

In Conversation Snapshot

# Protecting children and young people from online sexual abuse

In Part 2 of this important conversation exploring the dangers of online abuse, Dr Leanne Beagley CEO of the National Centre, spoke with A/Prof Michael Salter and Carol Todd, the mother of Amanda Todd who tragically lost her life to cyberbullying. They explored some of the challenges that children and young people face, as well as the role parents, carers and other adults have in combating the epidemic of online child sexual abuse.

(See Part 1, *In Conversation* recording [here](#)).



Carol Todd  
Founder, Amanda Todd  
Legacy Society

“We know that globally every day there’s 750,000 predators... watching our kids”



# Online child sexual abuse: a public health issue

over  
**40,000**  
reports

The Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) received **over 40,000 reports** of child sexual exploitation in 2022-23.

**1 in 6**  
children

A recent survey conducted in the US showed that around **one in six children** will experience online sexual harm before the age of 18 years.<sup>1</sup>

● The **sheer number** of online platforms where sexual abuse can occur, including social media and gaming sites, can feel **overwhelming** for parents, carers and other adults who engage with children and young people.

● The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to generate and share child sexual abuse material is **increasing at a rapid pace**.

● Perpetrators are creating, via AI, depictions of **violent and sadistic** child abuse material.

● Children and young people often don't speak up as they **feel shame**, that it's **their fault**, feel **isolated**, and **scared** that any images or videos will be shared.

## A call to action

**Everyone** is responsible for protecting children and young people from online sexual abuse. It's the role of **parents** and **carers**, **schools**, **services**, the **broader community**, the **legal system** and all levels of **government**.

**Regularly talk** to the children and young people in your life about online safety – continual **connection** and **communication** is key. Don't assume a one-off discussion will be enough for a child to be able to recognise and speak up about abuse online sexual abuse.

**Be curious** and **learn** about the different platforms children and young people use to connect with others online, including their **benefits**, **risks**, **privacy settings** and **reporting mechanisms**. The eSafety Commissioner has published a comprehensive guide on the latest games, apps and social media, including how to report harmful content: [The eSafety Guide](#).



A/Prof Michael Salter  
School of Social Sciences,  
UNSW

"...on one hand we don't want to terrify the community, but on the other hand, I don't think we're telling the public the full story about how bad it is out there because we don't want to scare them... that's a fine line for us to walk."

Create a **supportive network** of trusted adults around children and young people – they may be too worried or afraid to tell a parent or carer as they might think they will be in trouble or have their device taken away if they raise a concern or say they have shared sexual content.

<sup>1</sup> Finkelhor D, Turner H, Colburn D. Prevalence of Online Sexual Offenses Against Children in the US. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2022;5(10)

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Create a **no-blame, non-judgemental** space where children and young people feel **empowered** and **safe** to tell you about the online platforms they use and to raise concerns about their online world.

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**Advocate for government**, policy makers and others to:

- be responsible for **removing content** of children being sexually abused
  - **require** online platforms to **prioritise** child safety and hold them to account when they fail to protect children and young people from online sexual abuse
  - better **fund research** in online child sexual abuse identification and responses
  - **invest more** into prevention and law enforcement.
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Carol Todd  
Founder, Amanda Todd  
Legacy Society

“Technology is wonderful, but we have to know how to use it properly. And we have to teach our kids what the red flags are...We need to talk to our kids a lot earlier, before they get devices”

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[Click here to access a recording of our online child sexual abuse \*In Conversation\* Webinar.](#)

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A/Prof Michael Salter  
School of Social Sciences,  
UNSW

“It takes a village to protect a child, but frankly...it also takes a village to hold people to account, not only for the sexual harm they commit to children but...[also] the technology sector”

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**Report** any online behaviour that is inappropriate to the relevant authorities:

- Call **000** if a child or young person is in immediate danger.
- Visit your local police station to make a report.
- Contact the **ACCCE** if a child or young person has experienced online child sexual abuse, sextortion or online grooming:  
<https://www.accce.gov.au/report>
- Contact the **eSafety Commissioner** if you become aware of child sexual abuse material online:  
<https://www.esafety.gov.au/report/what-is-illegal-restricted-content>
- The **eSafety Commissioner** can also help to remove sexual content that has been shared without consent:  
<https://www.esafety.gov.au/report/forms>