

## **Closing The Net – Season 2, Episode 2, Time To talk**

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:

Understand what your kids are doing online. Think the unthinkable, which some people are not willing to go there.

Tracy Adams:

I think it's a subject that makes people sometimes feel uncomfortable, to talk about the exploitation of children, the abuse of children, the sexual abuse of children by family members. We've gotta get over that, being uncomfortable.

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.

Amanda:

I think that it only sinks in once there's consequences or once it goes further. I think if they send that one photo, they make that one comment, and not much happens with it, they don't think anything of it. Once that image is shared, and it gets out, that's when a kid... it really hits home.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

I'm Caroline Craig and this is Season 2 of Closing The Net. A podcast series that looks at the borderless crime of online child sexual exploitation and provides valuable tips and advice to parents, carers and teachers to help protect kids and keep them safe online. In the previous episode, we learnt about some of the valuable resources available through the AFP's online education program, ThinkUKnow – resources that communities everywhere can use to educate themselves and help start conversations around what, for many, is a very uncomfortable topic.

In this episode, we'll bust open some of the myths surrounding online child sexual exploitation, offer some practical advice around what parents, carers and teachers can do to become more involved in what kids are doing online and how to protect them. And we'll hear the story behind this mother's heartfelt plea to other parents.

Lizzie:

And that's one of the things that I always say to my friends since it happened, before you allow your child to have whatever it is, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, learn how to use the settings of what you can protect and what you can't.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Some of the material you're about to hear may be confronting, but for anyone involved in the life of a child, you can't afford not to listen. The Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation - otherwise known as the ACCCE - is a world-class hub of knowledge, expertise and resources, which brings together law enforcement with government, non-government and other groups in the child protection space to disrupt and prevent this horrendous crime type. And it's a big task. In the twelve months leading up to the end of June 2021, the ACCCE received more than twenty-two-thousand reports of online child sexual exploitation. And that's just Australia.

Commonly available gaming platforms and social media apps provide child sex offenders with relatively easy ways to target victims. Maybe it's a lack of maturity and life experience. Maybe it's a lack of knowledge. Maybe it comes down to their level of self-esteem. But child sex offenders know how to take advantage of these types of vulnerabilities to manipulate and gain access to a child. It's led to some significant pressure on social media companies to do more with their platforms to help protect kids when they're online using these types of apps. Child Wise is one of the Australian organisations working alongside the ACCCE in the child protection space. It works with companies across the world to help them put in place practices that stop children from being abused, no matter where they are. This includes social media companies. Natalie Siegel-Brown is the Managing Director of Child Wise.

Natalie Siegel-Brown:

If you think about social media and the organisations that have started up very, very quickly in that domain, that have come from a pretty commercial focus, they grow super, super quickly, and sometimes that means that they haven't had sufficient regard to all the risks that can occur for children in using their platform and maybe they actually haven't been aware of the proclivity for sexual exploitation and sexual abuse on their platforms. It's been said that anywhere you see an upload button, there is child sexual abuse material. And many of these organisations are unclear about how they actually stop their platforms being used for bad. They're very clear about how their platforms can be used for good, to elevate the voice of kids in a society where most of our power structures actually subjugate the voice of kids and tell them that their voice is less relevant. So there's actually a lot of good that comes from them as well, but there's a heck of a lot of risks and bad stuff that comes, and I can tell you that a lot of the platforms that you and I use, even as adults, actually have huge prevalence of child sexual abuse material. So when we work with these platforms, we don't just work around what safeguards they need to put in place on the platform, but also we work with some of their moderators, or content reviewers, who actually are often at a loss to know how and when to intercept content because all the time trends of abuse are developing that you could never have conceived of even five years ago, and sadly, many of the times, it's actually young people, producing abusive material against other young people. Young people filming each other fighting in the playground and then shaming the loser by uploading the video. So we also work with some technology partners who are working on software that enables content to be pixilated and blocked before it even makes it onto the platform, so that there's not necessarily even the need for as many or as much moderation by a human being. So really, Child Wise comes at the digital risks from a what we call a 'contextual safeguarding' approach. It's very much that situational crime prevention, how can we stop it from getting up there in the first place, but we're really trying to stimulate that conversation about, what is causing this human behaviour to want to promulgate harm? What is it that causes a person to wanna sexually abuse or harm a child?

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

This is a question with no easy answer. And for those working in law enforcement, they know that child sex offenders don't always come from the same mould. Brendan Hayler is a Federal Agent attached to Child Protection Operations within the AFP.

Brendan Hayler:

If there's one thing I've seen in my two years in Child Protection is there's no one type of any child sex offender. They vary in age, they vary in genders as well, so male and female. They vary in professional occupation, they can be unemployed, they can be employed, and they vary in relationship status as well. They use common apps and platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, as well as some of the other ones on the web, like Chaturbate, Chatroulette, you know, Omegle, where you just get randomly connected with people. And it seems to be that children are using those platforms as entertainment or just to get online and see what's online, I guess, becoming familiar with that platform. 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:

It's hard to know what drives a person to engage in the online sexual exploitation or abuse of a child. To view, share or even produce harmful material involving innocent children. What we do know is that online offenders can be very savvy about using social media and gaming platforms to target their victims and they can go to great lengths to disguise their true identity. Sadly, we also know many people don't like to talk about this issue and it's too uncomfortable to even think about. But if we're serious about protecting our kids, protecting them from online sex offenders seeking to cause harm, then it's time we started talking.

ThinkUKnow is Australia's national education program that aims to provide knowledge and get more people talking about online child sexual exploitation. Danielle Broster is a Senior Prevention Officer working in the AFP's Online Child Safety Team, who manage the ThinkUKnow program.

Danielle Broster:

It isn't being talked about as much as it should be. This leads to a lot of unknowns about the crime type. So, some of the key barriers that we're seeing, particularly with parents and carers and even educators, is there are a lot of negative attitudes towards the topic. And obviously it is a difficult subject to talk about, but it elicits feelings of fear and anger, shame, disgust, denial, and this creates a lot of stigma around the subject. There's limited knowledge and understanding of some of the challenges and the consequences of the crime type, as well as feelings that it might be too hard to take action or that it's a bit overwhelming. There are also a lot of feelings as though parents and carers don't have adequate information or support to take action and some also just don't perceive the topic as being their responsibility.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Preventing the online sexual exploitation of children is everyone's responsibility. There's no doubt that the sexual abuse or exploitation of a child by an online sex offender is something none of us would willingly choose to think about, let alone talk about. But if we don't talk about it, if we don't educate ourselves about the issue, then the conversation remains buried and we allow myths and misconceptions about this crime type to fester and grow. As ThinkUKnow's Danielle Broster explains, one of these 'myths' is that online child sex offenders are always older men.

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. Sometimes they're a trusted adult or a family friend. Sometimes they're very successful, charismatic, or, in some cases, young themselves. So we're seeing offenders who are in their twenties and thirties being charged with online child sexual exploitation.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Another myth surrounds online grooming, with many thinking it takes a long time for someone to groom a child. That leads many parents and carers to think they'd have time to notice the signs and to stop things before they went too far. The truth is, it can be only a matter of minutes for online child sex offenders to gain trust and form friendships with their potential victims.

Danielle Broster:

Offenders can use a variety of tactics to groom children. Some may be very sophisticated, use multiple platforms and multiple identities. Others will simply contact as many children as possible, hoping that some will give in to their demands. Some may only target a single child. Online grooming can also be very difficult to detect as offenders can be very manipulative and encourage or shame the victim into keeping the interactions a secret or manipulate the child into thinking that their interaction is friendly or trustworthy.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Research conducted by the ACCCE in 2019 revealed that more than two-thirds of Australian parents believe teenagers are much more at risk than younger children of online child sexual exploitation, but this is another myth. Anyone under the age of 18 can become a victim. And with touch screens making it easier for little kids to navigate a device and connect to the internet, the ACCCE is increasingly receiving reports of very young children - some as young as four - engaging with offenders from around the world.

Danielle Broster

So the ACCCE will receive reports of young children quite innocently uploading naked content of themselves online, where a child has been given a device and left unsupervised. In these scenarios, nothing malicious has necessarily happened. The child has just thought it would be funny to upload the content of themselves. So this highlights, essentially, the importance of starting the conversation young, as well as implementing safe online practices like supervision and being aware of the kind of apps and devices that your child is using from a young age.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

The advice seems pretty clear-cut, yet the latest research from the ACCCE suggests only around half of all parents and carers are talking to their kids about this sort of stuff. And close to eighty per cent of those surveyed thought online sexual exploitation was something that just couldn't happen to their child. Most parents don't like to think anything bad will happen to their child online until it actually does. In Australia, there are almost nine hundred-thousand kids aged between twelve and seventeen. With the accessibility of mobile phones in this age group, producing and sharing sexualised images and content has never been easier. Sending nudes is considered by some teenagers as a bit of innocent flirting, especially if they're in a relationship. But if they lose control of that image, things can go wrong very quickly.

Lizzie:

She sent a photo to a person that she never met in her life on Snapchat. Completely naked. Completely naked. When I found out, the first thing I said to her was, "Was it showing your face? Was it completely naked or it was kind of naked?" And she was like, "No, mummy, it was everything. It was everything."

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Like a lot of parents, Lizzie - whose identity's been changed for the purpose of this podcast - struggled with the idea of her thirteen-year-old daughter being on social media. But since her daughter's friends were all using it, Lizzie found it too hard to say no. To allay her fears, Lizzie made sure she had her daughter's username and password so she could log on at any time to keep tabs on her daughter's online activity. But teenagers know their way around apps far better than we give them credit for and it wasn't long before Lizzie's daughter had worked out how to get onto certain social media apps without her mother knowing. Lizzie's daughter was contacted online by someone she'd never met before and began interacting with someone she thought was a fourteen-year-old boy.

Lizzie:

She probably saw, oh yeah, it's someone my age, you know, cute and start talking, thinking that it was nothing much. She did say that in the beginning of the conversation they were, you know, he was really nice. She said it wasn't sexual, the conversation, but he was talking to her about, you know, he could get some money if she wants to send a picture, he would get her some money for that picture but it would not be something that, you know, it would be shared. I don't think the money was the motivation. It was the kind of attention for the boy. You know, someone who, you know, saying that she's pretty and you know that, and, "Oh, send me a photo of you naked", and she didn't see that as something bad because I think in her head, he was a nice guy, he wouldn't do anything bad.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

It wasn't long before Lizzie's daughter had sent this nice guy a naked image of herself. And from that point on, things quickly unravelled.

Lizzie:

I think after she sent the picture, she kind of "Oops, you know, I shouldn't have". But it was gone and he asks for her to send more. And at first, she started kind of, "Oh, I'll see, I'll see." And then, she was like, "No, I'm not gonna send any more." And he's like, "You will send more, otherwise I'm gonna take this photo and I will send it to all your friends." She thought he was bluffing. She didn't believe he would do it. And he did. He sent it to all her school friends. Not just school friends, but school kids that are around her, not necessarily her group, close group of friends. But the part that was very disturbing for me was the fact that these kids shared the photo among themselves and to other children at the school. And on social media, put on Snapchat stories, making fun of her. Kids, while she's in the school canteen queue, pointing at her, showing the picture on the phone to her. And I only found out because the school counsellor called me one day, I was at work. And she called me to, to come to the school because she, she said something really serious happened and I need you now. She went to speak to the counsellor knowing that the counsellor would have to speak with me about it. But she felt more comfortable to let her tell me instead of coming straight to me. Which hurts so much as a mum. All that I wanted, and she was with her head down and really scared, I just want to hug her and say, it's not your fault and I'm here, you know.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

The incident has given Lizzie some valuable insights into protecting kids online, insights she wants to share with other parents.

Because her Snapchat wasn't private, anyone could get in contact with her. And that's how I believe that she got in contact with this person. I didn't know how to use Snapchat which didn't help me much, and that's one of the things that I always say to my friends since it happened. Before you allow your child to have whatever it is, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, learn how to use the settings of what you can protect and what you can't. I didn't know and I allowed her to have Snapchat because she wants to use the filters for the funny faces. You just want your child safe. And you, you, you care so much. When they are little, when you can hold their hand to cross the road. And you care so much with, you know, when they are going to places, to their friend's house. When you don't realise that it's there in your house, something that you allowed them to do, you helped that situation somehow. You facilitated for that to happen. And because she is such a good kid in school, responsible, I kind of assumed that she had the maturity when she's still just a kid. That was my job and I kind of stepped back because I believed that being such a responsible child, she would know better.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

It's heart-breaking for any parent to find themselves in the kind of situation Lizzie did. We tell our kids incidents like these are not their fault while all along, we carry the burden of responsibility. A responsibility to protect our kids. It's a responsibility which can sometimes weigh very heavily on our shoulders. It can be hard for parents to know how to talk to their kids about the issues associated with the production and sharing of sexualized content, no matter how innocently flirtatious they think it might be. In fact, many parents and their kids don't even fully understand the criminal implications.

Jeremy Prichard:

Production itself is an offense. So, this means that the thirteen-year-old who takes a photo of himself or herself in a very sexualized pose, they've just committed an offense, whether they send it to anybody or not. Sending it to somebody, distributing for example, or sharing as the case may be, could be an offense. Possessing, accessing, these can also be offenses. So, yeah, it is complex.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Jeremy Prichard is an Associate Professor at the University of Tasmania Law School. Jeremy's researching new ways to try and reduce the harms associated with sexualized material of children on the internet. It is a complex area, but as parents, we need to at least start the conversation somewhere, understanding that what may work for kids in primary school will be quite different from what may work for teenagers.

Jeremy Prichard:

So, it could be at a young age that really all we need to get going, without it being too tense and scary, are just some basic rules about how technology is used in the house, and at school. Some basic dos and don'ts, and even, this is naughty and so forth, or whatever the appropriate language is. I think at some stage it is appropriate for parents to be telling, especially adolescents in their home, you know, there's certain types of material that you can produce on your phone, or that your friends might produce, that could be an indictable offense. It could be a really serious offense, and so be careful, and open up that discussion on that topic. One of the things for parents is that this is, it's a horrible topic. They just don't want to have to think about it much. That might be one of the cognitive hurdles for parents to get over. It's complex. They might feel, "Goodness, where do I go to find out what I, you know, what I need to know?" They might not only want, need to know the basics of what the law is but how to deliver it to kids of different ages. This is something I've heard schools

talk about. There seems to be, when they put on information nights, I think for many parents it seems to just be an embarrassment factor. They just don't wanna have to talk about this, you know, it might fall in the same category for them as sex education and maybe, "I hope the school are teaching them all about this." Schools can only do so much and parents definitely have a key role to play.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Fortunately for parents and carers, Australia is home to some amazing organisations who are there to offer support, producing up-to-date materials and resources which can really help when having those tough conversations with kids.

Helen Fogarty:

When we wanna talk to parents about online safety, we have to be able to give them fairly easy strategies and we have to be able to paint a picture of how it can be okay. We don't want to paint a picture of the internet being this terrible scary place. We need to find ways that we engage parents so that it doesn't trigger these ideas of, "Oh, it's all too much" or "It's all too scary."

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Helen Fogarty leads the communications team at NAPCAN - Australia's National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. NAPCAN is just one of the organisations offering tips and advice on how to talk with kids about online safety, without making parents and carers feel burdened or overwhelmed by the task ahead.

Helen Fogarty:

A lot of the work we do at NAPCAN is about equity. And we know that a lot of parents are, are struggling because they have other burdens like poverty, like unemployment, just the general life stresses. And people are very busy. So when we go to parents expecting them to do something extra, it's no surprise that, you know, they don't have the head space for it. So, we sometimes talk about it in terms of like, being a bit like an overloaded truck. So someone who doesn't have enough money, doesn't know how to get their kid to school 'cause their car's broken down, they're really not gonna have space for these things. So that's where the really big picture of what NAPCAN does, does come back to online safety, because we can't expect those parents to be kind of finding space for these things when they have such a burden. I mean, there's just literally not space in people's brains to do that. The other thing about that, that messaging is we do a lot of work with organisations and parents about how to have conversations from a very early age with children about things like consent and safety. So, regardless of what a parent can do, if any adult can be a trusted adult for a child, they're doing a good job. So, they may not have time to work out how to set up the safety mechanisms on a laptop, they may not feel comfortable having all the conversations they need to do, but if they're trusted by that child, you're a bit ahead of the game.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Trust is such a critical element in getting kids to disclose abuse of any kind. For Natalie Siegel-Brown from Child Wise, if her 25 years in child protection has taught her anything, it's that trust between a child and an adult needs to be earned. It's not automatic.

Natalie Siegel-Brown:

Kids will test you. They won't disclose the real issue, the full issue to begin with. They'll test you with a small thing, "How do you react to the fact that I'm telling you that this friend of mine at school hit me? Or that this

friend of mine at school threatened to touch my private part if I didn't do, if I reported something to the teacher?" They are serious enough, but if you as a parent, or carer, or teacher, dismiss those things, they will immediately treat that as a barrier to being able to share anything further with you. So take the small things seriously. If they disclose harm online, whether it be from a peer or another unknown adult, whatever you do, do not react by saying, "That's it, no access to your iPhone or your iPad." Many kids fear that disclosure will result in them having the technology taken away from them. And you have to remember, our kids live this seamless existence where the physical and digital world has no divide, one is just a natural extension of the other. So, abstinence doesn't fix anything and it also doesn't equip them with the power to be able to leave a situation when it's getting really scary. In fact, it probably just deters disclosure if you're gonna take it away, and we really work hard to explain to people that abstinence is not the answer. You want to create an environment where kids feel open to disclose without fear of your judgment and fear of being forced offline, where they're going to be even more isolated, whereas previously online they actually might have had some support from their friends. So, we need to build the confidence of kids in disclosing without fear or shame and we also need to build their confidence to know what to happen. We also need to understand that, depending on the age of the child, they just might not feel comfortable sharing this stuff with adults. Don't assume that no matter how fabulous you are as a parent, carer, or teacher, they're gonna talk to you. Kids often feel like us adults don't get it. Let's face it, most of us who are over the age of eighteen, did not grow up in a world where we, our fingers were touching a glass screen from six months, a year of age. We probably don't get it from their perspective.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

The eSafety Commissioner is Australia's national independent regulator for online safety, leading and coordinating online safety efforts across Commonwealth departments, authorities and agencies. To help teachers and educators to better understand where kids are coming from when talking about technology or how and where they spend their time online, the eSafety Commissioner has developed an online safety framework that will have everyone talking the same language. Sharon Trotter is the eSafety Commissioner's Executive Manager of Education, Prevention and Inclusion.

Sharon Trotter:

So, there's five key fundamentals. The first is to focus on children and what they need. And I guess that means, in practice don't be putting in place programs that are not going to have a practical impact for a child or not going to recognise, you know, their rights and have their input. The second one is to use strengths-based approaches. That means, don't deliver education through scare tactics but start by recognising that the internet is positive and it's here to stay in a child's life. The third one is to have school-wide approaches, effective school-wide approaches. That means building online safety into lessons at every year of a child's learning and supporting that through ensuring that teachers are upskilled in online safety. And so, if a child comes to them, they know both how to teach it and how to respond to an incident. That also means ensuring that the school is working with the broader community, including parents, to make sure that they're all sort of speaking with one voice when it comes to online safety and that parents are getting information at the same time as their children. The fourth one is to both teach online safety as a subject in itself, so have a lesson that's dedicated to it, but then to take opportunities throughout other subjects as well to be teaching or to be working in online safety lessons. That means, you know, you might have a lesson about respectful relationships, so build in an online element to that. Make sure that you're also reflecting on how that manifests in the online world as well as in the face-to-face world. And the fifth one is just to make sure that when it comes to online safety as a school, it's not a set-and-forget. You don't set an approach every couple of years and then just leave it and then expect it will be all fine, but to come back to it, evaluate what you're doing, identify what's working, and then to go away and, you know, change your program accordingly and according to your school's needs.



Caroline Craig, Narrator:

The school environment has a big impact on a child's development and that impact can be felt inside and outside the classroom. Amanda is a secondary school teacher who's seen first-hand how damaging online abuse can be to teenage kids.

Amanda:

A particular female student had sent nude photographs. It was head-to-toe nude selfie, fully nude. She was in, from memory, Year 8 at the time, and she'd sent it to a boy in Year 10 who went to our school, and then he sent it on to all of his mates. So for her, that was absolutely destroying, and I knew her really well. We had a great relationship, and we had to move classes for her, we had to sort out so many different things for that poor kid and that was awful. We had another kid who was engaging in sexual activity with her boyfriend. He filmed it. He sent it on Snapchat to his mates. I'm not familiar with it but his mates had some sort of Snap unblocker and they were able to download that video. Then they posted that online. And for any family that's horrific, but she came from a particular different culture background, so for her that was even more significant. And she regressed so much. She withdrew from school a lot, she faced bullying from kids at school, from other schools, online, in person, and I would say that just about destroyed her. It was horrendous.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Teachers have a vitally important role in protecting and caring for children and part of that comes down to building strong relationships with students so that if they choose to disclose any form of abuse, they feel like they'll be heard, believed and supported.

Amanda:

I think definitely we have an obligation. I think these kids come to us as teachers and they put such trust in us and they confide in us a lot more than their parents a lot of the time. They're seeking advice, they're seeking support, they're looking in ways in which to navigate friendships, relationships, even sometimes they'll come to us and ask us to tell their parents what's going on 'cause they just don't know how to broach that subject. So I think yeah, there is a huge responsibility on us and I know that I wanna be a part of that. It's not something that I would shy away from. But it's a really fine line when kids come to you to confide and they don't want their parents to know. So what is it that we have the duty of care to report? We want them to open up, but then at the same time we don't wanna break that trust. So we're really open with the kids about what we do and don't have to report, and often if we know they're about to unload, we say, "Okay, just so that you know, these are the things I have to tell whoever it is that's at home, before you open up." And the kids can be really clever in knowing what we do and don't have to discuss at home, or the way they phrase things and the way they ask for help and information. They can be really clever about that. But a lot of the time, the kids just want advice.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

Beyond schools and teachers, there are other places kids can turn to for advice, help and support when things go wrong. Tracy Adams is the CEO of YourTown, which provides a range of services to children and young people across Australia. One of the most well-known services is Kids Helpline, which provides twenty-four-seven phone and online counselling to children and young people between the ages of five and twenty-five.

Tracy Adams:

Sometimes talking can be really hard, and that's one of the reasons why Kids Helpline has opened up more channels than just the telephone calls, so that we recognise that. Being deliberate about asking young people, you know, it's one thing to promote help seeking, but I think as adults and the people around these young people, there is still a space for really seeking out and asking a young person if they are okay, if things are okay for them and being deliberate about that. You know, we can't expect our young people to carry the burden of help seeking if nobody's really stepping into that space. It's one thing for adults to say it's okay to help seek, but adults themselves are often very loathe to do that and it is an unfortunate reality that we've still got to do a lot more with our role modelling as adults in this space about help seeking. Parents are often loathe to help seek because it feels that they've been inadequate. Children are then often loathe to help seek because people might view them that "Why can't you just be resilient and deal with this?" So, we've got to keep our messaging proactive, we've got to be deliberate in our role modelling, we've got to keep providing these pathways of support in as many ways as possible. So, not just asking a young person to call and speak to a stranger, but putting different channels, using our social media platforms to have good messaging, messaging by people that they look up to that are role models, that actually say, "This is normal. Nobody can deal with these challenges on their own, no child should have to, and there are people here for you." So, I think we've come a long way and I think the increasing numbers of young people who use Kids Helpline, for example, and I know many other services, is an example where the message is getting through.

Caroline Craig, Narrator:

We've learnt throughout the Closing The Net podcasts that the protection of kids when they're online is everyone's responsibility. It's not just down to parents. It's not just down to teachers. Keeping our kids safe online is a whole-of-community issue. So educate yourself on the technology that kids are using. Break down the myths about online child sexual exploitation and how easily it can happen. Take advantage of the wealth of online resources that can help you start conversations. And then, start talking. Because the more we talk about it, the more we normalise the conversation and the more chances we have of providing a better future for our children. Commander Hilda Sirec heads up the team at the ACCCE, a team driven to change the way we look at online child sexual exploitation.

Hilda Sirec:

And by ensuring that we have more structure and understanding that we have to take the taboo out of talking about child exploitation, I think we'll get more community involvement, more NGOs and more parents and teachers and peers of people that are potentially exploited, willing to have the conversation about what's not right. There is the need to do more, but I think there's also a cultural change that's needed. We need to be okay about talking about child exploitation. We need to be okay and say for the safety of children, for the safety of our society and to avoid exploitation people are gonna have to be okay to talk about what isn't always a nice topic to talk about.

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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