



97% of young Australians regularly use social media, according to ACMA. Picture: Josie Hayden

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Cyber-bullying on the rise in Australia as schools try to find ways to educate children on social media

Chanel Kinniburgh, Herald Sun

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OVER 460,000 Australian teens were victims of cyber-bullying last year, according to the Bully4U organisation.

With greater diversity across social media in recent years, avenues for cyber-bullying have increased, with more social networks like Instagram and Snapchat boasting increased user numbers.

Studies performed by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) show that 97% of young Australians regularly use social media and consider it an important part of their life.

“We have to mould young people’s minds to do positive things online. Education is the key to effectively targeting cyber bullying,” Cyberbully expert Brett Lee said.

Optus's new 'Digital Thumbprint' program is attempting to alleviate parents and teachers concerns about children's online interactions by teaching students about online etiquette and the potential dangers of the internet.

Delivered to 40,000 high school students over Victoria and New South Wales in the last year, the initiative offers three programs at no cost to secondary students in years 7 to 12.

"The reaction has been incredible, with 95% of student's participants reporting that they had learnt something new and 97% of teacher saying they had gained a greater knowledge of digital concepts" Program facilitator Tania Sarafian said,

Advocate for online safety teachings and Antoine College's E-Learning head James Lee said his schools participation in the program was an absolute success,

"A lot of kids were surprised to hear about the impact their actions have online."

One of contemporary society's greatest bullying stimuli is 'sexting' which involves sending sexually explicit photographs to another via a mobile device.

According to Guard Child — a website protecting children in a digital age — 20% of all teenagers have sexted and of those 11% were aged between 11 and 16.

"(There is) a lot of talk of suicide linked to cyber-bullying, especially among young girls," said Brett Lee.

As a former police detective Mr Lee said the new legislation which could send anyone receiving an inappropriate picture of someone under 18 to jail for two years and list them as a registered sex offender only contributes 10% to the efforts needed to stop cyber-bullying.

Mr Lee said that parents must insist on knowing what their child is doing online as they have the potential to connect with close to three million people from their bedroom.

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