

OVERVIEW

Throughout 2024, Cyber Safety Project conducted a targeted, anonymous survey of secondary school students across Australia. These surveys aim to capture insights into the current digital habits of nominated student cohorts.

The Digital Habits Survey explores personal use of digital technologies, including school- and home-based devices, such as laptops, tablets, mobile phones and gaming consoles. Students report on their online experiences, with a focus on emotional responses when using technology and strategies employed to stay safe online.

The Teens & Screens in 2024 Report provides a snapshot of the ways in which young people in these communities are currently engaging with social networking and online gaming platforms. The report presents insights into young people's experiences when using technology to connect with their peers and a global community. The report draws comparisons with current trends and those seen across previous years.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Insights obtained from the survey highlight varying needs and challenges, providing opportunities for targeted intervention to create a safer world for everyone.

Some results in the report may affirm your current experiences of the challenges that are faced by young people. Some may surprise you. Most importantly, what we have learned from this data is that, overwhelmingly, young people enjoy connecting online. They want to stay safe and do have some knowledge of the risks involved with being a connected digital citizen. It's our hope that this report will assist you to support the young people in your community to safely navigate the online world.

REFLECT

What does this data tell us?

What do we need to learn more about?

How can we support our community to be safe and healthy digital citizens?



SNAPSHOT SUMMARY

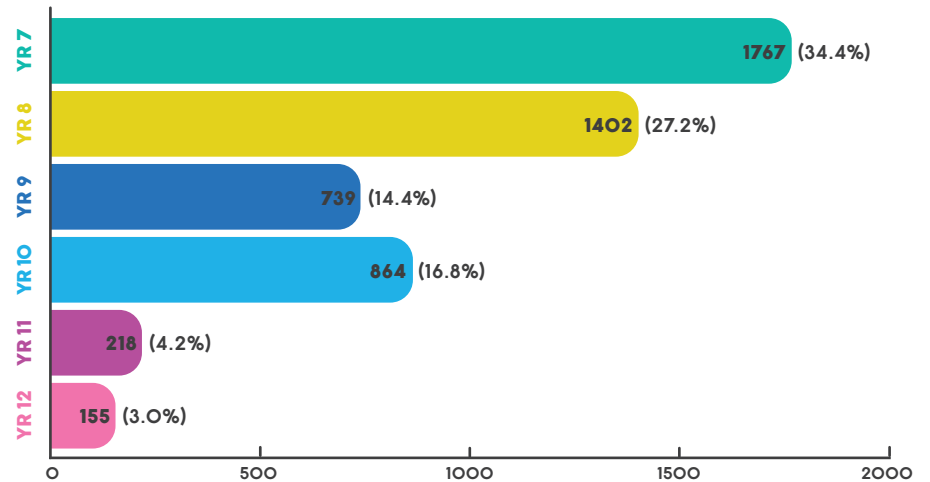
22 schools across Australia participated in our 2024 Digital Habits Survey.

The majority of schools were located in Victoria (68.2%), with 13.6% in NSW, 9.1% in Queensland, and 9.1% in WA.

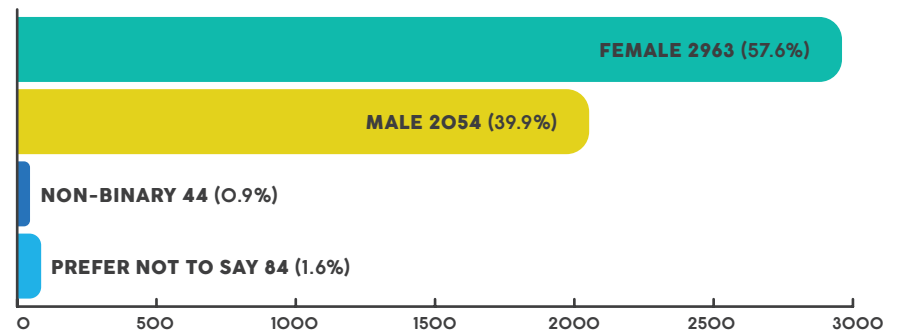
5145 secondary students completed the survey, representing a range of year levels and genders.



RESPONDENTS BY YEAR LEVEL



RESPONDENTS BY GENDER



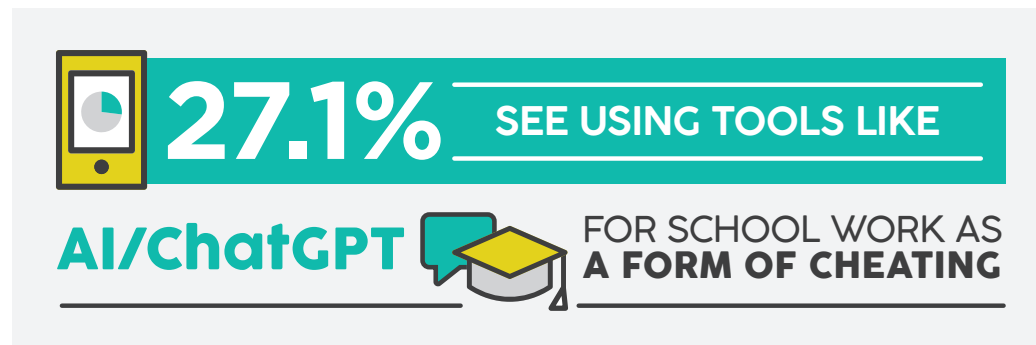
SNAPSHOT SUMMARY

Digital Use General Insights

93.7% of students confirmed they have their own smartphone. As expected, this percentage increases with age, with 89% of Year 7 students and 98.7% of Year 12 students surveyed having their own smartphone.

Outside of learning time, 29% of students said they use connected devices for more than 4 hours a day. Again, there was an increase from 20% of Year 7 students to 42% of Year 12 students reporting this level of usage.

Research shows the use of devices immediately before sleeping affects sleep quality. Concerningly, 58.9% of students surveyed who have their own smartphone have no boundaries in place at home regarding taking personal devices into their bedroom overnight. Again, there was a steady increase in this behaviour, with only 49% of smartphone owners in Year 7, but 78% of Year 11 and 12 smartphone owners, being given independence and a lack of boundaries overnight when it comes to smartphones. Pleasingly, there was an overall reduction in this behaviour. Of students surveyed in 2023, 68.5% were allowed to take their personal device into their bedroom overnight. This shows a growing awareness of the benefits of quality sleep and digital balance.



SNAPSHOT SUMMARY

Social Networking Insights

79% of students surveyed access social media. 58% of these users are female.

Most social networking platforms require users to be at least 13 years of age, including residents of Australia. The main reason for this is to comply with laws, particularly the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (1998) in the US, which prohibits the collection and storage of personal information of children. Concerningly, 76.5% of social media users had their first account before the age of 13. 17% of users had their first account by the time they were 9 years of age. These trends are similar to those reported last year.

The survey indicated students are aware of the importance of having a private social media account, with 72.5% of social media users confirming they have their account set to private. Older students were more likely to have an awareness of the privacy of their account, with only 61% of Year 7 students but 89.8% of Year 12 students having private accounts. 11% of Year 7 students were unaware of their account's privacy settings. This is concerning as most social media default settings are public. It was reassuring to see this statistic drop to 3% in Years 10, 11 and 12 students.

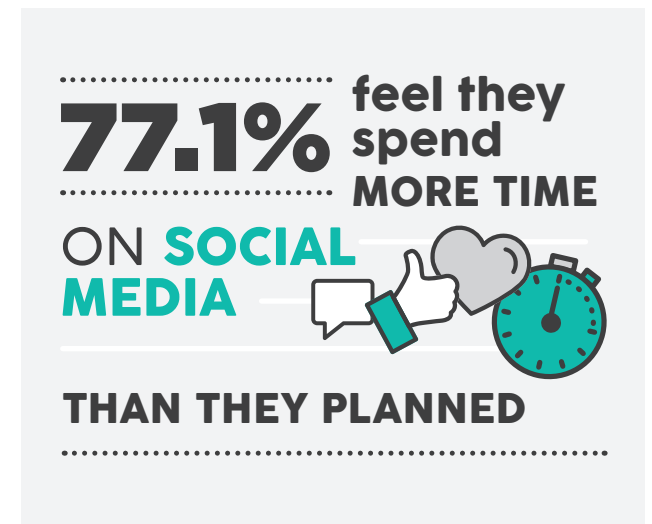
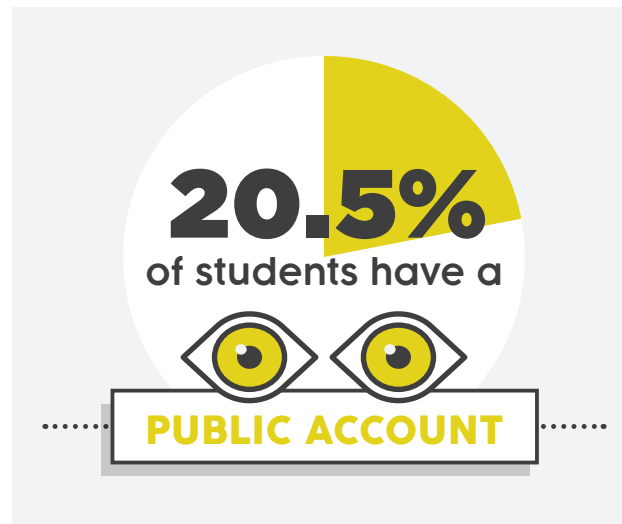
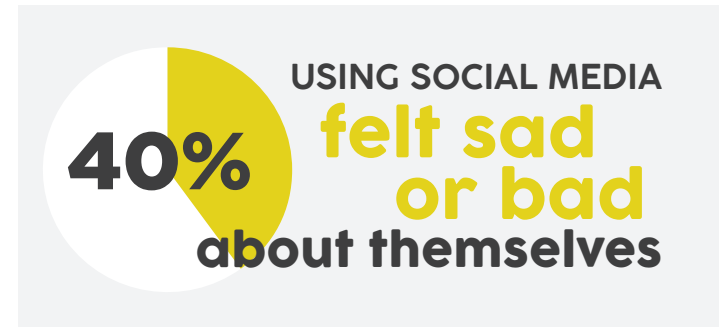
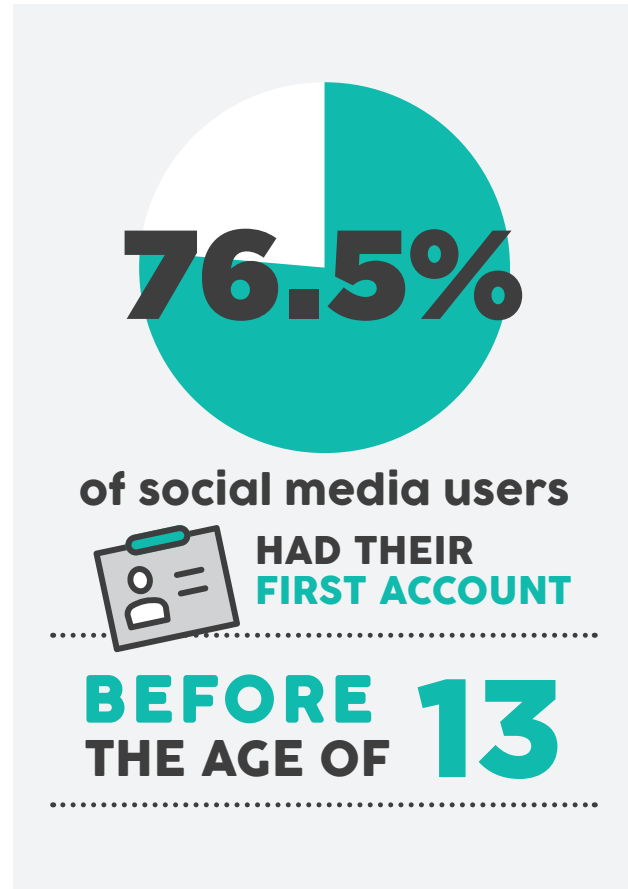
However, 29% of those with Instagram accounts had 300 or more followers and 7% had 1000 or more followers. Of those with TikTok accounts, 25% had 300 or more followers and 10% had 1000 or more followers. Regardless of privacy settings, excessive numbers of online followers can open the door for potential strangers (including scammers and users with malintent) to be engaging with young people. Of those with Instagram accounts, 24% had 300 or more followers and 132 students had more than 1000 followers. Of those with TikTok accounts, 26% had 300 or more followers and 9.8% had more than 1000 followers.

Of the students who use social media, 76.6% use Snapchat. A feature of Snapchat is Snap Maps – a location service allowing followers to see your location on a satellite map. Many of the students surveyed who use Snapchat are selective about sharing their location on the app, with 36% of users enabling Ghost Mode and a further 51.2% filtering their location to specific friends. Unfortunately, 12.8% of users do not have Ghost Mode switched on, therefore sharing their location (on a map) with all they are connected with.

Anonymous messaging apps have been used by 18% of students in the previous 12 months. These apps provide platforms for receiving messages and feedback from others without knowing the sender. Likewise, they are also able to send messages with no accountability. Anonymous messaging apps are synonymous with negative, toxic and sometimes bullying behaviours.



SNAPSHOT SUMMARY



SNAPSHOT SUMMARY


Online Gaming Insights

75% of students surveyed play online games.

Online gaming is popular amongst young people, with 90.5% of males surveyed playing. Additionally, 79.5% of non-binary students and 63.5% of female students play online games. Gaming is more popular amongst students in the earlier years of secondary school, with 80.2% of Year 7 and 77.6% of Year 8 students playing online games but only 60% of Year 11 and 44.5% of Year 12 students playing.

31.5% of students who play online games do so for 7 or more hours each week – more than an hour per day – with 8.5% playing for 16 or more hours each week. 69.3% of gamers report they have spent longer playing than intended. This is a reflection of the addictive nature of online gaming. A little more than 1 in 5 (21.6%) have streamed other gamers on platforms, such as Twitch or YouTube.

69.3% have spent **LONGER PLAYING**
ONLINE GAMES
THAN THEY INTENDED



50.9% FELT GAMING HAS DISTRACTED THEM FROM
SPENDING TIME WITH FAMILY



54%
concerned
ABOUT THE
BEHAVIOUR
OF OTHERS DURING
ONLINE
GAMES



80.7%
HAVE PLAYED
ONLINE GAMES
WITH STRANGERS



SNAPSHOT SUMMARY

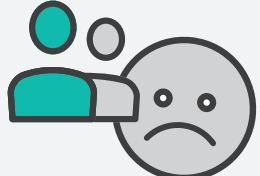
Artificial Intelligence Insights

Artificial Intelligence programs, such as ChatGPT, have become a household name. At the time of surveying, 39.3% of students had used Generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, to support their learning. This is more than double the 2023 data, which showed 17% of students had experimented with Generative AI software. Interestingly, 27.1% of students who had used Generative AI tools to support their learning viewed it as a form of cheating.

Help-seeking Insights

It is highly likely young digital citizens will experience a challenging online situation where they need to turn to somebody for support. 44.4% of students indicated a parent as the person they would seek help from first if something went wrong online. Only 2.4% said they would first turn to another trusted adult, for example, a teacher, chaplain or school counsellor. A little over half (50.2%) of students surveyed said they would reach out to a peer (friend or sibling) first if something went wrong online. Young people may not be equipped with the resources or resilience to support a friend or sibling who may be experiencing online harms or exposure to cyber-crimes.

If something went wrong online

44.4% 

WOULD TURN TO A PARENT FIRST

50.2% 

WOULD TURN TO A FRIEND OR SIBLING FIRST



SNAPSHOT SUMMARY

Digital Safety

SHARING PERSONAL INFORMATION

According to the eSafety Commissioner, 1 in 3 young people have a photo of themselves online in their school uniform. Pleasingly, only 10.3% of all students surveyed have posted a photo online in their school uniform. This indicates an awareness of sharing personal information online. Children should be encouraged to think before they share photos and data online and consider the safety risks of sharing personal information online.

LIMITED USE OF PRIVACY SETTINGS

Setting social networking and gaming spaces to private is highly recommended for young people. 72.5% of students surveyed confirmed they had set their social networking accounts to private. Unfortunately, 20.5% of students confirmed their accounts were public, and 7% of students were unaware of their profile visibility.

GIVING AWAY PASSWORD & ACCOUNT INFORMATION

23% of all students surveyed said they have logged into a social networking account on a friend's phone or device. This behaviour puts students at risk of losing control of their personal accounts – whereby friends post on behalf of friends, unknowingly change profile settings and block peers from their own accounts.

ENGAGING WITH STRANGERS

Of all students surveyed, nearly 1 in 2 (46%) have chatted to a stranger online. Female students were less likely to chat to a stranger online (37%), as were students who did not own a smartphone (34%), and students who had boundaries in place regarding taking personal devices into bedrooms overnight (38%).

Those who play online games are highly likely to interact with strangers online, with 80.7% having played an online game with a stranger and nearly half (42.1%) of gamers connecting multiple times with someone they first met online. Concerningly, 29% of gamers stated they have become regular friends with someone they first met in an online game. This could lead to students building trusting relationships with malicious users.



Students who identify as male or non-binary are more likely to interact with strangers online, particularly when playing online games. Whilst 36.9% of female students reported having chatted to a stranger online, 57.7% of male students and 56.8% of non-binary students had done so. When gaming, 72.9% of female students, 88.2% of male students and 91.4% of non-binary students had played an online game with a stranger. This pattern continues as 33.4% of female students, 50.3% of male students and 62.9% of non-binary students connected online multiple times with someone they first met in a game. The gap widened further when becoming regular friends with someone students first met in an online game – with 22.7% of female students and more than double (48.6%) of non-binary students reporting having done so. Public gaming servers can be a place for students to find community through mutual interests. Unfortunately, they can also be a place for scammers and people with malicious intent to take advantage of vulnerable young people.

SNAPSHOT SUMMARY

Digital Wellbeing

NEGATIVE DIGITAL EXPERIENCES

Social exclusion extends beyond the school ground with 29.7% of students surveyed reporting they have felt left out after seeing something posted online. This is less prevalent amongst male students (19%) and a more common experience for female (37%) and non-binary (45%) students.

Online content is highly curated and usually not a reflection of 'real life' experiences and expectations. Concerningly, when it comes to social networking users, 47% feel they compare their life to others who they follow and 40% admit the use of social media has made them feel sad or poorly about themselves. Female and non-binary students report almost twice as highly on these experiences than their male peers.

Gamers also have negative digital experiences, with 16% admitting they have been made to feel uncomfortable while playing a game online.

51% HAVE SEEN  **NEGATIVE BEHAVIOURS TOWARDS OTHERS ONLINE**

CYBERBULLYING & NEGATIVE BEHAVIOURS

In today's online world, it is likely young people will witness negative behaviours towards others. 51% of all students surveyed had witnessed negative behaviour towards others online and 28% had received a negative comment online. Some of these experiences are continued and targeted, with 8% of students feeling they had been cyberbullied in the previous 12 months. Negative behaviours are common in online games too – 54% of students surveyed who play online games shared that they were concerned about how others behave on these platforms.

When responding to experiencing negative behaviours, students indicated they were unlikely to take an assertive approach with only 17.3% stating they would tell a responsible adult. This is up from 12% in 2023. Only 4.3% stated they would alert the person of the negative behaviour, which is a similar response rate as the previous year. Interestingly, 45.5% of students said they would ignore it and keep socialising, 15.1% said they would leave the conversation or group and 13.2% said they would respond back with a negative comment.

Female students were twice as likely (22.0%) to tell a responsible adult as male students (11.1%) or non-binary students (9.1%). Interestingly, male and non-binary students were twice as likely to respond back with a negative comment (18.9% and 20.5% respectively) than female students (9.1%). Younger students were also more likely to tell a responsible adult with 25.6% of Year 7 students gradually reducing to 7.1% of Year 12 students reporting this. 57.2% of Year 12 students said they would ignore the behaviour and keep socialising.

Students were less likely to ignore negative behaviours if they witness it occurring to somebody else, with only 36.5% reporting they would ignore the behaviour and keep socialising. In these scenarios, students were nearly three times more likely to exhibit upstander behaviour – 11.1% saying they would alert the person to the negative behaviour. 20.6% of students said they would reach out to the person impacted and offer support and 9.9% said they would leave the conversation or group, but only 4.8% admitted they would tell a responsible adult.

SNAPSHOT SUMMARY

Female students were more likely (24.6%) to reach out to the person impacted and offer support than their male (16.1%) or non-binary (19.3%) peers. Females were also twice as likely (6.6%) to tell a responsible adult than male (2.8%) or non-binary (3.2%) students. Male (17.4%) and non-binary (16.1%) students surveyed were more likely to respond back with a negative comment than the female students surveyed (7.6%). Interestingly, there was very little difference across Year Levels in this area.

NUDES/SEXTING

According to an eSafety Commissioner report, Young People and Sexting – Attitudes and Behaviours (Dec 2017), 1 in 3 Australian teens (14-17 years old) were involved with sexting. Sexting is the sending, being asked and asking, and sharing or showing nude or nearly nude images or videos. 9.8% of students surveyed have received a nude image, down from 14% in our 2023 survey. Concerningly, 43.5% of those students who had received a nude image were in Years 7 or 8. 7.6% of students surveyed had been asked to send a nude image, and more than half (62.4%) of those who had been asked were in Years 7, 8 or 9. Female students (8.6%) were more likely to have been asked to send a nude than male students surveyed (5.6%). Concerningly, 29.5% of non-binary students reported having been asked to send a nude.

It's critical that young people are aware of their digital responsibilities, including consent and laws around sending and storing nude images. For further information, we recommend visiting Youth Law Australia (yla.org.au) with young people in your care.

DIGITAL DEPENDENCIES

Young people show high levels of digital dependency with 45.8% of students surveyed admitting they feel the need to constantly check their phone or device. This dependency sat at 39.6% for Year 7 students but steadily increased to 60.6% for students in Year 12. Of those who use social networking platforms, 25.9% estimated they check their social networking accounts more than 20 times a day, 67% felt social media could be a distraction to their learning, with 90.5% of Year 12 students agreeing with this statement. 57.4% felt social media distracted them from their family. Social media platforms are designed to keep users coming back for more. Concerningly, 77.1% felt they spent more time on social media than they had planned. 82.2% of female social media users agreed with this statement, as did 91.2% of Year 12 social media users. Gamers also displayed digital dependencies, with 50.9% feeling gaming has distracted them from spending time with family. 57.4% of male gamers agreed with this statement, but only 44.7% of female gamers agreed.



9.8%

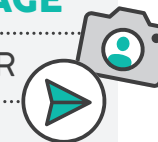
HAVE RECEIVED
A NUDE IMAGE



TWO
THIRDS

of those who had
been asked to send
A NUDE IMAGE

WERE IN YEAR
7, 8 OR 9



NEXT STEPS

Proactive measures you can take immediately to protect your community.

REFLECT

Take time to reflect on these insights. How might you use this information to develop your community's cyber safety and digital wellbeing? Consider recruiting Cyber Safety Project to implement a [Digital Habits Survey](#) with your school community.

REVIEW

Audit your current cyber safety processes, policies and programs. Engage all stakeholders in reviewing and updating documentation to align with current trends and needs of the community.

COMMUNICATE

Start the conversation and keep it going. Open communication from the beginning normalises conversations around cyber safety and digital wellbeing, and children will be more likely to talk if something goes wrong online. Our free [Conversation Checklist](#) is a great starter for families. For educators, our free set of [Emotions Cards](#) include activities for the classroom.

ROLE MODEL

Children look to the adults around them and follow their behaviours. Model a healthy use of technology. Set up expectations for healthy and positive use of technology with the [Digital Use Agreement](#) and [Digital Balance Challenge](#).

EDUCATE

Provide proactive education to everybody in your community. Empower young people through [student sessions](#) and [sequenced curriculum](#). [Professional learning](#) and [strategic planning](#) equips educators to level up their teaching of cyber safety and digital wellbeing.

PROMOTE

Consistently promote safe, positive and ethical use of technologies. Promote available help seeking resources amongst your community, including online and localised platforms.

- esafety.gov.au/report
- kidshelpline.com.au
- headspace.org.au
- accce.gov.au
- lifeline.org.au
- gamblershelp.com.au
- Local community health services
- Local community mental health services
- Local community legal support services

CYBER SAFETY PROJECT

LEARN MORE

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