binary.

88% of students confirmed they have their own mobile phone. Outside of learning time, 36% of these students use their device for 3 hours or more each day. Research shows the use of devices immediately before sleeping affects sleep quality. **Concerningly, 68.5% of students have no boundaries in place at home regarding taking personal devices into their bedroom overnight.**

### Social Networking Insights

**83% of students access social media.**

Most social networking platforms require users to be at least 13 years of age, including residents of Australia and New Zealand. The main reason for this is to comply with laws, particularly the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (1998) in the US, which prohibits the collection and storage of personal information of children. Concerningly, 75% of social media users had their first account before the age of 13. Of these users, 42% were 10 years or younger and 14% were 8 years or younger when they had their first account.

The survey indicated students are aware of the importance of having a private social media account, with 71% of social media users confirming they have their account set to private. However, 29% of those with Instagram accounts had 300 or more followers and 7% had 1000 or more followers. Of those with TikTok accounts, 25% had 300 or more followers and 10% had 1000 or more followers. Regardless of privacy settings, excessive numbers of followers can open the door for potential strangers (including scammers and users with malintent) to be engaging with young people.

Of the students who use social media, 76% use Snapchat. A feature of Snapchat is Snap Maps – a location service allowing followers to see your location on a satellite map.

Many of the students surveyed who use Snapchat are selective about sharing their location on the app, with 34% of users enabled Ghost Mode and a further 50% filtering their location to specific friends. Unfortunately, 16% of users do not have Ghost Mode switched on, therefore sharing their location (on a map) with all they are connected with.

Anonymous messaging apps have been used by 17% of students in the previous 12 months. These apps provide platforms for receiving messages and feedback from others without knowing the sender.

Likewise, they are also able to send messages with no accountability. Anonymous messaging apps are synonymous with negative, toxic and sometimes bullying behaviours.

### Online Gaming Insights

**74% of students play online games.**

34% of students who play online games do so for 7 or more hours each week – more than an hour per day – with 10.5% playing for 16 or more hours each week. 70% of gamers report they have spent longer playing than intended. This is a reflection of the addictive nature of online gaming. Nearly 1 in 4 (23%) have streamed other gamers on platforms such as, Twitch or YouTube.

### Artificial Intelligence Insights

Artificial Intelligence programs, such as ChatGPT, have become a household name in 2023. At the time of surveying, 17% of students had used ChatGPT, mainly experimenting with the platform. Interestingly, 26.5% of students surveyed perceive the use of AI/ChatGPT for school work as a form of cheating.

# SNAPSHOT SUMMARY

## Help-seeking Insights

It is highly likely young digital citizens will experience a challenging online situation where they need to turn to somebody for support. 35.6% of students indicated a parent as the person they would seek help from first if something went wrong online. Only 2.4% said they would first turn to another trusted adult, for example, a teacher, chaplain or school counsellor. More than half (57.8%) of students surveyed said they would reach out to a peer (friend or sibling) first if something went wrong online. Young people may not be equipped with the resources or resilience to support a friend or sibling who may be experiencing online harms or exposure to cyber-crimes.

## Digital Safety

### SHARING PERSONAL INFORMATION

According to the eSafety Commissioner, 1 in 3 young people have a photo of themselves online in their school uniform. Pleasingly, only 13% of all students surveyed have posted a photo online in their school uniform. This indicates an awareness of sharing personal information online. Children should be encouraged to think before they share photos and data online and consider the safety risks of sharing personal information online.

### LIMITED USE OF PRIVACY SETTINGS

Setting social networking and gaming spaces to private is highly recommended for young people. 71% of students surveyed confirmed they had set their social networking accounts to private. Unfortunately, 22% of students confirmed their accounts were public, and 7% of students were unaware of their profile visibility.

### GIVING AWAY PASSWORD & ACCOUNT INFORMATION

23% of all students surveyed said they have logged into a social networking account on a friend's phone or device. This behaviour puts students at risk of losing control of their personal accounts – whereby friends post on behalf of friends, unknowingly change profile settings and block peers from their own accounts.

### ENGAGING WITH STRANGERS

Of all students surveyed, 1 in 2 have chatted to a stranger online. Those who play online games are highly likely to interact with strangers online, with 83% having played an online game with a stranger and nearly half (47.5%) of gamers connecting multiple times with someone they first met online. Concerningly, 34% of gamers stated they have become regular friends with someone they first met in an online game. This could lead to students building trusting relationships with malintent users.

## Digital Wellbeing

### NEGATIVE DIGITAL EXPERIENCES

Social exclusion extends beyond the school ground with 31% of students surveyed reporting they have felt left out after seeing something posted online.

Online content is highly curated and usually not a reflection of 'real life' experiences and expectations. Concerningly, when it comes to social networking users, 46% feel they compare their life to others who they follow and 40% admit the use of social media has made them feel sad or poorly about themselves. Gamers also have negative digital experiences, with 18% admitting they have been made to feel uncomfortable while playing a game online.

### CYBERBULLYING & NEGATIVE BEHAVIOURS

In today's online world, it is likely young people will witness negative behaviours towards others. 53% of all students surveyed had witnessed negative behaviour towards others online and 38% had received a negative comment online. Some of these experiences are continued and targeted, with 8% of students feeling they had been cyberbullied in the previous 12 months.



## SNAPSHOT SUMMARY

Negative behaviours are common in online games too – 55% of students surveyed who play online games shared that they were concerned about how others behave on these platforms.

When responding to experiencing negative behaviours, students indicated they were unlikely to take an assertive approach with only 12.5% stating they would tell a responsible adult and only 4% saying they would alert the person of the negative behaviour.

Interestingly, 50% of students said they would ignore it and keep socialising, 14% said they would leave the conversation or group and 13% said they would respond back with a negative comment.

Students were less likely to ignore negative behaviours if they witness it occurring to somebody else, with only 36% reporting they would ignore the behaviour and keep socialising. In these scenarios, students were three times more likely to exhibit upstander behaviour – 12% saying they would alert the person to the negative behaviour. 24% of students said they would reach out to the person impacted and offer support and 8% said they would leave the conversation or group, but only 3% admitted they would tell a responsible adult.

### NUDES/SEXTING

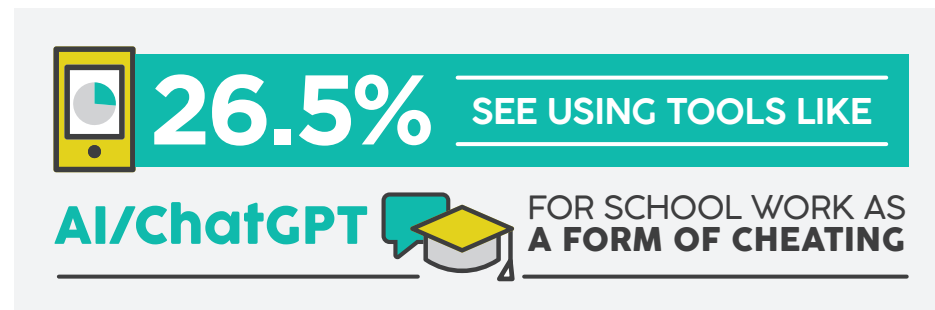
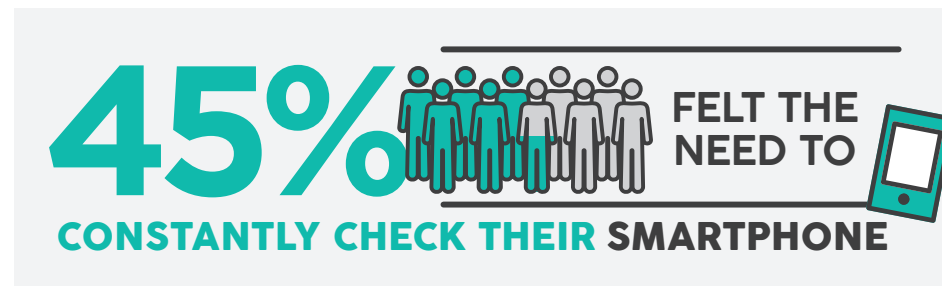
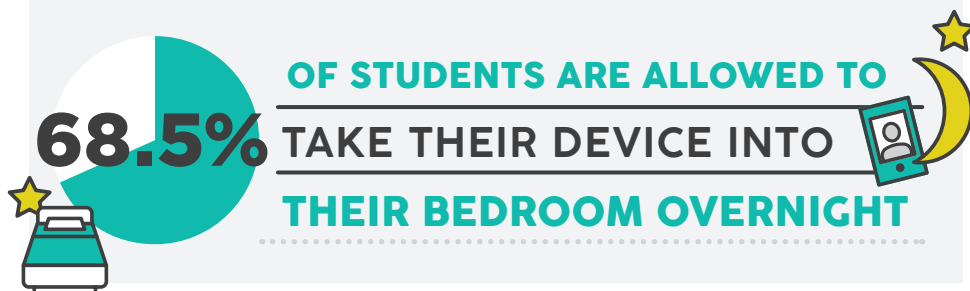
According to an eSafety Commissioner report, Young People and Sexting – Attitudes and Behaviours (Dec 2017), 1 in 3 Australian teens (14-17 years old) were involved with sexting. Sexting is the sending, being asked and asking and sharing or showing nude or nearly nude images or videos. 14% of students surveyed have received a nude image, and 29% of these students who had received a nude image were in Years 7 or 8. 11% of students surveyed had been asked to send a nude image, and nearly half (49.4%) of those who had been asked were in Years 7, 8 or 9. It's critical that young people are aware of their digital responsibilities, including consent and laws around sending and storing nude images. For further information, we recommend visiting Youth Law Australia ([yla.org.au](http://yla.org.au)) with young people in your care.

### DIGITAL DEPENDENCIES

Young people show high levels of digital dependency with 45% of students surveyed admitting they feel the need to constantly check their phone or device. Of those who use social networking platforms, 30% estimated they check their social networking accounts more than 20 times a day, 66% felt social media could be a distraction to their learning and 57% felt social media distracted them from their family. Social media platforms are designed to keep users coming back for more. Concerningly, 74% felt they spent more time on social media than they had planned. Gamers also displayed digital dependencies, with 53% feeling gaming has distracted them from spending time with family.



## GENERAL INSIGHTS



## HELP-SEEKING

If something went wrong online

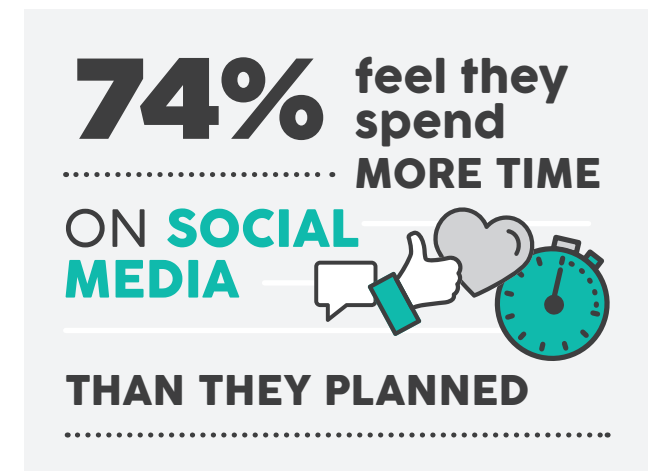
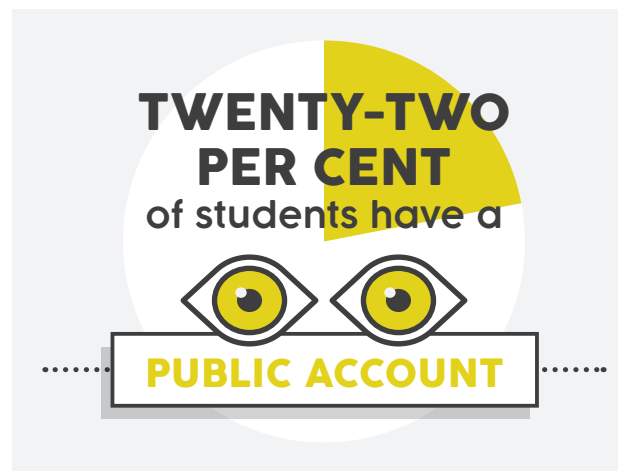
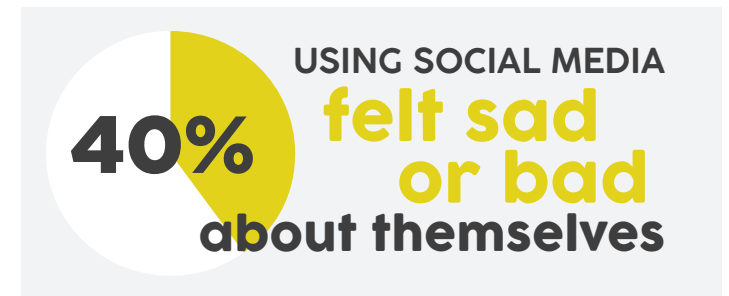
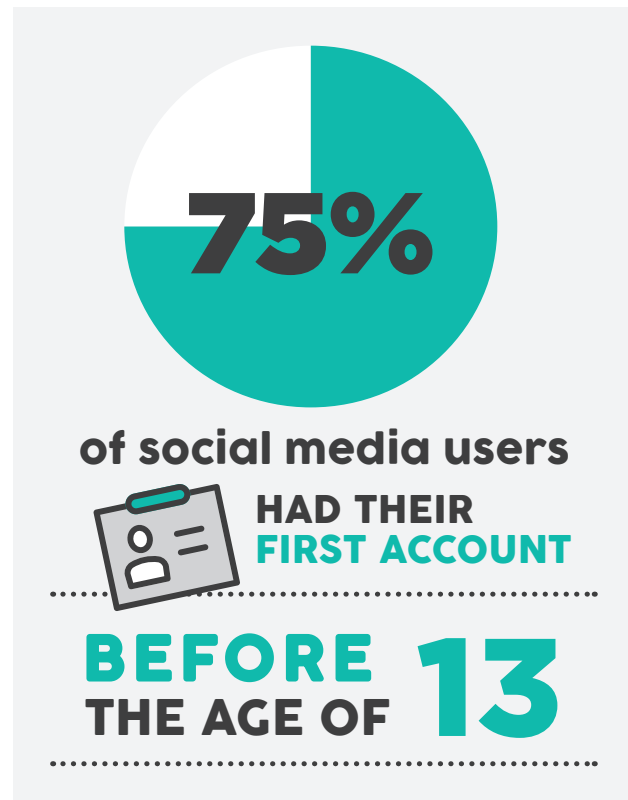


WOULD TURN TO A PARENT FIRST




WOULD TURN TO A FRIEND OR SIBLING FIRST

## SOCIAL NETWORKING



## ONLINE GAMING

**70%** have spent **LONGER PLAYING** ONLINE GAMES THAN THEY INTENDED




**53%** FELT GAMING HAS DISTRACTED THEM FROM SPENDING TIME WITH FAMILY

**55%** concerned ABOUT THE BEHAVIOUR OF OTHERS DURING ONLINE GAMES




**83%** HAVE PLAYED ONLINE GAMES WITH STRANGERS




## CYBER BULLYING & NEGATIVE BEHAVIOURS

**53%** HAVE SEEN NEGATIVE BEHAVIOURS TOWARDS OTHERS ONLINE




## NUDES / SEXTING

**14%** HAVE RECEIVED A NUDE IMAGE



**NEARLY HALF**



of those who had been asked to send **A NUDE IMAGE**

WERE IN YEAR **7, 8 OR 9**





# NEXT STEPS

Proactive measures you can take immediately to protect your community.

## REFLECT

Take time to reflect on these insights. How might you use this information to develop your community's cyber safety and digital wellbeing? Consider recruiting Cyber Safety Project to implement a [Digital Habits Survey](#) with your school community.

## REVIEW

Audit your current cyber safety processes, policies and programs. Engage all stakeholders in reviewing and updating documentation to align with current trends and needs of the community.

## COMMUNICATE

Start the conversation and keep it going. Open communication from the beginning normalises conversations around cyber safety and digital wellbeing, and children will be more likely to talk if something goes wrong online. Our free [Conversation Checklist](#) is a great starter for families. For educators, our free set of [Emotions Cards](#) include activities for the classroom.

## ROLE MODEL

Children look to the adults around them and follow their behaviours. Model a healthy use of technology. Set up expectations for healthy and positive use of technology with the [Digital Use Agreement](#) and [Digital Balance Challenge](#).

## EDUCATE

Provide proactive education to everybody in your community. Empower young people through [student sessions](#) and [sequenced curriculum](#). [Professional learning](#) and [strategic planning](#) equips educators to level up their teaching of cyber safety and digital wellbeing.

## PROMOTE

Consistently promote safe, positive and ethical use of technologies. Promote available help seeking resources amongst your community, including online and localised platforms.

- [esafety.gov.au/report](https://esafety.gov.au/report)
- [kidshelpline.com.au](https://kidshelpline.com.au)
- [headspace.org.au](https://headspace.org.au)
- [accce.gov.au](https://accce.gov.au)
- [lifeline.org.au](https://lifeline.org.au)
- [gamblershelp.com.au](https://gamblershelp.com.au)
- Local community health services
- Local community mental health services
- Local community legal support services



Creating cyber safe communities

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