

Safety by Design (SbD) is an initiative that places the safety and rights of users at the centre of the design, development and deployment of online products and services.

The initiative, led in Australia by eSafety, aims to encourage and assist industry to take a proactive and consistent approach to user safety when developing online products and services.

SbD seeks to create stronger, healthier and more positive communities online by driving-up standards of user safety. It puts the responsibility for this on online service providers, their developers and

engineers. It makes SbD a core business objective – at the very centre of product development.

While the concept of SbD is gaining momentum internationally, eSafety's own initiative is well progressed. In order to create a shared and consistent global approach, we are sharing our SbD work with international partners.

Development and consultation

The SbD initiative is the result of extensive development and consultation. It commenced in 2018 with a goal of creating a set of Safety by Design Principles (SbD Principles) to guide online service providers as they assess, review and embed user safety into their products and services.

Consultation has been broad – with industry, organisations responsible for safeguarding users, as well as parents, carers and young people – in order to ensure that the principles cover every aspect of user safety in a practical and meaningful way.

The principles also take into account results of earlier work by government and industry bodies around the world about online user safety, along with well-established theoretical models and international human rights instruments.

On release in 2019, the SbD Principles were overwhelmingly welcomed by those consulted – providing industries with a valuable benchmark.



Safety by Design Principles

The SbD Principles aim to guide services about how to incorporate, enhance and assess user safety throughout the design, development and deployment of their service. They provide a universal and consistent set of realistic, actionable and achievable measures to better protect and safeguard citizens online.

There are three overarching principles:

1) Service provider responsibilities

This principle recognises that the burden of safety should never fall solely upon the end-user. Platforms and services can take preventative steps to help ensure that known and anticipated harms have been evaluated in the design and provision of an online service, along with steps to make services less likely to facilitate, inflame or encourage illegal and inappropriate behaviours.

2) User empowerment and autonomy

This principle notes that the dignity of users online, and their best interests, are of central importance. Human agency and autonomy should be supported, amplified and strengthened in service design. It should allow users greater control, governance and regulation of their own experiences, particularly at times when their safety is, or is at risk of, being compromised.

3) Transparency and accountability

The third principle notes transparency and accountability as the hallmarks of a robust approach to safety, providing users with assurance that the online services they use are operating according to their published safety objectives. It also assures users that the services are working to educate and empower them about steps they can take to address safety concerns.

Each of the overarching principles has detailed sub-principles, and 'good practice' notes which help to clarify and assist services in their implementation. All have been refined with the support and feedback of service providers and industry and will be made available in coming months.

Next steps

eSafety's work on SbD is ongoing. With the core SbD Principles established in early 2019, work has now begun to create a Framework of guidance, working with key stakeholders to develop the tools and resources they need to ensure that user safety is embedded into the design, function and content of their services. We continue to consult with industry and look forward to sharing more information as the initiative progresses.

At eSafety we know that meaningful change can require a pivot in approaches, and that change can take time. We are committed to working with industry, collaboratively and constructively, to reduce, and counter, the risks and threats that citizens face online. We believe that Safety by Design is a catalyst for this change to occur.