

How Safe are Australian Children in the Internet Age?

Research and safety advice by ESET on online behaviour patterns and the security risks Australian children face



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Before the age of sixteen, Australian children now commonly have their own laptop, smartphone, or tablet, and children as young as five years old are using the internet unsupervised.

The next generation of digital natives are connecting to the internet every day, yet research by antivirus company ESET shows that online behaviour safety best practices are not being taught to the younger generations.

Did you know that fewer than half of Aussie parents have had 'the talk' about cyber safety with their children?

The majority of Australian parents are aware of the amount of time their children spend online, and the serious issue of cyberbullying. However, parents are grossly underestimating other risks their children are taking online. ESET has found that children are potentially exposing themselves to significant dangers by regularly talking to strangers, sharing personal information, streaming music and video content, and rarely change their passwords.

Raising awareness among children of best practices for using the internet and social media safely is the shared responsibility of parents, governments, and teachers, as each play a significant role in influencing children's behaviour. The following report outlines key findings by ESET on the online behaviours of Australian children aged 5-16, as well as practical advice on how to minimise risk and prevent danger.

"The counter-measures to cyber security threats are, for the most part, common sense. By cultivating a mindset in which common sense and security are ingrained in children, you will enable them to become responsible technology users," said Righard Zwienenberg, cyber security expert at digital protection company ESET.

Looking closely at survey data revealing how Australian families are accessing the internet and educating their children, the following report covers:

- Who is accessing what online and how?
- Our kids are taking more risks than we think
- How we protect children online
- Best practice advice for mitigating online risk
- A look at Aussie families state-by-state
- Further resources, about the data and about ESET

Who is accessing what online and how?

ESET's research involved interviewing over 1,000 Australian parents and their children aged 5-16.

The research showed that families are rapidly transitioning from sharing computers and technology devices across several family members, to having several devices each.

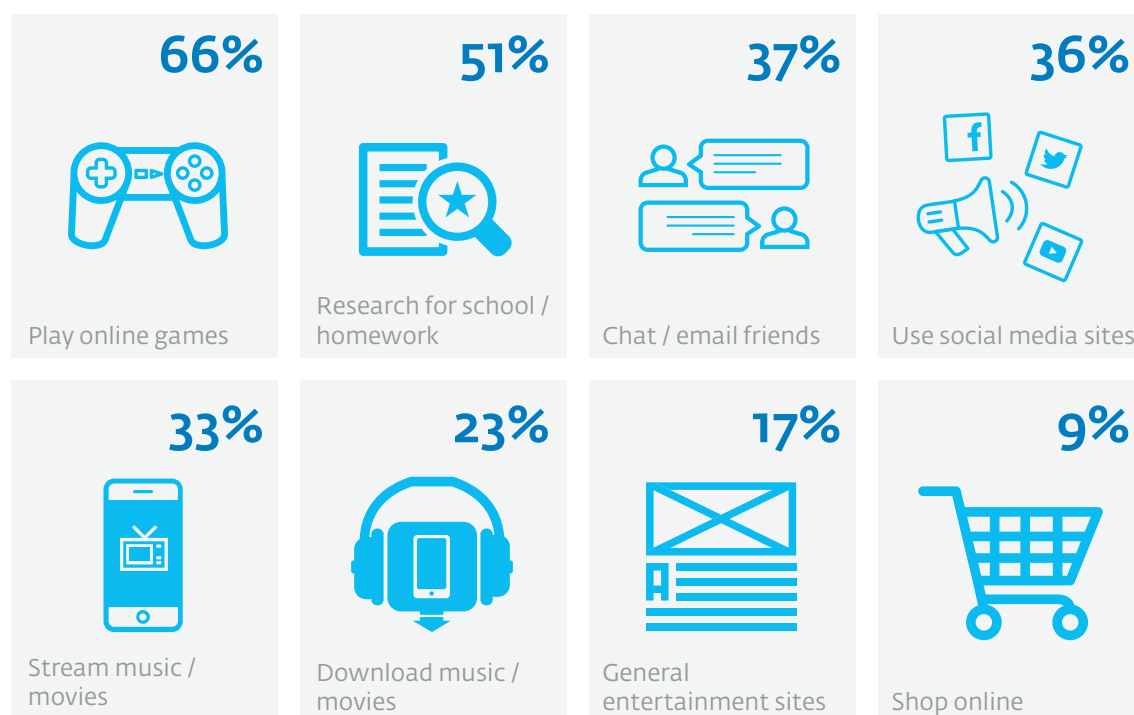
- 46% of children aged 13-16 are using their own laptop/computer
- 28% of children are using tablets

Accessing the internet through multiple sources will multiply the chances of security threats and risks, as these differ and are unique for mobile, desktop, and tablet devices.

As for the amount of time children are spending online, parents believe their children are spending 115 minutes per day, while children reported spending a very close 114 minutes. This demonstrates children are not using the internet secretly, and parents are fully aware of when their children are online.

- Children are spending 114 minutes per day online

Children are going online for a variety of reasons. Most are using the internet to play online games or for research or homework. Over a third are using it to chat to and email friends, and similar numbers use social media sites or stream music and movies.



Our kids are taking more risks than we think

A third of all Aussie children know someone who has engaged in risky online behaviour.

Stranger danger

The most surprising and worrying findings in this report show Australian children are taking more risks than their parents think they are. More than one in four of Aussie kids have engaged in risky online behaviour with a stranger, which could include communicating with them online, connecting with them on social media, sharing their e-mail address, or sending photos of themselves.

Alarming, 3% of Australian children have arranged to meet an online stranger in person, representing 85,565 children across the country. These figures clearly show that not enough is understood about the consequences of risky behaviours online.

“Sharing personal information with a stranger online can lead to undesirable consequences, for the child and their family. In a worst-case scenario, this could include child crime or harassment,” said Righard Zwienenberg.

A quarter of children know someone who has communicated with a stranger online, and one in ten know someone who has sent photos of themselves to a stranger.

This forces us to question whether children are aware of the dangers associated with their behaviour, as well as how to talk to adults about other children who may be at risk.

Cyber bullying

Two out of five Australian children know someone who has experienced cyber bullying, with this ratio increasing among older children. For children aged 13-16 years old, 49% know of someone who has had rumours spread about them via e-mails or social networking sites, and 38% know of someone who had been sent hurtful e-mail messages from someone online.

The significant volume and quality of conversation around cyber bullying in Australia's schools and in the media has shown to have strongly impacted the views of parents, with 74% now showing concern about peer-to-peer bullying via the internet.

While the prevalent issue of cyber bullying is still clearly active among children, the high rate awareness among parents demonstrates Australia is making positive strides in this space.



More than one in four of Aussie children have engaged in risky online behaviour with a stranger.



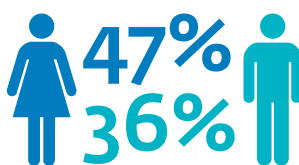
69%

of children aged between 13-16 know someone who has been bullied online



3%

of Aussie children have arranged to meet an online stranger in person, this represents 85,565 children.



47%
36%

Of those who have engaged in risky behaviour online, girls are more likely to have connected with a stranger on social media than boys

How we protect children online

Did you know that fewer than half of Aussie parents have had 'the talk' about cyber safety with their children? Although this is the most popular way Australian parents are choosing to protect their children online, a worrying 52% of parents do not do this. Mums are more likely than dads to have had the cyber safety talk with their children, and parents living in regional areas are more likely to have had the cyber safety talk with their children than city-dwellers.

Parents are not the only guiding influence in children's lives. Parents think that teachers should be discussing cyber safety with their students every month.

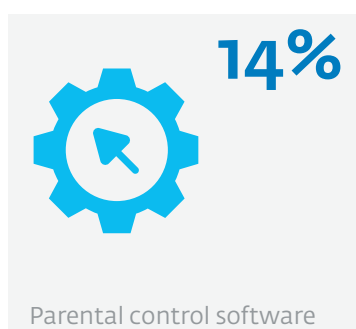
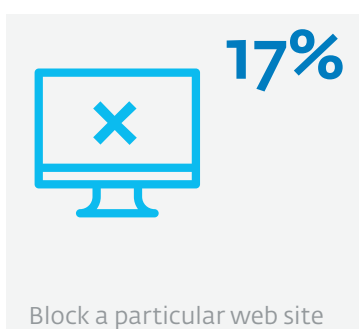
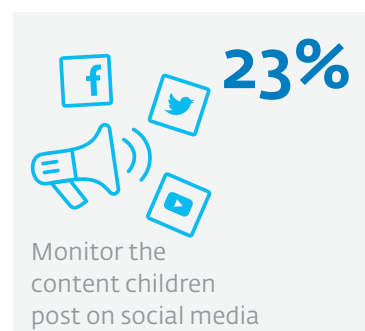
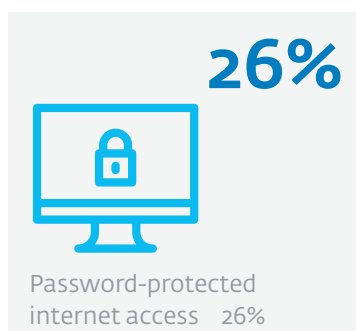
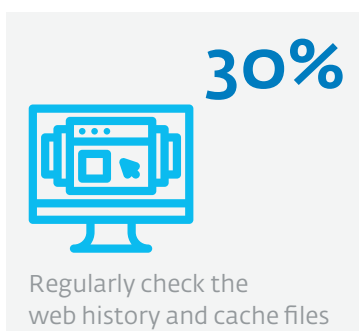
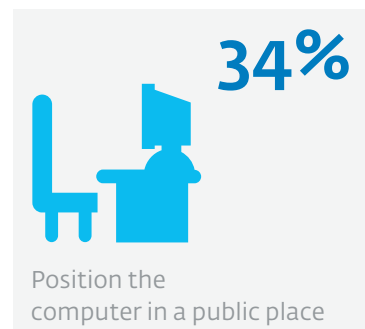
The next most prevalent methods used by Aussie parents to protect children are:

- Active supervision (i.e. sitting with your child while they are online) (36%)
- Only allowing computer access in a public place (34%)

- Regularly checking browsing history and cache files (30%)




Mums are more likely to check browsing history and cache files than dads, and Mums are also more likely to restrict internet access with a password.

"Education is the most important tool parents have in the mission to keep their children and family safe online. This lays the groundwork for creating good digital citizens. However parents should also utilise the multitude of safety technologies available to either reinforce the good behaviour they have taught their children, or act as a safety net for when potentially harmful behaviour does occur," said Righard Zwieneberg.

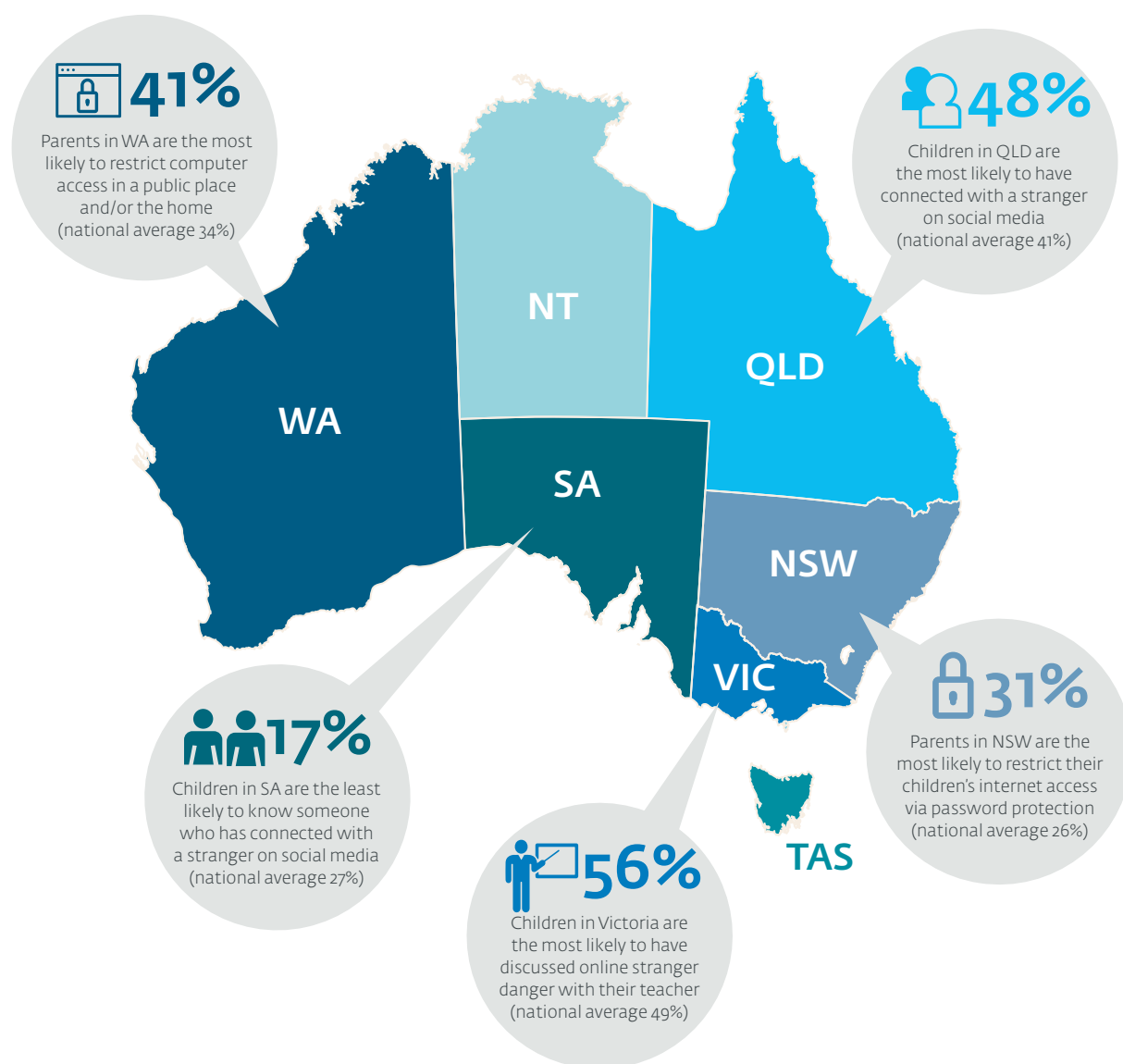


Best practice advice for mitigating online risk

“Parents need to realise that it takes time for young kids to understand and adopt safe computing habits. Therefore, it is crucial for adults to monitor their children’s online activities while they learn. This is the best way to stop any undesirable activities, and more importantly, educate children on best-practices for the future.”

	Current level of protection	The risks	Advice on creating a safer environment
Education	 <p>48%</p> <p>Fewer than half of Aussie parents have had the 'talk' about cyber safety with their children.</p>	<p>Low awareness of cyber security and associated risks makes it difficult for children to understand new concepts like "online stranger danger" or grooming.</p> <p>Educating children on cyber security through parents and teachers are the best ways to improve awareness on best practices for online behaviour, minimising a whole range of risks from illegal file sharing to nasty viruses.</p>	<p>One of the most effective ways parents and teachers can combat cyber security, is by creating a space in which children feel comfortable with talking about their online habits and any concerns or security threats they have come across.</p> <p>To do this, parents and teachers need to make themselves aware of the full scope of accessible threats and make a regular habit of explaining to children how these present dangers. Incentivising responsible use of technology is a good way of maintaining high standards of safe online behaviour.</p>
Passwords	 <p>23%</p> <p>Almost one quarter of Aussie children never change the passwords to their online accounts.</p>	<p>Passwords that are easy to guess open doors for hackers.</p> <p>Keeping all passwords the same for different applications and not regularly updating your password can present more risks.</p>	<p>Explaining good password complexity to children can be a challenge and also difficult for them to remember. Some more realistic and effective options are:</p> <p>Password managers: Installing a password manager app will create strong and unique passwords for children that can be regularly updated. For their master password, children could use passphrases rather than passwords, which can be a series of words or even a full sentence that is simple and easy to remember.</p>
Stranger danger	 <p>21%</p> <p>1 in 5 of Aussie parents are not concerned about the possibility of online grooming.</p>	<p>Grooming is a process whereby an adult attempts to persuade a child to engage in sexual activities by developing an emotional connection with the child and a sense of trust.</p> <p>More Aussie parents are concerned about their children accidentally seeing adult material (84%) and the possibility of them downloading viruses (82%), than online stranger danger and grooming (79%).</p>	<p>Online grooming is a growing issue and needs to be addressed seriously and regularly by parents to avoid dangerous offline behaviour by children (e.g. meeting strangers in person). This must be made clear to children by parents and teachers alike.</p>

A look at Aussie families, state-by-state



Further resources

Cyber security is a major issue that is affecting individuals and families in Australia and around the world. By understanding the behaviours of children, our most vulnerable internet users, we can best equip parents, teachers, and other influential institutions to effectively educate children and enforce safe online behaviours for the next generation of digital adopters.

Righard Zwienenberg, cyber security expert concludes, "As with many things in life, it is easier when we learn and practise doing things the right way when young. Thus teaching safe computing practices to young children will provide a backdrop which they can lean on when as they move into adult life."

There are many resources available for parents or educators who want to begin educating children about cyber safety. The National Cyber Security Alliance provides free tips for families and educators, as well as businesses. The Australian Government also provides free resources, such as Budd:e, Cybersmart, and Stay Smart Online.

About the data

The survey was commissioned by ESET and conducted by Lonergan Research. A total of 1,053 Australian parents and their children aged 5-16 years were interviewed. Surveys were distributed throughout Australia including both capital city and non-capital city areas. Fieldwork commenced on Friday, 9 January, 2015 and was completed on Monday, 19 January, 2015. This study was conducted online amongst members of a permission based panel. After interviewing, data was weighted to the latest population estimates sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

About ESET

Since 1987, ESET® has been developing award-winning security software that now helps over 100 million users to Enjoy Safer Technology. Its broad security product portfolio covers all popular platforms and provides businesses and consumers around the world with the perfect balance of performance and proactive protection. The company has a global sales network covering 180 countries, and regional offices in Bratislava, San Diego, Singapore and Buenos Aires. For more information visit www.eset.com/au/ or follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.