

# Inquiry into improving the delivery of respectful relationships and sex education relevant to the use of technology in Queensland state schools



## Key Contact

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CEO



## Terms of Reference

1. That the Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee consider and report on how to improve the delivery of respectful relationships and sex education in regards to the use of technology in Queensland state schools.

The Committee is asked to consider the following:

- a) the prevalence of sexualised content and the unsafe use of technology by students;
  - b) how adequately the Health and Physical Education curriculum supports students to make safe and healthy choices and understand respectful relationships, particularly given students' greater access to technology; and
  - c) consideration of other jurisdictions' approach to tackling sex education and the issue of at risk behaviour and sexualised content creation by students.
2. In undertaking the inquiry, the committee should also consider, the potential benefits of students being better informed about the risks behind the use of technology in a sexual nature.

## The Daniel Morcombe Foundation

The Daniel Morcombe Foundation (DMF) was established in 2005 by parents Bruce and Denise Morcombe after their son Daniel was abducted and murdered in December 2003 while waiting to catch a bus on the Sunshine Coast. DMF was established as a lasting legacy to Daniel and now has two main aims:

- educating children on how to stay safe in physical and online environments
- supporting young victims of crime

Every year we support thousands of parents, carers and children across Australia to develop skills and confidence to ensure that young people can engage safely with the world while understanding child safety risks and how to manage these. DMF has delivered education to over 260 000 students across Queensland and additionally has visited over 1000 schools and communities across Australia. Annually the DMF host the largest Child Safety awareness event in Australia called Day for Daniel. Over one million Australians on this day in October wear red, educate and donate for the Foundation, including 3000 schools across the nation.

DMF has a strong track record in the development of trusted resources for families and education professionals. The development and adoption of the Daniel Morcombe Child Safety curriculum is now a part of the official Education Queensland curriculum and available to over 500 000 primary school students.

## The issue

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that there are 4.8 million children and young people between the ages of 0 -18 living in Australia, of this group, 3.7 million are enrolled in school. The use of computers, laptops and tablets within education settings is now a firmly entrenched part of most student's day to day learning.

Children and young people's use of digital technologies and time spent online is increasing. Laptops, tablets and smartphones are commonplace in the backpacks of students all over Australia. With 80% of Australian teenagers (14-17 years) either owning or having a smartphone, the way children and young people access the internet is rapidly changing – it's mobile and not always supervised by parents.

Parents need to not only ensure that their children have access to technology for educational and recreational purposes but ensure that their use of it is healthy and positive. Many parents express fear and confusion about how to make sure their children are safe while they are online.

In Australia, 86% of all households have the internet at home and this number increases to 97% if there is a child under the age of 15 at home. Although most of us use the internet daily, many parents and teachers do not know how to start a conversation about online safety.

Most parents and teachers know they should be talking about online safety with report feeling overwhelmed at the range of topics they need to cover and don't know how to start. Much of the current advice fails to support how adults can have 'the talk' let alone teach; and lacks the crucial component of safety skill building for children and young people as they engage in online environments. We have reached a point where many children and young people are more digitally literate than adults are, and using platforms and engaging in online gaming that adults do not understand.

It is essential that all schools and parents be able to communicate in an age and stage appropriate manner about strategies for online safety and positive technology use. This includes openly discussing issues and problem solving potential scenarios with children from an early age. In this way, the adults in children's lives can become the protective software that is needed as children grow and create their own digital footprint in the world.

**Objectives of respectful relationships and sexuality education relevant to the use of technology must in Queensland State Schools must:**

- Provide prevention focused, evidenced based responses in curriculum and resource development to increase the safe, healthy, ethical, informed and critical use of technology
- Contribute to education and reform influencing gendered drivers of violence against children and women and people of diversity including stereotyping, controlling and disrespecting actions
- Contribute to the development of an expert workforce through professional development and whole school approach strategies
- Contribute to early prevention using developmental and age appropriate teaching and learning strategies from P-12

**The Daniel Morcombe Foundation recommends:**

- a) the inclusion of young people on committees, review boards, other policy making groups, so that their knowledge and experience can inform future frameworks and curriculum for understanding, educating and responding to potential and perceived risks associated with use of technology by young people with regards to respectful relationships and sexuality
- b) that education be focused on fostering ethical, respectful practices within online and mobile technology networks
- c) that education include acknowledgement of gendered implications with regards to messages, content and strategies
- d) that teachers, administrators, policy makers consider context specific, developmental and age appropriate educational responses for young people across P-12. At present supporting materials as related to Health and Physical Education exist for year levels P-10. Year 11 and 12 students would also benefit from appropriate, evidence based resources.
- e) evidence informed access for parents/carers to resources and information acknowledging respectful relationships and sexuality education strategies that acknowledge children and young people's rights and responsibilities with regards to safe, healthy, informed, ethical approaches to self-representation and expression
- f) that safe, informed and critical use of technology be included across other subject areas particularly but not exclusively in Information and Communication Technology in schools
- g) that teachers and administrators have access to information, resources and strategies including professional development, policies and learning and teaching materials reflecting evidence based, context specific, developmental and age appropriate methodologies
- h) teachers, administrators, policy makers and legislators consider the specific needs of those under 18, yet over 16 (age of consent to sexual activity)
- i) legislative reform to clarify application of existing laws to child exploitation materials (as they apply to technology), and to clarify lawful conduct between consenting children and young people

Children and young people can use technology in positive and safe ways. They can also be online and mobile in ways which can expose them to inappropriate messages and materials, risk their safety and the safety of others. Children and young people who have access to accurate, age appropriate education regarding use of technology that is supported by the parents, carers and professionals in their lives are more likely to make informed, ethical, respectful and responsible decisions and avoid and report exploitation.

### Key contact for further discussion

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<sup>1</sup> DET Key Statistics <http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/statistics/>

<sup>2</sup>A statistical picture of Australia's children <http://www.alrc.gov.au/publications/2-statistical-picture-australias-children/who-are-australias-children>

<sup>3</sup>4221.0 - Schools, Australia, 2016 <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4221.0>

<sup>4</sup>Aussie teens and kids online <http://www.acma.gov.au/theACMA/engage-blogs/engage-blogs/Research-snapshots/Aussie-teens-and-kids-online>

<sup>5</sup>Households with internet access at home <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/8146.0>