



Digital mental health

Digital mental health – that is, online mental health supports and services – is an effective way of providing support to children and young people.

What do we mean by digital mental health?

Digital mental health refers to services delivered via digital platforms online, mobile or via the phone. It also encompasses the use of social media and online support communities, which allows people to connect with others who are going through similar experiences or who share their interests.

Digital mental health services can be accessed in a confidential way – allowing children and young people to reach out for support when they may not be able to access support in the learning environment or broader community.

Online support services have been shown to support children and young people's learning, development, social networks, mental health and wellbeing. It can also provide access to opportunities to connect with others, and gain support, through the development of new skill sets to complement and build on their existing social and emotional competencies.

There are a range of online sites, services and supports available specifically for young people. The Be You Wellbeing Tools for Students [insert Sitecore link] is your essential guide to the online tools and other resources that will best support children and

young people in taking care of their own mental health.

Social media

Much has been written and reported about the potential risks of social media, so it's helpful to consider the opportunities as well.

Social media can be used to:

- promote positive norms about health and wellbeing and enhance health promotion initiatives
- foster identity formation, community-building and creativity
- support the self-directed learning and aspirations of marginalised children and young people
- extend formal and informal knowledge networks and social support for children and young people
- build young people's consumer and financial literacy
- promote proactive approaches to issues of risk and safety
- support family and intergenerational relationships. Different generations of people will bring different skills and knowledge to social

media. When children, young people and family members use technologies to collaborate and socialise, they can find new opportunities to connect, utilise each other's strengths and can be watchful for each other's safety.

Challenges of social media

- The range of content and culture of social media provides low-level exposure to a range of risks. However, experiencing some level of risk is necessary to build resilience online and offline.
- Children and young people may also experience upsetting and potentially harmful content and practices, which can have serious effects on their wellbeing.
- Poor integration of social media in formal and informal learning environments can reinforce social exclusion.
- More research is required to understand the multiple influences which can foster harmful consumption and financial practices.
- Social media may also amplify risks to physical and emotional safety.
- Social media may also be perceived as a barrier to traditional family relationships.

Online safety

The [Office of the eSafety Commissioner](#) is Australia's leader in online safety. The eSafety Commissioner is responsible for promoting online safety for all Australians. committed to helping all Australians have safer, positive experiences online – just as they would offline.

The Office coordinates and leads the online safety efforts of government, industry and the not-for profit community. It has a broad remit which includes providing a complaints service for young Australians who experience serious cyberbullying, identifying and removing illegal online content, and tackling image-based abuse. The Office also provides audience-specific content to help educate all Australians about online safety including young people, women, teachers, parents, seniors and community groups.

Managing risks

School staff can meet duty of care requirements by being both proactive and reactive in helping young

people manage the risks associated with technology use. Proactive strategies include:

- incorporating cybersafety into curriculum, year level events and health promotion activities as part of mental health promotion activities
- adopting a whole-school approach to preventing bullying
- developing students' ability to critically analyse websites, apps and social sites to ensure that the sites are credible and safe
- supporting families through information shared via the website and newsletters as well as information sessions or workshops to empower them to support their young people in the safe and effective use of technology for mental health and wellbeing.

School staff should respond to incidents of cyberbullying or inappropriate technology use by following your school's policies and procedures.

Access and equity

Children and young people from rural and remote communities, as well as those from low socioeconomic areas, may have less access to online platforms at home. Learning communities can help by having computers available at school and providing class-based mental health promotion activities.

In the same manner, online platforms can support children and young people with disabilities. Children and young people with disabilities may find opportunities to connect with others, feel an enhanced sense of belonging, and be able to better participate in education.

However, they may require additional support to engage with online sites and services, such as assistive technologies designed to improve access and engagement. They may also be more vulnerable to bullying or accessing inappropriate sites, so tailored cybersafety education and monitoring may be required to ensure safe and effective engagement with technology.

Higher-risk groups

It's important to recognise that some students are more vulnerable to cyberbullying than others, including gender diverse and same-sex attracted

young people, students with disabilities, students from culturally and multiculturally and linguistically diverse communities, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Learn more about what educators can do to support digital mental health [here](#).

References

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