

## **Closing The Net – Season 2 Episode 1, See Say Do**

Opening disclaimer:

Due to themes of child sexual abuse and exploitation, the content of this podcast may be distressing to some people. It is not suitable for children and listener discretion is advised. For advice and support, please visit [accce.gov.au](http://accce.gov.au).

Reece Kershaw:

It's a crime type that sadly is on the increase, and it really concerns me that we need to do more, not just in our arrest rate and our interventions, but in the prevention, education, and awareness, to make sure we keep our children safe online, and what the dangers are.

Phil Meyer:

But I don't think this is all about the tech. I think this is very much more about the behaviours and building the trust relationship between parents and children.

Maria Bennett:

If you think something's wrong, report it. If it turns out to be nothing, then there's nothing lost, but if it actually turns out to be an issue, potentially it's a child's life that's saved.

Tim:

I think the more people who become educated, the more we'll start to talk about it as a community. It is a conversation that we need to have.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

I'm Caroline Craig and welcome to Season 2 of Closing The Net - a podcast series that looks at the borderless crime of online child sexual exploitation, providing valuable tips and advice to parents, carers and teachers on how to protect kids when they're online. In Season 1, we gained important understanding of the global scale of the issue, the incredible work of investigators in tackling this crime type, and the role we can all play in protecting our children. Part of that involves having regular chats with kids about online safety. Taking an interest in who they're chatting with online and the kinds of apps and games that they're into. And we all need to be aware that online child sexual exploitation does exist. We need to educate ourselves about what it is and how to protect children from ever having to experience it. Talking about this issue may make you feel uncomfortable. But by talking about it, you may just be saving one child from experiencing a world of pain greater than you could ever imagine.

Lesa Gale:

It's one of those issues people don't want to hear about, it's just too confronting. People think, you know, it's the man in the hat wearing the trench coat, there's a certain conception that people consider offenders of this type. What I would say is that's not true. It can be anyone, it can be your next-door neighbour. It can be your relative. They come from all walks of life, the offenders in relation to this particular crime type.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Lesla Gale is an AFP Assistant Commissioner, who oversees the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation, otherwise known as the ACCCE. The women and men of the ACCCE work tirelessly with international partners, local law enforcement and NGOs to prevent the sexual exploitation of children, remove children from harm, and bring child sex offenders to justice. Lesla knows this is not an easy topic for people to talk about, but for the safety of children, it's an absolutely vital one.

Lesla Gale:

I implore parents please, when you hear us talking about what's happening in the child exploitation space, don't turn down the television, don't walk away, listen to what we're saying. It's really very simple. Know what your children are doing in the online environment. Have those honest conversations with your kids so that they know if, "Oh my God, I've been in an app and been engaging with someone and I'm feeling a little uncomfortable", that they will come and tell you. Report it, you know, know where to go to. There's so many resources out there that work tirelessly in this space to try and educate and prevent children being exploited. I guess the biggest misconception is that parents think it won't happen to them and it won't be their kids. But let me tell you, and what we see through the Child Protection Triage Unit and what we communicate through our ThinkUKnow program, is it can happen to you and your children and the better educated you are about what they're doing in the online environment and what you can do to help them and support them, the less likely your kids are gonna be victims of this crime type.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Coming up, we'll hear from parents about some of the challenges they face trying to stay up-to-date with technology and stay connected with their kids' digital lives. We'll also hear from some of the amazing team behind ThinkUKnow, Australia's national online education program led by the AFP to prevent online child sexual exploitation.

Kristy Thomson:

All our presentations are pro-technology and they address topics in regards to online child sexual exploitation. So that includes things like, self-generated online child sexual exploitation material, online grooming, image-based abuse, sexual extortion, and how to get help. And we do that through the lens of providing a broad understanding of what young people see, say, and do online.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Some of the material you're about to hear in this podcast may be confronting, but for anyone involved in the life of a child, you can't afford not to listen.

Raising a child in the 21st century can sometimes feel overwhelming. For parents and carers, there are so many things we need to be aware of and to try and stay on top of. We worry about our kids' health and wellbeing. We worry about their physical and social development. We worry about how much is too much parental supervision. We don't want to be a helicopter parent. However, there are definitely times when it pays to take a more active interest in what our kids are doing and who they're doing it with. Nowhere is this more critical than in the online space.

Parent 1:

My youngest is constantly on Snapchat and constantly TikTocking. You know, I'm constantly saying to her, "You don't need that validation all the time." And I actually think that it affects her ability to get things done because they're in contact with their friends every minute of the day.

Tim:

We didn't want them to feel like that they were doing something wrong or that we were challenging their behaviour online. It was more that we wanted to understand what they were doing, so that we could help protect them.

Lizzie:

Both my husband and I, we were against the social media at her age. But we were at a point where, do we want her to be out of the group where all the kids are using the social media? And, you know, you get in that situation, should we allow, should we not?

Parent 2:

I remember when one of my girls was about 11 or 12 and they had a friend over and they were googling 'kissing'. So cute and funny. And we've always had the computer in the loungeroom so we could look at everything. And, you know, they didn't just get an innocent photo of kiss ups. That sort of opened my eyes up to what they could find.

Parent 3:

People get blasé and they go, both parents and kids alike go, "oh, it won't happen to me" or "I'm so street smart, it'll never happen to me". And indeed, it's not only that but it's also about them doing the wrong thing on other people too.

Parent 4:

So I'm quite naive when it comes to all those different platforms and everything and I know that they're out there. And I feel like I really don't know what to do about that other than talk to my kids. Is everything going okay in their lives. Keeping tabs with maybe their school work, their friendships, that sort of thing.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Trying to keep up with the latest mobile devices, online games, apps and social media platforms can be like going down a never-ending rabbit hole for most parents. While it pays to be aware of new technology, the truth is you don't need to be an expert. You don't need to be a Twitterverse connoisseur, a dance challenge master on TikTok, or an online gaming warrior. The most important thing you can do is to educate yourself about online child sexual exploitation, so you can understand what needs to be done within the technology to keep your kids safe when they're online doing the things they love. It sounds simple enough. Yet, in a 2019 survey of Australian parents and carers conducted by the ACCCE, most had very limited knowledge about online child sexual exploitation, including the size of the issue, how it could occur and how quickly it could happen, what they should be doing to minimise the risk to kids, and the resources available to help if something does go wrong. If you're a parent or carer, the mere fact that you're here listening to this podcast is a great start.

It was after listening to the first season of Closing The Net that Tim, a father of three, recognised the need for he and his wife to readjust their approach with their kids about online safety, touching base around what they were doing, who they were talking to, and re-setting some basic ground rules.

Tim:

At times, we'll ask them to leave their phones out of their room, but it's not on a consistent rule. It's usually if, you know, they're looking tired or we suspect they've been on their phone through the night checking messages or whatever. We'll ask them to leave their phones out of their room. But yeah, general principle is, don't engage with someone we don't know offline. So, if it's someone that we haven't spoken to in our house, or within our family community circle, then we don't really know that person so, if you don't know them, we don't really engage with them. Particularly the Xbox online game, 'cause you could be playing against anyone. That's the young fella, he's in that space now, so that's where I'm a little bit nervous is how you put limitation around that. You sort of hope you've brought your kids up to be a good judge of character, and that's what we were sort of hedging our bets on, was that, "We brought you up to understand a good individual from a poor individual." That gets taken away from them in an online space because who they're talking to is not may not be who they think they're talking to. And that's a different world to how I was brought up. So, trying to help them understand 'cause they get pretty invested and they believe who that online person is or the profile that an online person's created. They get really invested in who that is. And then to try and get them to understand that that might not be true. I think we've got a pretty open conversation in the house so I feel like, if they're not sure about something, that's probably one of our ground rules is, "If you're unsure, or something doesn't sit right, it comes back to that judging a person. Using your judgment to try and bring it out to us", and make it feel safe that they can come and share that with us. It was something we had to readjust as our approach as parents, was we didn't want them to feel like they were doing something wrong, or that we were challenging their behaviour online. It was more that we wanted to understand what they were doing, so that we could help protect them. And initially, it did go a little bit, they closed off, because they felt like maybe they're doing the wrong thing. "I don't wanna show mum and dad 'cause I'll get in trouble, and I might lose my online," or, "I won't be able to go with my mates this week," or, "I won't be able to play tag this weekend." So, we had to sort of readjust our approach and make them understand that the only reason we're asking these questions is, "We don't want to get you in trouble," or, "We don't think you're doing the wrong thing intentionally. We're trying to support and protect you." So that was something we had to readjust with our approach.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Most parents and carers will understand that dilemma of trying to strike a balance between keeping kids 'safe' and not stifling their sense of independence. And trying to have online safety conversations with teenagers, well, that can be a whole other issue. But as Tim found out, when the information is relatable and not delivered as a lecture, kids can be surprisingly receptive.

Tim:

Yeah, when we adjusted our approach so that they're more willing to share their thoughts on it, they sort of, you know, they-they give you the response of, "I'm not that dumb" you know, "I know, I know, I can judge that". But sharing the real specific scenarios that Closing The Net had, it helped to say, you know, "That's your age, that's a kid in your grade, he probably thought he was pretty bulletproof too, maybe. Or didn't realise what he was getting into at the time." So those real scenarios, I guess, we just used those scenarios out of the podcast to facilitate the conversation, just sort of reinforce the message. I think that hit home a little bit better. 'Cause most teenagers know everything anyway, so you've got to try and use something that relates. Having stories of kids their age and where they've come unstuck online and say, "Look, it can happen to anyone. You do need to be cautious and be educated. Lean on us for support. Don't think you know it all, if something's going a bit south, and you need support, feel like you can come and see us."

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

It's important for kids to know they'll have the support of a trusted adult if they ever have a negative experience online. Someone they can disclose to and who can help them make a report. It's also important for kids, parents, carers and teachers to know that there are comprehensive resources available through programs such as ThinkUKnow. ThinkUKnow is Australia's only national law enforcement-led online child safety program. It delivers community presentations and online resources to support the ACCCE in raising awareness of online child sexual exploitation and how to prevent it. The program was developed by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre in the UK where it was already a success. And in 2009, it was introduced in Australia by the AFP, in partnership with Microsoft, the Commonwealth Bank and Datacom. AFP Detective Superintendent Jayne Crossling was involved in the early development of the program.

Jayne Crossling:

When we got the program, we knew that there were numbers of programs out there that were aimed more specifically at young people in the school stream. But when we looked at the program, we saw an amazing opportunity because at that time, there was nothing specifically aimed at parents, teachers and carers. And we saw that as a real gap in the market and actually a huge vulnerability, because it's one thing to make sure that the kids are getting certain messages, but if parents don't get similar messages so that the two can safely overlap, then we think that that doesn't necessarily solve any problems. So, we think that parents, and we still believe this, definitely had a really strong role to play in helping young people stay safe online, and that it essentially is a shared responsibility. When we started the program, we recognised that many parents, by their own admission, lacked confidence and awareness of what young people are doing online, how they use technology. And they also weren't aware of the role that they could play in helping a young person stay safe online. So, we wanted to impress upon parents how important it was that they actually take a key role in making a young person's online experience really safe and positive.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Kate is an AFP officer who's been delivering ThinkUKnow presentations for more than 10 years and believes the program is critical for getting parents and kids talking openly about online safety.

Kate:

It's about making children feel comfortable with the internet and being online. It's about making parents feel comfortable with their kids being online and to open a regular dialogue between themselves and their children so that there's a level of comfort and a level of understanding and an opportunity to educate and guide young people from being quite supervised at a young age through to being quite confident dealing with things online when they're in their teenage years. That's the time when they really don't have necessarily that, I guess, helicopter parenting that's seeing everything that they're doing and able to step in when problems occur. So important that as people get older, they can navigate those issues themselves.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

For some parents, having to chat with their kids about issues like online child sexual exploitation is like having the sex talk with them, although perhaps the online talk is even more uncomfortable. But it's a conversation that needs to be had. The ThinkUKnow presentations are designed to equip parents and carers with the knowledge they need to have those conversations. And Kate has some good advice on how to start.

Kate:

I guess every circumstance will be different. And it's a little bit like the idea of having to have courageous conversations. Maybe don't think of it as being courageous, just think of it as a conversation. So don't make

too much of a big thing of it to start with. It can be as simple as sitting down with your kids and watching what they're doing. So gaming for instance - just commenting on what you're seeing and asking questions, quite innocent sort of questions that then can lead onto more in-depth questions. I think conversations in the car are brilliant. It's a great opportunity for parents to talk to their kids. And often, one discussion will lead onto another. The other thing is, particularly in the teenage years, you've got them there for that period of time, they can't get away. So, you can ensure that the conversation goes somewhere.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

A cornerstone of the ThinkUKnow program is its relatability and easy to understand and implement information. The presentations are delivered by law enforcement and industry partners, who volunteer their time and experience to educate the community about how to protect our kids online. Kristy Thomson is the Senior Project Manager of the AFP's Online Child Safety Team and helps develop the materials and resources which form a vital part of the ThinkUKnow presentations. The core of every presentation is the See, Say, Do approach, which aims to give parents and carers an idea of how our kids are using the internet and interacting with others when they're online.

Kristy Thomson:

All our presentations are pro-technology and they address topics in regards to online child sexual exploitation. So that includes things like self-generated online child sexual exploitation material, online grooming, image-based abuse, sexual extortion, and how to get help. And we do that through the lens of providing a broad understanding of what young people see, say, and do online. So, what they see is when a young person searches for content online, such as videos, images and text. What they say is when they connect with other people, such as friends and family. And then what they do online, so that's the different types of apps and games that they may be using. We also look at online challenges that a young person may face when they are online and these can depend on the type of activity that they're doing, so if they're playing games or using social media apps. And we look at the challenges by knowing what the challenges are that can help a parent and carer prevent the online challenges and manage them, so they can take action if a young person needs it. I think because technology is such a big part of a child's life, you know, it's really important that they know what their child is doing online, so learning the technology. And our presentations are a step in helping expand their knowledge and sort of learn what their child are doing online so they can then sort of take practical steps to help them.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

At the heart of the ThinkUKnow program are its volunteers and presenters - hundreds of them, covering every State and Territory, ensuring that online safety messages reach as many Australians as possible. Volunteer presenters come from law enforcement, industry partners, even community partners, such as Neighbourhood Watch, where recently one volunteer presented more than sixty sessions in a single year. It's that kind of dedication and passion which embodies the spirit of Neighbourhood Watch - people working with police to help prevent crime in their local area, while protecting children and other vulnerable members of the community. Maria Bennett is the CEO.

Maria Bennett:

These could be our neighbours. These could be the people that live next door to us, across the road from us. The internet has really caused the world to become a global village. So there's nothing to stop someone from across the world entering your lounge room through your child's device. There's no way known that a parent would allow that, yet children are vulnerable and inquisitive. And so if they get an inquiry, someone that's

posing as a friend, what's the harm to say hello and engage? And it's just too high risk. You wouldn't let your child do that if they are in a park or in a shopping centre or down the street. That's the difficulty with online predators. They really can just come into your child's bedroom at eleven o'clock at night, totally unbeknownst to anyone else in the household. And that's where Neighbourhood Watch needs to be good neighbours and be observant. Look out for any tell-tale signs. Be friends, be a trusted neighbour. So then if the child or the parent needs to seek advice that they can be the people that they go to to trust for information. And trust your instincts. If you think something's wrong, report it. If it turns out to be nothing, then there's nothing lost, but if it actually turns out to be an issue, potentially it's a child's life that's saved.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Microsoft was one of the founding partners of ThinkUKnow in Australia and the company is active in providing insight and advice to parents who may feel a little lost. Phil Meyer is a technology strategist with Microsoft. Through its Family Safety Settings, Microsoft has for many years been providing parents and carers technological controls to limit screen time and access on its Windows software, Xbox gaming platforms, and Android devices. But Phil acknowledges that technology can only go so far.

Phil Meyer:

Frankly, yeah, I'm a technologist, and technology's great, even cool. But I don't think this is all about the tech. I think this is very much more about the behaviours and building that trust relationship between parents and children. Things are gonna go wrong in life. Even on the sporting fields, you put pads on and you put elbow guards down and kids can still get injured. Even with all these protections, whether they're Apple or Microsoft safety systems, there's something that might get through and somebody's gonna get hurt in this. So I'm hoping that parents through this sort of podcast and through ThinkUKnow will be better prepared to help pick up their kids, dust them off and get them back out there and having fun and being productive on the internet.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Phil's also been a ThinkUKnow presenter since its inception, one of many volunteers from the tech giant working to help parents, carers and teachers to understand the technology that kids are using.

Phil Meyer:

We were actually one of the founding partners to ThinkUKnow, dating back to about 2008, I think we started discussions, 2009 we actually started going out. It really came about because we saw this increased usage of the internet by young people outside of their school. It was also the advent of mobile devices, early iPhones, gaming systems. And I think we, the Australian Federal Police, and the other volunteer groups, we all had a shared concern about really how this technology was being used by children at the time. And it was all done on PCs and Macs back then, because it was the early days of iPads and iPhones and mobile phones, smartphones, was very, very early. Even gaming consoles at that stage were largely disconnected. They aren't like they are today. There's more apps and more users and more platforms to gain access and I guess during the pandemic it's become a pandemic of applications and access as well, as people have been working from home more than they've ever worked before.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

With such an abundance of apps and technology and our kids being connected online more than ever before, it's only natural that Phil and other ThinkUKnow presenters receive lots of questions during their presentations.

Phil Meyer:

A common question is: "How do I get my kids off their device?" And I reflect on a time when I was presenting and a particular lady in the audience was on her phone the whole time. She's the one who asked the question. And I said, "Well, it's by setting the right example." I don't think she actually got what I was getting at in that pointed comment, but others in the room did. So I just went on and explained that maybe at dinner time, it's about having dinner together and taking those devices away. Maybe it's about you not having your phone at the meal table, or indeed you putting your phone away an hour or so before going to bed so that they can see by way of example that you're not using your device all the time and that you're actually engaging human-to-human, person to person.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

For Detective Superintendent Crossling, another common question comes in the form of people wanting to know what to do when a child comes to them requesting a specific app.

Jayne Crossling:

The first thing you ask is, "Is it age appropriate? Are you okay with the nature of it and the content of it? Is that in keeping with your beliefs and values, and are there any safety challenges identified?" Because you're doing some research there. If you were to research something like TikTok, I think you'd be then quite aware that there are a range of different challenges, some really complex challenges with something like TikTok. But if you feel that you still want to proceed with it, then you would go through the steps of downloading it together. And there's a lot of benefits in doing this together and having a shared experience. You would also set up a separate profile for yourself for whatever that is, even if you're not terribly interested in it, but it'll help you better understand the ins and outs of it. And within that app environment, you would learn how to take screenshots, how to capture URLs, how to block and report any of those things, if you ever needed to help your young child through a problem. And just staying engaged. We know the benefits of parents engaging with young people on subjects of technology, given how passionate they are, given how much pleasure they get out of it. Young people really got a lot of positive feedback when their parents show those levels of engagement as well.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

If ever there's been a time for parents to be highly engaged with what their kids are doing online, then the time is right now. The amount of time our kids are spending online has increased dramatically since the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, with basic things like school and catching up with friends being forced into the online space. And by spending more time online, our kids become more vulnerable to unsolicited - and unwanted - contact. Nick Thomas is a Senior Prevention Officer within the AFP's Online Child Safety Team and oversees the roll-out of the ThinkUKnow program into Australian states and territories. In recent months, Nick and the team have seen a significant increase in the appetite from parents and carers for information around how to keep their kids safe online.

Nick Thomas:

Definitely, the appetite has changed. I'd say that's mainly got to do with the pandemic. Pretty much the world was essentially thrown online overnight and all the industries have had to adjust to this and education is one of them. And because of this, children have sort of been forced into the online learning space where previously I felt like the attitude was kids were only online for video games and also part of their social life, so it wasn't really an essential aspect of their life, so it was kind of a bit ignored. But now, because they have to be online for their education, I feel like the attitude's changed to, "We need to help them and prepare them for this new



environment that they've found themselves within." We've actually getting quite a more positive request from principals, community leaders and schools requesting these ThinkUKnow presentations, because of remote learning due to all these lockdowns.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

There's no doubt the pandemic has heightened awareness around the need for parents to be more vigilant around what their kids are seeing, saying, and doing online. And that's why the ThinkUKnow presentations and online fact sheets are an invaluable resource. The fact sheets are also available in languages other than English, which helps the online safety message get through to kids in a range of diverse communities who are just as vulnerable when they're online.

Nick Thomas:

I wouldn't say that they're more specifically vulnerable to it but it's more, I'd say, the parents that migrate over here, they probably have less of an understanding of how the technology works. And then because their kids grow up in an Australian culture, they're sort of exposed to this online world and their parents probably do not have the tools or the knowledge as much as someone who probably grew up in a Western society. So that's what our program really aims to teach, is the adults, sort of, the technology that the children are using, and sort of recognise the warning signs of grooming. We've got a lot of refugee communities that come from countries where English is the second language. There are police out there that work in these communities, and they use ThinkUKnow as, like a great sort of outreach program, where they can go into the community, they say, "Hey, this is who we are. We're on your side." And they use it as an outreach program where they get to know the community, and they're also able to have a positive message at the same time. All these presenters, they have different techniques on how they communicate the program. Some of them are from that type of community themselves, so they can speak their native language, so some of them would translate the presentation. We've got other examples where the community organisations, they would organise a translator for the event. And we also have some fact sheets that we translate into all the different languages.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

The ThinkUKnow website is a great resource for anyone wanting more information around keeping kids safe online and protecting them from online child sexual exploitation. As well as finding all the details you need to book a ThinkUKnow presentation, as Detective Superintendent Jayne Crossling explains, you'll also find templates for the popular family online safety contract - a joint project between the Carly Ryan Foundation and the AFP.

Jayne Crossling:

On the ThinkUKnow website, there's two different versions. One is pre-filled, that gives you some really standard approaches to take in engaging with children. And it is a form of conversation starter. Or you could cherry-pick out of the pre-filled one and then start your own, so there is a blank one. And what parents have told us over the years is just how powerful they can be and how enduring, because they've ensured that there are consequences for breaches of contracts and that there are consequences for both the young person and the parents. So, some of the things that young people have insisted have gone into contracts include no work calls at the dinner table, no mobile phone calls over the weekend, not allowed to bring your mobile phone to the park to take work calls. And the kids themselves have to also commit to doing certain things and ensuring their homework's done before they play a game or go online. One of the key things that any contract should cover off on is that it's really incumbent on the young person to speak up and tell somebody when something's gone wrong, even if it's not necessarily the parent, because sometimes it can be just so confronting to talk to a

parent, and you may fear reprisals as a child as well. But even if you go through some convoluted process, you still need to tell somebody. And there's a line of text in both contracts saying, "Nothing is ever so bad that you can't tell a trusted adult." These sorts of facilitated contracts I think can be really very useful and help overcome some of the concerns that a parent might have and it puts them in control a little bit as well, given that they're most likely buying the device in the first place and they're paying the bills.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

The internet is a fantastic place, but no-one will deny it can also be a dangerous place. So in much the same way that we teach kids how to do things safely in the physical world, we need to do exactly the same in the online space. We need to be more aware of what our kids are seeing, saying and doing online. The technology is here to stay, so the onus is now on us to educate ourselves about it, so we can protect and guide our kids towards a safer future. Reece Kershaw is the AFP Commissioner, and believes no-one can be too careful or too vigilant in safeguarding the online space that kids may inhabit, whether that be for school or play.

Reece Kershaw:

Going back 15 years ago, I was involved in investigating online child exploitation. And sadly, what I've seen, both personally and professionally, is a significant increase in not just the volume of material that's out there on the internet, but the number of victims that have been groomed, targeted and exploited. It's a crime type that sadly is on the increase and it really concerns me that we need to do more, not just in our arrest rate and our interventions, but in the prevention, education and awareness to make sure we keep our children safe online and what the dangers are. And the messages haven't really changed. They're still the same messages, and that is that parents and carers and those responsible for young kids, you know, need to be connected to their children and understand what are they actually really doing on these mobile devices, on the internet, and so on. Because these predators have adapted and have become smarter and smarter and have used quite sophisticated techniques to groom and harm our children. I do want to thank those parents that are alive to this issue, and we do our best as parents to make sure that we do keep our kids safe online. But I think there's more than we can do with getting it to the broader network of Australians to make sure that this is a real issue.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Education and greater awareness among parents and carers are critical factors in reducing the incidence of online child sexual exploitation. They can even go a long way towards its eradication. Alongside education, parents like Tim simply want more people to start talking about the issue.

Tim:

I think the more people who push through and listen to it and become educated, the more we'll start to talk about it as a community. It is a conversation that we need to have. It does need to be a percentage of our conversation, yeah. And try and park that unpleasantness somehow. Just because the reason we're doing it is to protect our kids.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

In the next episode of Closing the Net, we bust open some common myths surrounding online child sexual exploitation.

Danielle Broster:

There's a strong stereotype of what an offender looks like. And it's often fed to us by what we're seeing portrayed in movies or media. And the reality is that online offenders can be any age, any gender, from any background, and from all walks of life. So they're not always the creepy older male lurking in their parents' basement that we often see portrayed.

Brendan Hayler:

The really alarming thing that I've seen from my operation and from other things around that is that it doesn't take very long at all to flip from just a conversation to sextortion. In fact, it can be as few as three sentences and then they're beginning to solicit pictures, sexualized pictures, nudity from children.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

If the content in this podcast has caused any distress, or if you know a child is being contacted or groomed online, visit [acce.gov.au](http://acce.gov.au) to find out how to report and where you can seek support. If you see child abuse material online, it's important to report it to the eSafety Commissioner who can help get it removed. And if you think a child is in immediate danger, please call Triple Zero or your local police. You can provide anonymous information about this crime to [crimestoppers.com.au](http://crimestoppers.com.au) or on 1800 333 000.

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