

Local community gets behind Safer Internet Day

By Erin Archer

Celebrated in 150 countries around the world, but coordinated in Australia, Safer Internet Day raises awareness about online safety with events and activities happening right across the globe.

In a community led approach, Safer Internet Day promotes the safe and positive use of digital technology among a wide range of groups such as children and teenagers, parents and carers, educators, and the elderly. The aim is to create a safer and “better internet”, where everyone is empowered to use technology responsibly, respectfully, critically and creatively.

The theme for 2020, “together for a better internet” encourages everyone to join the movement, to participate and to make the most of the Internet’s potential to bring people together.

What if I’m not technologically savvy?

Education is the key message, however, different demographics have different needs, according to the eSafety Commissioner’s Education Outreach Manager, Kellie Britnell.

She said each group requires different educational strategies to help them understand and be aware of Internet dangers.

“Older Australians can be susceptible to online scams. They have specific needs around being familiar with all the technology that younger people have always had access to.

“[With] younger people, it’s about bringing offline values like respect, resilience and responsibility to the online space,” she said.

In the lead up to Safer Internet Day, the Office of the eSafety Commissioner has released a wide variety of online resources aimed at helping parents and children start what can sometimes be a difficult conversation.

This includes webinars, which allows parents and caregivers of primary and secondary school children the chance to interact with educational experts and up-skill their knowledge about Internet safety.

Schools and parents partnership

Michaela Kenwell, from Central West NSW, sometimes feels like she's falling behind the times when it comes to the ever-evolving dangers of the Internet, but credits her daughter's school on helping educate both parents and children.

"I had a note sent home from school which explained what [websites] were ok to access and how to be respectful with it – and the child and the parent had to sign the note after they'd explained it to their children, and send it back to school", she said.

Ms Kenwell says while she believes her daughter's school is appropriately dealing with Internet safety, further communication between the school and parents could make it more cooperative.

Primary and high school teachers remain one of the biggest influences to spread Internet safety awareness, with most of the eSafety Commission's developed resources sent to their educational stakeholders.

Looking forward

The eSafety Commission is hoping Safer Internet Day is just the start of a much bigger celebration of Internet safety, with Ms Britnell saying the concept can be broadened to employment and business sectors too.

“Organisations and corporates are getting on board, because they know if employees are smarter online... it means being more aware of any risks that can impact you”, she said.

Ms Kenwell believes a pragmatic approach is necessary when teaching children about Internet safety and that education on the subject should develop according to age, similar to sex education.

“Introduce stranger danger on the Internet to begin with, and then when they are in year 6, give a more in depth explanation”, she said.

Ms Britnell said everyone has a responsibility to make a positive difference online, and encouraged community groups and schools to participate during Safer Internet Day.

“It’s about encouraging the community that you’re in, whether that be your peers, your employees, students, or your family to talk about ways to improve online safety,” she said.