Dear Parents and Carers at St. James Primary,

Thank you to those of you who attended the
Cybersafety Information Session for parents
and carers last week. As a follow up I wanted to provide you
with links to some of the resources I mentioned and reinforce the key
messages from the session.

For those of you who were unable to attend, it is my background as a former Victoria Police Detective working in Sexual Offences and Child Abuse which has instilled a passion in me to educate parents about the risks of their children's online presence.

I informed the parents and carers during the online session that I am *not* a cybersecurity expert nor have I obtained additional qualifications in computer science or IT.   However, I do hold a Bachelor of Behavioural Science (Psychology), Diploma of Police Studies, Advanced Diploma of Public Safety (Police Investigation), Cert III in Investigative Services and I am coming to you with the hindsight of almost 25 years of experience as an operational member of Victoria Police. But more importantly, like each of you, I am also a parent trying to navigate unchartered territory raising two daughters in this digital age.

Prior to the student session for year 3-6 students at St James I arranged for a survey to be conducted to determine how students use the internet and to identify any patterns or risks. The survey was completed anonymously and personal details or email addresses were not recorded. The results identified the following key findings:

- **65% of students reported that they had friends or followers they did not know**
- **47% reported that someone had been mean to them online**
- **7% were honest and reported that they had been mean to others online**
- **65% reported that they'd played an online game with someone they don't know**
- **47% reported they'd received a message from someone they don't know**
- **and 19% reported that they'd felt unsafe online.**

Of the 19% who reported they'd felt unsafe online, some had received messages from strangers saying they knew where they lived, reported that they had been bullied by classmates and others felt unsafe when their friends used inappropriate language during shared game time.

Only 80% of the children who reported having felt unsafe online or receiving a message from a stranger actually told someone. The main reasons students didn't speak up were that they didn't want to get into trouble, or they had deleted and blocked the user so didn't think they needed to share the information with an adult. And only 67% of parents ask their children questions about their device time.

The survey also showed that over ¾ of the students were allowed to use their device in the bedroom, and of those, 63% were allowed to use it unsupervised in the bedroom. What really concerned me was that more than 80% of that group were also allowed to have their bedroom door closed whilst they used their devices in their bedroom.

Now I'm speaking from my previous experience as a Police detective when I warn you that when you combine unsupervised online gaming with closed bedroom doors and playing and communicating with people online that they don't know, the risk of your children becoming engaged in being or exposed to bullying, online grooming or violence increases significantly.

I can't tell you how to raise your child, but I cannot express how strongly I feel about banning internet enabled devices, especially unsupervised use, in a child's bedroom or the bathroom. As well as the increased risk of experiencing negativity online, there is a wealth of research which supports the assertion that to ensure healthy sleep patterns, bedrooms should be for sleeping and not gaming or social media scrolling.

It would also be easy for me to say, 'don't let your child use that app or play that game', but research shows that restrictive measures don't work as well as education, boundaries, co-playing and supervision in keeping children safe. Finding the right balance between imposing restrictive measures and empowering children to use the internet in age-appropriate ways to enhance their creativity and learning opportunities is NOT an exact science, and as parents and carers you know your child better than anyone to support and guide them to have safer online experiences.

To help navigate this tightrope, here are my top tips:

Talk to your child about what they do online and what they know about staying safe. Cyberbullying, image based abuse, sexting, online grooming, identity theft and other offending has lasting impacts for the victim and their families, and children need to both understand the risks involved but also be armed with strategies to deal with any issues that may arise.

Encourage nonjudgmental and open communication, so that in the event that something happens or they are exposed to risks, children don't fear negative consequences by talking to you.

Consider your child's screen use in the context of their overall health and wellbeing. It can be easy to focus only on the clock and how long your child is spending in front of the screen, but the quality and nature of what they are doing and your involvement are just as important

Monitor their behaviour for signs something might be wrong. From changes in their personality, becoming more withdrawn or sad, changes in their sleep patterns, avoidance of school or becoming secretive about their online activities and/or mobile phone use. These are all signs that it is time to talk to your child. Work out what you want to say and how you want to say it, depending on the issue you want to talk about. It takes courage to share hard stories and as parents sometimes we try to discharge our own discomfort with blame, aggression, disappointment, and at times, trying to minimise or avoid discussing it altogether. Listen and respond with empathy and compassion. Try not to get uprooted and thrown into the storm yourself, it's the quickest way for your child to shut down or retract.

Educate yourself about what your child is doing online. Ask them to show you what they are doing and show an interest in learning about it. Remind them of the difference between the online world and creating real relationships and success in the real world. So many young people compare themselves in a negative way to the overly filtered highlight reel of so called 'influencers'.

Learn how to apply privacy settings, block and report content or users. I highly you visit recommend esafety.gov.au/parents for more information and support.

Consider parental controls and family agreements regarding the use of technology , including screen time limits and boundaries around the use of games and social media. For example, your family plan could include rules like this:

- no devices in the bedroom
- all screens off at least one hour before planned bedtime
- all family members switch off at dinner time
- devices charged overnight in a place your child cannot access
- and encourage your child to achieve a healthy balance by encouraging offline activities, exercise, and exploring nature.

By being proactive, the risks of harm from technology can be greatly reduced so, despite the fact that tweens and teens can be difficult to communicate with at the best of times as their desire for independence increases, continue to find opportunities to keep the lines of communication open.

Remember that it is never too early to instil good habits, and as your child gets older it is useful to keep reminding them of these basic digital intelligence principles: balance, respect, empathy, critical thinking and responsible behaviour. One of the best ways to do this is by demonstrating respectful and safe online practices yourself. Don't engage in negative online behaviours, have digital detox time, put the phone away at dinner, get outside with the kids and encourage your kids to show themselves and others compassion and kindness in their online interactions by demonstrating these qualities yourself.

So, to finish up, here are details of the online resources I recommended in my presentation:

esafety.gov.au and **cyber.gov.au**. These sites promote online safety education for children, educators and parents. They also provide a complaints mechanism for people experiencing cyberbullying, online image abuse and to report illegal or offensive content.

Bully Stoppers is an initiative of the education department and encourages prevention and strategies on how to deal with situations. The website also contains direct links to other support services like Kidshelpline, Lifeline, Parentline and Beyond Blue.

ThinkUKnow –provides a number of resources and advice for parents and children on issues such as sexting, general relationship advice and what you can do if an image appears online that you haven't consented to.

And finally, Kids Helpline - Australia's only free, private and confidential, telephone and online counselling service specifically for young people aged between 5 and 25. Children can call them on 1800 55 1800 or visit their website at kidshelpine.com.au

I also encourage parents and carers to speak to their child's teacher, wellbeing staff or principal if any incidents arise that involve other students. Don't take matters into your own hands. Australian schools support a nationally consistent approach to preventing and responding to
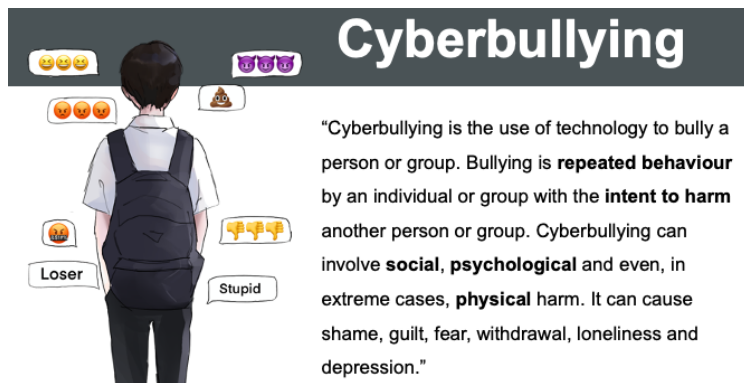
online safety issues. Schools are equipped to manage school related incidents in line with their policies and procedures.

Some cases may be unlawful and activate state reportable offences or mandatory reporting requirements, but for the majority of minor to moderate incidents, the focus is on removing content, resolving conflict and restoring relationships in the best interests of the student/s involved.

Thank you so much for your time and I wish you all the very best in your role as a Digital Parent,

Paula Jarski

PS. There was a request by some parents for screenshots from the slideshow relating to the law and how it applies to Cyber safety. I hope this information helps:

Cyberbullying

"Cyberbullying is the use of technology to bully a person or group. Bullying is **repeated behaviour** by an individual or group with the **intent to harm** another person or group. Cyberbullying can involve **social**, **psychological** and even, in extreme cases, **physical** harm. It can cause shame, guilt, fear, withdrawal, loneliness and depression."

Source: Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), Cybersmart

In summary under the Crimes Act you cannot cause apprehension (worry) or fear in another person. It is also illegal to participate in any conduct which causes another person to want to harm themselves. This can be face to face school yard incidents or online behaviour: it covers both. The change in the law has put online abusers on notice that if their actions cause people to fear physical or mental harm, they face a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment. The laws cover sending abusive emails, posting threatening or hurtful messages, photos or videos online or repeatedly sending unwanted messages. It also provides a basis for victims of cyberbullying to seek court imposed intervention orders.

Every State in Australia has adopted the age of 10 as the minimal age at which a child can be considered to have sufficient understanding between "right and wrong". Between the ages of 10 and 15 a child can be arrested and charged if the prosecution can prove beyond reasonable doubt that the child knew that the act would cause a crime to be committed as distinct from being a childish act of mere naughtiness. After 16 there is a irrebuttable presumption that ignorance to the law is no excuse.

SEXTING

DEFINITION

"Taking **naked** or **partly naked** photos or videos of yourself (posing in a sexual way) and **sharing** the photos or videos with others online or through your mobile phones; and **receiving**, **forwarding** or **posting** these photos or videos online or through mobile phones"

Source: National Children's and Youth Law Centre, Lawstuff

In summary, the law states that a person must not intentionally distribute an intimate image of ANYONE regardless of their age without their consent.

But for people under 18 the law is even stronger and it prohibits the distribution of ANY intimate image with or without consent. To strengthen the privacy of Victorians even more it is also an offence to *threaten* to distribute an image. There is an exception to this legislation which was designed to cater for consensual sexting between peer aged children aged under 18.
The law recognises that teenagers who engage in peer to peer sexting are distinct from child abuse material offenders. By peer age I mean both parties must be under 18 years of age and there must be LESS than two years of age between them.

Once a person turns 18, the exceptions no longer apply and what was once considered a sexting image could be considered child abuse material, even if the person obtained the image when they were under 18.

Penalties for child abuse material offences are very serious and can result in imprisonment and registration on the sex offenders registry. Penalties for distribution or threatening to distribute an intimate image can include a maximum of 2 years jail.

So Essentially:
it's not illegal to send a picture of yourself to someone however;
It is illegal for that person to forward the picture to someone else without your permission and…..
When children are involved in consensual peer to peer sexting there must be less than two years of age between them and the images can go no further than between them.