

Principles for a better Children's Internet



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Introduction

The Internet has enhanced children's lives in many ways and we recognise that it will continue to play an important role as they move through childhood, into their teen years and adulthood. Online experiences will be central to how they learn, the careers they undertake, and how they experience everyday life throughout the 21st century.

Online experiences, however, are not always well designed, well regulated, or good for children. They are sometimes exploitative, risky, and problematic; the Internet was not created with children's interests and needs in mind.

In our [Manifesto for a better Children's Internet](#) we use the term the 'Children's Internet' as a unifying concept to remind us that children have a right to playful, exploratory, fun, entertaining, positive, and educational experiences online. The Children's Internet is made up of an array of digital products and services that are both intended for, and not intended for, children. We recognise not all children have the same access to internet experiences and part of improving the Children's Internet is addressing the digital divide.

The Children's Internet is an idea that can be used by industry, government, educators, parents and carers, and various stakeholders to reflect on how digital products, services, and content are thought about, made available, designed, sold, regulated, managed, used, and invite children to participate online.

The principles outlined in this document provide clear guidance on how to create a better Children's Internet. While each principle addresses a specific need, four overarching actions emerge across the principles. Specifically, the development of:

- 1) Standards for high-quality digital experiences for children**
- 2) Slow design and decision-making processes driven by consultation with children**
- 3) Child-centred regulation and policy**
- 4) Media literacy policy and programs**

This goal of a better Children's Internet will not be realised unless there is broad agreement amongst adults that we need to do more to ensure that children have fun, productive, safe, diverse, and ethical internet experiences.

Principle 1:

The availability of free and high-quality Children's Internet experiences

Greater investment, both financially and culturally, is needed to develop societal and industry standards that ensure high quality and accessible internet experiences for all children across different digital products, services, and content.

Children have a right to high-quality Internet experiences that are playful, exploratory, fun, entertaining, positive, engaging, dynamic, safe and educational. In moving towards a better Children's Internet, it is essential that we place children's interests, capabilities, rights, and aspirations at the centre of our considerations about how to continue to improve the Internet.

Children often have access to the Internet via direct purchases and subscriptions. A significant number of families, however, cannot afford to pay for access to quality Children's Internet products and services and there is a significant risk that some children will miss out.

Examples of what is being done:

- Many national publicly owned broadcasters, like the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and the [Ghana Broadcasting Corporation](#) (GBC), provide access to free children's content and services, and this must continue.
- [Design Well, Play Well](#) is a collective of organisations and individuals who are working to ensure children's digital experiences are actively good.

What more needs to be done?

- In countries where free and high-quality Children's Internet experiences are made available through a public broadcaster, this must be maintained and extended.
- Media and technology companies should invest in high-quality children's products and services as an aspect of their social licence to operate; that is, their social and corporate responsibility to create fun, productive, safe, diverse, and ethical internet experiences.
- Media and technology companies should be encouraged to avoid placing high-quality Children's Internet content and experiences behind subscription paywalls.
- Media and technology companies need to be explicit about what is 'free' and what costs money.



Principle 2:

The development of quality standards for age-appropriate entertainment and educational products and services for children

Rigorous standards of quality need to be developed to ensure the production of ‘made for kids’ products and services are age-appropriate, suitable, and relevant for children.

Currently, there are few parameters for how to judge the quality of digital products, services, and experiences that are ‘made for kids’. While some digital platforms have sought to implement quality standards, tensions often emerge in relation to the platform’s existing business models and commercial imperatives, as well as in the processes of monitoring and evaluating the uptake of the standards amongst individual creators or users.

The multifaceted ways in which children can consume content (through official, unofficial, and fan-created media channels) complicates the level of implied or assured quality that would previously have been associated with specific ‘intellectual property’ or trusted products.

Examples of what is being done:

- YouTube’s [Best practices for kids & family content](#) guidelines outline key principles relating to the production of ‘high-quality’ children’s content—that is, “age-appropriate, enriching, engaging, and inspiring” media.
- Common Sense Media have developed a proprietary ‘quality rubric’ to review movies, books, television programs, and games, and use a rating system to indicate the appropriateness of content for children at different age levels. Common Sense Media’s [Sensical TV](#) streaming service provides children with free (advertising supported) video content reviewed by children’s experts.

What more needs to be done?

- Governments, industry, educators and researchers must work together to develop public consensus about high-quality children’s internet products and experiences for children of different ages.
- Once developed, quality standards should be endorsed and widely implemented with transparency and accountability.
- Funding for the development of children’s internet products and services should be aligned to quality standards.
- Technology and media companies should promote and favour endorsed products and experiences, for instance within online App stores.
- Families should feel confident that endorsement is a marker of quality and integrity.

Principle 3:

Clearer advice and better mechanisms for age-appropriate access and use of products and services for children and families

There is a need to examine how current mechanisms to determine the age-appropriateness of products and services, such as age-gating, effectively inform and govern children's internet experiences.

Many digital products and services set 13 as the minimum age for users of their main adult-oriented services. This process is known as 'age-gating' and is often managed through sign-up processes where a date of birth or credit card details need to be entered to create an account. Digital services sometimes explicitly ask whether the user is a child and request that an adult signs-up on their behalf.

We need to explore new avenues to provide children and families with the tools and resources to ensure they can make informed decisions about accessing engaging and age-appropriate content. A challenge is that so far, age gates on digital media for children have lacked nuance - all children from 0-12 are treated the same, as are young people from 13 to 18. While mechanisms for identifying users' ages can be difficult on digital media platforms and current age estimation technologies invoke concerns about effectiveness and privacy, children's internet experiences would be greatly enhanced if they were more age appropriate.

Examples of what is being done

- In late 2022, Roblox announced that it would introduce [Experience Guidelines](#), which include an [in-game age rating system](#) that provides information on the suitability of game experiences for players at various ages (with different experiences available to players under 13, aged 13-17, and for those aged 17 and older).
- The Australian eSafety Commissioner's [Roadmap for age verification](#) details recommendations, including a clearer online safety regulatory framework and educational programming alongside the integration of age assurance technologies, such as moderation and filtering, to help keep children safe when accessing content online.

What more needs to be done?

- A more nuanced and sophisticated set of guidelines for age-appropriateness for children's digital products and services should be developed, with categories for very young children (0-4), younger children (5-8), older children (9-12), younger teens (13-14) and older teens (15-17).
- Parents should have access to free advice about the age appropriateness of digital products and services, similar to what currently exists for television and film, particularly to assist with making decisions about the appropriateness of content for children aged 0-12.
- Media and technology companies, or the industry as a whole, should develop new and widely shared, ethically-based mechanisms for age verification, particularly for age-gates at 13, 15 and 18.

Principle 4:

Less focus on protecting children from the digital environment and more focus on protecting them within the digital environment

We need to move away from a deficit-based perspective when imagining children's internet experiences and strive to reimagine a future where public, media, and policy discourses about children's digital products and services champions their agency and positive futures.

Public discourse and policy responses to children's internet experiences over-emphasise keeping children out of online environments, or only granting them access to certain pockets of the Internet and other digital spaces. These responses imagine that safe and age-appropriate experiences for young users can only be created by restricting children's access to general features through age-gating mechanisms (keeping children in), and showcasing media and aesthetics that would not appeal to adult audiences (keeping adults out).

But these blanket approaches also limit children's access to important information, meaningful connections with peers, and may not equip children with the resources and skills to develop 'online resilience'. Additionally, preventing children from accessing the digital environment is increasingly challenging when considering the breadth and variety of products and services that children access.

Examples of what is being done

- [UNICEF have developed a framework](#) to assist stakeholders to design and implement more targeted, engaging, educational, and responsive online safety interventions for children.
- By working directly with children, researchers from the [Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child, Edith Cowan University, and the LEGO Group](#) learned how children from across India, Australia, and the Republic of Korea continue to learn about the types of risk involved in using the internet and also how they develop the skills and understanding to manage these risks, such as their abilities to respond to cyberbullying.



What more needs to be done?

- When legislation and policy is being developed there needs to be more emphasis on improving guardrails within the digital environment rather than excluding children from access to the digital environment.
- Policy should be child-centred and focus on children and young people's perspectives in the use of digital media in their lives.
- Collectively, we need to focus on removing the deficit framing from public conversations about children's digital media use, particularly within education and news media narratives.

Principle 5:

Accessible consumer information for families to allow them to make informed choices about digital products and services for children

Technology providers, industry, and governments have a responsibility to ensure clear and transparent information about products and services is readily available and accessible for families and children.

Parents and carers face many challenges when it comes to making decisions about what content, services, and products their children can access and use. This includes decisions about what is 'suitable' or 'appropriate' (particularly about products and services that are not specifically designed for children), as well as decisions about what is 'necessary' for children to access to assist with education, learning, and development.

Parents and carers also face the challenge of navigating the many costs associated with using different digital products, which is often not a straightforward purchase. Many apps, for instance, can be downloaded for free, but then present different tiers of experience or access to resources that must be earned or purchased.

Examples of what is being done

- In Australia, the New South Wales Department of Education has developed [a suite of resources](#) that parents and carers can freely access to better understand how to support their children to become resilient digital citizens.
- Professor Sonia Livingstone, a leading advocate for children's rights in the digital age, [has called for balance](#) between parental digital literacy and greater transparency from digital service providers and product developers.

What more needs to be done?

- Publicly funded agencies should continue to expand and update the development of accessible and widely available consumer information for parents, carers, and educators.
- In developing a rubric of quality standards, similar to a rating system, families will be assisted to make informed decisions on what digital content, services, and products their children should access and use.
- Technology providers should be mandated to provide greater transparency of any in-game microtransactions (e.g., loot boxes) and business models so consumers can make more informed choices.
- Digital platforms should diligently warn children and parents about scams and financially predatory behaviour targeting children.

Principle 6:

More investment in locally produced, diverse, and high-quality entertainment and educational products and services for children and families

Public funding bodies, such as governments, should be called on to give greater financial priority to the production of nationally representative children's content, while new processes and policies should be introduced to encourage strategic private investment into local and national media, particularly from global media production and technology companies.

Children gain a lot from seeing themselves, their lives, and their aspirations represented in the media they consume and interact with. At a national or local level, public broadcasters, such as, in the Australian context, the ABC and Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), subsequently have a crucial role to play in shaping what 'quality' children's content looks like and how children's identities are portrayed 'on screen'.

However, national public broadcasters often have no codified obligations to children and no mandated levels of national content. In Australia, the ABC has also been known to de-prioritise domestic content for children in light of other commercial pressures. These issues are compounded by international streaming services, such as Disney+ and Amazon Prime, which pose a threat to national representation unless they invest in local productions that prioritise local or nationally-representative children's content.

Examples of what is being done

- Large media and technology companies have begun to invest in local production, for example, **Netflix announced in 2023**, it had spent AU\$500 million since 2019 investing in children's programming in Australia.
- Although Australian TV content for children is increasingly disappearing from commercial and free-to-air networks in Australia (**with an 84% drop in content between 2019 and 2022**), research from Swinburne University of Technology shows that more than **80% of Australian parents** think it's essential for their children to see local Australian-made content on TV.

What more needs to be done?

- The ABC should provide minimum levels of Australian children's television each year including genres such as live action drama and documentaries, even if these are high cost and low profit ventures.
- Streamers and commercial broadcasters should contribute to a fund that supports the provision of culturally valuable and educational children's content.
- Australian children should be able to freely access high-quality age specific forms of content such as drama produced with state subsidies including tax rebates and direct funding.
- Policy makers should revisit the definition of what constitutes Australian content under the Significant Australian Content test, to guarantee that content that is being made under Australian creative control represents and reflects Australian children's lives.

Principle 7:

The development of products and services that increase access and use of digital technologies for children at risk of digital exclusion

Children’s access to quality internet experiences is uneven, due to the compounding impacts of differing socioeconomic, demographic, and geographic factors.

In 2023, the Australian Digital Inclusion Index showed that, of households with less than AU\$33,800 income per year, 33% were ‘highly excluded’ with significantly less internet access than their middle class neighbours and greater restrictions on their internet access through barriers such as data caps.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples, Australians with disability, less educated Australians, and those living in rural and remote locations were also found to be more likely to be digitally excluded.

Digital exclusion also precludes children’s ability to access quality education. A study conducted by the Queensland State Government audit office in 2021 demonstrated that 10% of students in the lowest income bracket had no access to the Internet at home, 14% of students had no access to a computer, laptop, or tablet, and an additional 16% had limited access.

Examples of what is being done

- The **‘Advancing digital inclusion in low-income Australian families’ project** highlights how efforts to address digital inclusion in low-income families need to be collaborative and shared between multi-level stakeholders as digital inclusion is everybody’s business.
- **The Good Things Foundation** highlights how community-led digital inclusion initiatives, alongside a national government strategy and ongoing service support, can help to ensure all Australians have the skills and resources needed to participate in our (digital) society.

What more needs to be done?

- The Australian federal government should mandate that a low cost and high-quality internet product to increase internet access, be made available to low-income families.
- Initiatives such as Optus’ data donation scheme, in partnership with charity The Smith Family, should be extended and introduced by other internet companies.
- School systems should develop clear policies and procedures for meeting digitally excluded students’ needs.
- Device donation schemes should be coordinated at the national level to enable efficient and purposeful provision of recycled devices to low-income children.

Principle 8:

Avoiding the tech entrepreneurial philosophy of ‘move fast and break things’ when developing products and services for children

The entrepreneurial motivation to rapidly innovate children’s products and services and disrupt markets, rather than meet real needs and present realities, is not compatible with a better Children’s Internet.

The tech entrepreneurial values driving the development of children’s online products and services hinge on the notion of ‘move fast and break things’; that innovation emerges by pushing products and services to market quickly and disrupting existing processes and technologies to get ahead of the curve.

This is problematic as it creates a culture of ‘techno-solutionism’ where technology is sought out as the solution to problems, before questions about what is best for that context are asked. In terms of the Children’s Internet, this has led to the rapid development of children’s versions of popular social media platforms (with varying degrees of success, as in the case of ‘Instagram for Kids’ which received widespread opposition), and also permeated into other experiences, such as children’s learning (as in the case of the rising EdTech industry).

Examples of what is being done

- The Australian eSafety Commissioner’s [Safety by Design](#) framework calls on technology companies to ‘move thoughtfully’; to proactively invest in risk mitigation and to embed consideration for user protection and safety from the offset when developing digital products and services.
- Child-centred principles, such as those developed as part of the [Digital Futures Commission’s ‘Child Rights by Design’ toolkit](#), can help create digital products, services, content, and experiences for children that have their well-being, interests, and rights at the core.

What more needs to be done?

- The development of regulatory processes that disincentivises the ‘move fast’ approach and incentivises practices that embed due consideration within the development of child-centred products and services.
- Leaders in the tech industry need to marshal a culture shift in terms of companies and organisations prioritising children’s best interests when developing digital products and services for them; this shift in culture needs to see children’s digital products and services as a public good and central to technology company’s social licence to operate.
- Regulation to mandate consultation with child and youth experts such as children, families, educators, health professionals, and a broad cross-section of academics while developing digital products and services for children.

Principle 9:

Timely and appropriate consultation with children and families when products and services are being developed

Through collaborative models, such as co-design, children, their families, and their communities should be included as key stakeholders in the design, decision-making, and delivery of the Children's Internet.

From a child's rights approach, children's voices, perspectives, and desires should be consulted when developing the digital products and services they'll encounter through their internet experiences. Engaging children in consultations allows them to express their views and opinions about digital environments, and to offer meaningful insights into their current and aspired digital practices, experiences, and behaviours.

UN conventions, such as the Rights of the Child and General Comment No. 25 on the rights of the child in the digital environment, ratify the obligations that all stakeholders, particularly states and commercial actors, have to uphold children's rights to participate as civil citizens online.

Examples of what is being done

- The [Playful by Design](#) framework, which was produced in consultation with more than 1000 children and young people in the UK, offers evidence-based recommendations to the designers of digital products and services that aim to improve children's opportunities for 'free play' in the digital environment.
- The [Responsible Innovation in Technology for Children](#) project—a collaboration between researchers from Western Sydney University, UNICEF Innocenti, and the LEGO Group—collected the digital wellbeing experiences of more than 300 children from 13 countries to create a framework to prompt governments and industry to put children's wellbeing first when designing and evaluating digital experiences.

What more needs to be done?

- Decision-making practices that pertain to child-centred policy and design need involve children, carers, families, educators and experts in the process.
- Regulatory guidelines should be developed to oversee when and how consultation with children is appropriate when designing digital products and services.
- Efforts ought to be made by leaders in the tech industry to support and encourage early consultation and co-design practices with children and families, and move away from viewing children as test markets of products and services.



Principle 10:

Schools and education systems to develop better processes for selecting digital resources for classroom use

Clear processes need to be in place to understand who makes decisions about what technologies are made available in schools, for what reasons, and how they are used both within and outside the classroom.

The ‘big three’ EdTech companies (Apple, Microsoft, and Google) actively market themselves to educators and administrators using a range of sophisticated techniques. The mediation of learning through this commercial layer has a direct impact on the purchases made by both schools and families.

Parents and carers who do not want their children to be ‘left behind’ are faced with choices that may have significant impacts on their family budget, particularly in instances where they feel pressured to purchase technology that is deemed ‘necessary’ for children’s learning and development. There is also often a mismatch between the claims made by technology developers and the actual impacts of educational technology on learning and education.

Examples of what is being done

- The **OECD** is actively monitoring how, globally, governments are increasingly allowed to make greater decisions about which digital tools and resources should be provided or procured by schools, teachers, and learners with little transparency.
- The Electronic Frontier Foundation is seeking to hold education systems and governments to account, as it says **students and their parents are often left in the dark** when it comes to understanding why certain decisions regarding classroom technology are made, and further, little clarity is given as to how data and privacy protections are in place on these devices.

What more needs to be done?

- Education systems and schools should look beyond marketing and hype when selecting and purchasing digital resources for classroom use.
- Once quality standards are established, a centralised review process should be established by education systems to regularly assess and recommend digital resources to schools and parents.
- The ‘big three’ EdTech companies should focus less on marketing and hype, and more on research about how technology can most effectively be used to support learning, and how teachers can be supported to develop knowledge and skills.

Principle 11:

School and education systems to be as technology agnostic as possible

School and education systems need to more greatly consider the impact of over-aligning themselves with specific technological ecosystems (such as being ‘either an Apple or Google school’).

Global technology brands, such as Microsoft, Google, and Apple, often have a dominating presence in schools due to direct contracting or preferred supplier status. The consequence of these arrangements is that significant power rests in the hands of state, district, or school authorities in terms of which technology ecosystems are favoured and supported.

There is potential for student learning to be impacted by these decisions as choices about preferred or familiar technology are taken away from individual users or families, and families may have a direct conflict with school decisions; families may be an ‘Apple family’ but their children may attend a ‘Google school’. In addition, placing a technological system at the centre of learning, rather than in the service of learning, has the potential to limit teacher pedagogies and student learning.

Examples of what is being done

- Ongoing advocacy work by The Smith Family highlights how a **one-size-fits-all tech-distribution model isn’t enough**, particularly in terms of supporting the digital skills development and inclusion of children and young people who are vulnerable, marginalised, or excluded.
- Some Australian State education systems allow greater choice about the technology that can be used in their schools, placing less emphasis on centralised decision making and more on school, teacher and student choice.

What more needs to be done?

- Education systems and schools should place less emphasis on specific technological ecosystems and should plan to enable multiple kinds of devices to be used on a school network.
- When developing relationships with education systems and schools, technology companies should focus less on sales and more on genuine learning outcomes.
- Teachers should become adaptable to a variety of technologies being used in their classrooms.



Principle 12:

Better quality control of products and services that are labelled as ‘educational’ within the major app stores

Greater quality control mechanisms are needed within the major app stores to prevent ‘educational’ apps from making inaccurate, exaggerated, or dubious claims about their learning or educational potential.

Recommendations made by the app stores through direct advertising or via search results do not always guarantee quality. For instance, some ‘educational’ apps promoted within the app store have been found to be highly misleading about their educational value and motivated primarily by financial gain.

Many ‘educational’ apps are also structured as games or have a gaming component, with developers seeking to produce high-quality educational experiences that are simultaneously fun to play. While these apps may keep children engaged (through visually stimulating design features, colour palettes, and task-based rewards) they may have limited or no verified educational value.

Examples of what is being done

- As part of [Google’s Teacher Approved program](#), teachers, children’s education specialists, and media experts evaluate apps according to a set of specific criteria to determine whether they are suitable to be promoted as high-quality apps for kids in the Google Play Store.
- As with other forms of EdTech, the [pedagogy that surrounds learning](#) or educational apps can have a greater impact on student’s or children’s learning outcomes than the content or use of the app itself; for instance, through rich and critical discussions as a class, or through the social and collaborative learning that can take place around digital games.

What more needs to be done?

- ‘Educational’ or learning-based apps should be assessed against agreed quality standards when being approved for inclusion within App Stores.
- Major technology companies should work within the guidelines of their social licence to operate when profiting from the distribution of educational products and services for children.
- These companies should reward and promote developers that adhere to quality standards when developing educational products for children.
- They should also highlight and promote those products and services that best adhere to quality standards.

Principle 13:

Regulation that strikes a fair balance between government policy, technology company policies, and personal responsibility

To build a better Children's Internet requires input and responsiveness from government, industry, families, and wider society; there needs to be fair and equitable responsibility from all stakeholders.

The objectives of international agencies and national and state-based governments are influential in shaping children's internet experiences, as are the corporate and commercial objectives of technology companies. Substantial weighting is also given to parents and families who, often by default, have to make key decisions about regulating children's internet experiences. Yet, the responsibility to keep children safe online does not, and should not, solely lie with parents.

Ensuring balanced regulatory and policy responsibility amongst all stakeholders will play a significant role in creating a better Children's Internet, not only defining and shaping positive internet experiences for children, but further reproducing ideals about how children should experience digital products, services, and content.

Examples of what is being done

- Legislative developments in the UK, such as [the Information Commissioner's Office's Age-Appropriate Design Code](#), are resulting in greater regulatory responsibilities being placed on businesses and organisations whose digital products and services are likely to be accessed by children, particularly with regard to data collection.
- Meta's [Best Interests of the Child Framework](#) draws on the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child to assist product development teams to centre children's rights within product design, evaluation, and implementation.

What more needs to be done?

- A government mechanism such as a Parliamentary Committee should be established to investigate the role of government in creating the conditions for a better Children's Internet; recognising the relationships between funding models, quality standards, age-appropriate design and consultation, and media literacy.
- Government regulation and technology company policy should not place the burden of responsibility primarily on parents to manage children's digital experiences.
- Technology companies should be held accountable by government, the media, and the public to live up to their social license to operate; that is, their social and corporate responsibility to create fun, productive, safe, diverse, and ethical internet experiences.

Principle 14:

A move away from the over-reliance on ‘parental controls’ as the solution to managing or improving children’s online experiences

The current over-reliance on ‘parental controls’ places too much emphasis on parents’ practices as a means of creating safe internet experiences for children.

Responsible adults are required to spend considerable time and effort managing their children’s digital accounts. It is not unusual for the parents of a digitally connected child to have to simultaneously manage the account and user settings of several digital services and experiences.

Technology companies overwhelmingly rely on this labour as part of their justification for making products and experiences available to children. They also rely on this parental labour to significantly reduce the costs associated with direct moderation and more advanced technological solutions and design features that may make children’s experiences more private, safe, and enjoyable.

Examples of what is being done

- In the US, [technology companies such as Meta, TikTok, and Snap Inc., are under pressure](#) from local and federal governing bodies to implement new tools and legislation to protect children from online harms, in particular, exploitation or harassment via social media.
- Recent [recommendations made by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine](#) advocate for ongoing consultation amongst international regulatory bodies to develop standards and policies that prompt more consistent and accountable social media platform design, transparency, and data use.



What more needs to be done?

- Media and technology products and services for children should adhere to ‘safety by design’ principles and negate the need for parental controls.
- Where they are necessary, parental controls should be designed to be easy to use and therefore should be designed for consistency across platforms and experiences.
- Media and technology companies should investigate the development of a cross-platform and interoperable parental control single sign-in and use mechanism. This could operate akin to a password manager to help simplify the process of managing parental controls.

Principle 15:

Full transparency and minimisation of data being collected from children; and avoiding the commercialisation of children's data

Technology companies and digital platforms should minimise the collection of data generated online from children (and about children) and further find more effective ways to avoid the commercialisation of children's data.

Data generated from children's use of digital products and services can be collected, used, and sold by individuals and companies, often covertly, for commercial purposes. Data protection rules regarding children's data are created to discourage and stop these collection and commercialisation practices. As data has the potential to be permanent, concerns regarding children's privacy and their agency to consent to what 'digital traces' they choose to leave behind are particularly important.

These concerns about data flow into larger issues pertaining to children's safety, as participation online can sometimes be porous and limitless, as digital platforms can link to external websites. Additionally, parents, families, and schools can also inadvertently generate data and identifiable information about children, raising important questions about how to balance children's rights to privacy with other rights and interests.

Examples of what is being done

- In Europe, the [General Data Protection Regulation](#) (GDPR) recognises that children deserve specific protection in relation to their personal data.
- [Human Rights Watch](#) recently reviewed 164 EdTech products used in schools worldwide during the COVID-19 school closures and found that 89% of these appeared to engage in data practices that put children's data at risk.

What more needs to be done?

- An Online Privacy Code should be developed by a government regulator, in consultation with children and other stakeholders; this code should apply to online services likely to be accessed by children and should promote the best interests of child users by, for example, taking a precautionary approach to the collection and use of children's data.
- Technology companies should be legally required to take into account the best interests of the child and only collect, use and disclose information when it is fair and reasonable to do so.
- Technology companies should be required by law to not trade in children's personal information and should avoid targeting children or direct marketing to them unless it is in the child's best interests.

Principle 16:

Legislation to ensure the recognition and protection of children's digital labour

Developing enshrined regulatory frameworks and guidance across local, national, and international contexts is essential to support children to engage in digital practices and to have safe online experiences without fear of exploitation, over-commercialisation, or coercion.

Children engage in digital labour when they are online, ranging from passive interactions with digital platforms such as viewing content (which generates data that can be commercialised), to creating content and experiences for other children, and participating in brand deals as a child influencer. As more and more young people aspire to have a career as a content creator, questions around labour—how much a young person can and should ‘work’ in creating content—and questions around privacy—both now and in the future—frequently arise.

Of similar concern is how technology companies monetise children's and families' digital participation. The digital or online environments where children hang out increasingly depend on user participation for the development of content and experiences, or on the sale of user data to commercial third parties such as advertisers.

Examples of what is being done

- France was the **first country to introduce legislation** to protect the rights of child influencers, with the ‘child YouTuber law’ requiring producers or content creators to gain official authorisation to produce content featuring minors under 16 years of age.
- Internet studies scholar, Professor Tama Leaver, has **spoken out on Australia's lack of regulation** surrounding children's labour online, particularly in relation to governments' failing to distinguish the nuances of children's labour and their play online.

What more needs to be done?

- Specific legislation needs to be developed to protect children's digital labour and participation online
- Technology companies need to be more vigilant on how they moderate content featuring children and/or made by children.
- Policymakers and educators need to develop more nuanced perspectives about children's online participation and recognise that digital play and media making is productive and important for the development of digital literacies.

Principle 17:

The promotion of media literacy to support children’s fun, productive, safe, diverse and ethical internet experiences

Media literacy allows children and adults alike to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to critically reflect on and build productive internet experiences.

Media literacy includes the ability to successfully use and make media for an array of purposes. Importantly, media literacy is not just a process of critiquing the media, but it also involves understanding how media can be used to improve society, for instance through supporting active digital citizenship.

One way to frame media literacy is to consider how it relies on the development and use of material, social, and cultural resources across four ‘building blocks’; namely, digital materials, conceptual understandings, media production, and media analysis.

Media literacy is a life-long pursuit and is not something that can be attained as a singular set of ‘skills’ because the media constantly evolves, particularly in digital contexts. Both the creation of media and media analysis relies on continual learning.

Examples of what is being done

- The [Australian Media Literacy Alliance and SBS Learn](#) and the [Australian Broadcasting Corporation](#) have produced digital resources to help empower and equip young people with critical media skills.
- [Media Arts](#), which promotes media literacy learning, is available as a subject within the Australian Curriculum.

What more needs to be done?

- In addition to the development of media literacy curricula, targeted media literacy resources should be developed for schools, and teachers need to be provided with professional learning to support the implementation of media literacy across the curriculum.
- Parents and carers of young children should be supported to understand how media literacy relates to parenting and the management of digital technology in the home.
- Community organisations, including libraries, should integrate media literacy into their programming.



Other resources & examples

- The **Fair Play Alliance's 'Digital Thriving' project** campaigns for the design of online spaces and games that help individuals and communities to truly thrive and to foster feelings and experiences of belonging, well-being, and connectedness.
- The Alannah & Madeline Foundation's **eSmart Media Literacy Lab** is a free resource available for all schools to use and access to encourage students to reflect on their online media practices and behaviours.
- The US state of Illinois has recently adopted **the country's first law protecting child influencers**; a law which sees a portion of any earnings from online videos of a child including the "likeness, name, or photograph of the minor" put into a trust for them to access upon adulthood.
- The **5Rights Foundation**, a leading global advocate for children's rights in the digital world, worked to create the '**Age Appropriate Design Code**' (or 'the Children's Code') as the world's first statutory code of practice for children's data.
- Child-centred research advocates call for the development of **content evaluation systems** that incorporate factors of user competence and experience alongside 'content risks' (like violence or extreme language), when considering the age appropriateness of digital content for children.
- Child-centred research advocates also champion the involvement of children as active stakeholders within any **research** or **design practices** that concern them.
- **Industry leaders in Generative AI** have called for greater prudence from industry and government when it comes to the development and regulation of emerging technologies, particularly in terms of a more considered and targeted approach to risk monitoring and user safety.
- Public libraries are a strong source of support for information about digital technologies. Some libraries provide **digital resources to help parents** understand how to keep their children safe online, while others may help parents and **children experience different technologies**, such as computers, gaming consoles, and VR headsets.
- The Australian eSafety Commissioner advocates for **three strategies that parents can use** to help their children adopt safe practices and behaviours online.
- Screen and production bodies from across the globe, including Australia, have joined together to **call on governments to implement regulations** that ensure streaming services invest in local productions.
- The Australian Government announced that it would **introduce content quotas for streaming platforms from mid-2024**, although details as to what these quotas would look like have yet to be finalised.
- In Europe, under the **Audiovisual Media Services Directive**, streaming services are obligated to reinvest a percentage of their local revenue into local productions, and must have a percentage quota of European content within their streaming catalogues.
- The Government of Zimbabwe **consulted more than 450 young people** aged between 12 and 17 whilst drafting the 'Child Online Protection Policy'.
- The **Digital Futures for Children's Impact of regulation on children's digital lives** research report provides evidence about whether legislation and regulation are effective in protecting children.



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