

Online Safety for Under 5s



Final report

Prepared for the eSafety Commissioner

27 October 2020

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About Synergistiq

Synergistiq was established in 1990 and has built a credible reputation over the past 30 years working with a wide range of clients, including government, not-for-profit and community agencies.

The expertise and experience of our consultants offer a depth of analysis and understanding of public policy. We work across a wide range of social policy areas – disability, health, drugs and alcohol, ageing, education, family violence and community building – and on issues that are often complex, sensitive and interconnected.

Synergistiq nurtures systemic improvement in social justice and human rights. We are a values-based company, applying a systems and strengths approach with participatory engagement. We value excellence, respect, learning, passion, humanity and courage. We are passionate about influencing structural change to make a difference for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, women, children and young people, and culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

Our office is located on Wurundjeri land. We acknowledge and pay respects to the Traditional Custodians of this land, and the lands, seas and waterways throughout this continent. We pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging.

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We would like to acknowledge the parents, carers and educators who shared their views with us for this project. We acknowledge the extreme pressure and stress that COVID-19 has placed on Australians, particularly those caring for young children. We thank these generous individuals for their considered feedback and reflective suggestions.

Executive summary

The Office of the eSafety Commissioner (eSafety) Early Years team has produced a series of resources (the resources) to support parents/carers and early childhood educators in discussing and promoting online safety for children under five years of age. This report speaks to feedback on two of those resources: a booklet designed for parents entitled *Online safety for under fives* and four online professional learning modules (modules) designed for educators.

Synergistiq was engaged to consult with parents/carers and educators to gather evidence of emotional and behavioural engagement with and learning from the resources. Between May 2020 and October 2020, Synergistiq engaged with parents/carers and educators through focus groups, interviews and a brief online survey. Feedback from those consultations informs this report.

Overall findings suggest that the resources have been positively received by the target audiences, but that most of the friends/family or colleagues of those engaged by the evaluators are not aware of these resources. This report contains suggestions for change and improvement from participant groups and from the evaluators. Key findings, parent/carer experience and educator experience are summarised below.

Key findings: parents/carers

Focus groups/interviews with 12 parents/carers and 27 survey respondents:

- the booklet is considered easy to read and well presented, and contains interesting, relevant and important
- half of the focus group/interview participants were not aware of the booklet prior to learning about the evaluation and most parents/carers do not think their friends/family with children under five are aware of the booklet
- most reported feeling more confident to discuss and take direct action regarding online safety with their child/children
- half had put two or more actions or recommendations from the booklet into place
- one participant felt that the information was not relevant for children aged five and under, while others felt the booklet had expanded their understanding of online safety and why it is important to start early.

Key findings: educators

Interviews with 12 educators:

- all found the modules easy to access and either had or intended to complete all four
- all would recommend the modules to others and most did not think that other educators were aware of the modules
- many said that the modules had enabled them to reflect on how technology could be safely used as a teaching tool in their rooms/services
- half said that the modules had increased their confidence to talk about online safety with children and to respond to any online safety concerns or issues children raised
- two had introduced methods to share the online safety information with parents; one was developing a way to include online safety into their learning program.

1. Background to the evaluation

Across Australia, children under five are engaging online in a number of ways – through viewing shows or games online, talking to and connecting with friends or family and using “smart” devices around the home. While the internet and engaging online can have many benefits for young children and their families, there are also risks.

eSafety is Australia’s national independent regulator for online safety. The eSafety Early Years program provides tailored professional learning, support and resources to the early childhood sector and parents and carers of 0 to 5-year olds. The resources are aimed at:

- building an understanding of online safety (and networked technologies) in young children
- setting the foundation for good online habits in young children – i.e. to be safe,

be kind, ask for help and make good choices

- providing educators with the skill and confidence to support the online safety of the children in their care and their families
- providing parents and carers with easy access to advice and practical tips
- encouraging parents, carers and educators to communicate and work together to support young children in online safety.

eSafety developed and released two resources as part of the Early Years program:

- *Online safety for under 5s*, a booklet for parents and carers (the booklet)
- a series of four professional learning modules for early childhood educators and centre directors/leaders (the modules).



eSafety Early Years: Creating a Safe Online Environment



eSafety Early Years: We MAKE and DO using technology



eSafety Early Years: We SAY and SHARE with technology



eSafety Early Years: We WATCH and EXPLORE on technology

Figure 1. Cover images of four of the five modules available through ECA's learning hub.

The modules were made available through Early Childhood Australia's (ECA) learning hub (a learning management system), and linked from eSafety's Early Years program page. They were promoted by eSafety through social media channels, electronic direct mail (EDM) and sharing with ECA.

As of September 2020, a total of 2,283 module completions¹ had been registered through ECA's learning hub, with the total completions for four of the modules summarised below in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Summary of completions by modules, as of September 2020.

Module	Completions
Creating a safe online environment	505
We MAKE and DO using technology	512
We SAY and SHARE using technology	838
We WATCH and EXPLORE with technology	428
Total	2283

The booklet was made available electronically on eSafety's early years parents webpage as a click through and downloadable document. Users were also able to request a free printed version. One copy was sent to every metropolitan-based registered childcare centre and four copies were sent to centres located in regional and remote locations. Services were able to request additional printed copies free of charge. eSafety also

undertook promotion of the booklet via their social media channels and EDM.

Between January 2020 and 17 August 2020, **22,600 hard copies** of the booklet were ordered by either parents/carers or services. These were in addition to the copies originally sent to centres, as described above. As at 30 June 2020, the booklet had received **3,600 views online** and had **932 downloads**.



Figure 2. Front cover of the booklet, *Online safety for under 5s*, and the module covers for each Image credit: eSafety

¹ This figure does not include completions at organisations who stream modules directly through

their own LMS. These organisations, typically large organisation include up to 15 900 educators.

1.1 Evaluation design

In May 2020, Synergistiq was commissioned by eSafety to conduct an evaluation of the use and impact of the modules and booklet.

The purpose of evaluating these resources was to:

- establish the booklet's and modules' effectiveness
- demonstrate this effectiveness to both internal and external stakeholders
- assist with continued improvement.

The evaluation drew on qualitative data gathered through focus groups and interviews with parents/carers and early childhood educators (educators). In response to low engagement from parent/carers, a survey was added part way through the project as described below.

The two key questions for the evaluation were:

1. What was parents' level of engagement with the booklet?
2. How has educators' practice changed since completing the modules?

Sample size

Sample size for this project was specified in eSafety's request for quote (RFQ) which requested interviews or focus groups with **6 educators** and **12 parents/carers**.

Recruitment

For both stakeholder sets, recruitment occurred in two ways:

- direct contact by eSafety
- indirect contact via promotion through partners and social media by eSafety and Synergistiq.

All stakeholders were provided with a \$25 voucher as compensation for their time.

Educators

Recruitment took place through a number of promotional activities. These included:

- a direct email from an eSafety early years program staff member, to individuals who had completed the modules and indicated they were happy to be contacted to provide further feedback
- mention in an electronic eSafety newsletter distributed to educators
- an email to 11 early childhood education and care services (services) that had ordered additional parent/educator booklets
- posts on the eSafety Facebook and Twitter pages.

With the exception of module participants who received a direct email, all interested candidates were directed to an information webpage produced by Synergistiq that included a secure "Expression of Interest" form through which they could lodge contact details and complete a basic screening questionnaire.

Parents/carers

The consultation target group were parents/carers who had downloaded and read the booklet, with a view to seeking their perspectives on its relevance, ease of understanding and applicability. A first round of promotion for recruitment purposes included the following activities:

- direct electronic mail from eSafety to all parents/carers signed up to the eSafety newsletter
- posts on eSafety's Facebook page
- emails to services that had requested additional copies of the booklet with suggested copy and promotional materials for them to distribute to their parent/carer community

- emails to early years services at a range of local councils and community groups across the country
- promotion through Synergistiq's social media, including Twitter and Facebook, with boosted content.

Parents/carers responding to the promotional activities were directed to a page on Synergistiq's website with information about the project, a downloadable copy of the participant information sheet, consent form and contact details of the research team.

Low response rates to this first round of promotion led to a reassessment of, and adjustment to, the strategy. All new parent/carer visitors to the website were presented with a brief online survey gauging perceptions around the importance of, and confidence levels in, managing online safety for under fives. For those who had seen the booklet, the survey also asked a series of questions about the booklet. At the conclusion of the survey, respondents were provided with the

opportunity to express their interest in participating in a focus group/interview. Four parents/carers expressed their interest through the survey format and were provided a link by the evaluator to the expression of interest page. Two parents/carers proceeded to the focus group/interview stage.

A further round of promotion utilising new messaging (shown below as Figure 3) called for parents/carers who might like to download the booklet and then provide feedback. These promotional activities included:

- direct messaging through various "mothers' group" or "parent group" social media moderators
- closed Facebook groups, including locationally specific Facebook groups and national parent interest pages
- production of targeted Twitter and Facebook images, and creation of Facebook advertisements through boosting and audience targeting.



Figure 3. Promotional image used on social media for targeted recruitment of parents/carers.

Stakeholders

Focus group/interview participation

The evaluation reached its recruitment target of six educators and 12 parents/carers. Five educators expressed their interest through Synergistiq's form and five replied to the email from eSafety. Six of the ten educators who expressed interest were interviewed². All interviewees were from NSW or Victoria. Interviews took place between the 22 July and 31 August 2020, with most being conducted between 5 and 7pm. Table 2 below contains demographic details for educators who participated in interviews.

Table 2. Summary of educators who participated in interviews.

Stakeholder	State/Territory	Location	Centre-type	Role
Educator 1	NSW	Regional	School	Teacher
Educator 2	Victoria	Metropolitan	Long day care/childcare, privately owned	Centre Manager
Educator 3	Victoria	Metropolitan	Long day care/childcare, privately owned	Casual Educator
Educator 4	Victoria	Metropolitan	Long day care, not-for-profit	Educator
Educator 5	Did not wish to disclose.			Educator, Safety Officer
Educator 6	NSW	Regional	Stand-alone kindergarten	Early Childhood Teacher
Additional educator	NSW	Metropolitan	Long day care, not-for-profit	Early Childhood Teacher/ Centre Manager

Nineteen parents/carers expressed their interest to participate in focus groups/interviews, with seven having viewed the booklet prior to recruitment and 12 having viewed the booklet afterwards. Ultimately, 12 of the 19 expressing interest in the study participated in interviews and focus groups. Of the remaining seven who did not complete a focus group/interview, five were not previously aware of the booklet and were sent the link, with one participant requesting a printed copy. A summary of focus group/interview participants is included below at Table 3.

² Those not interviewed either could not be contacted or did not keep their interview appointment.

Table 3. Summary of parents/carers who participated in focus groups/interviews.

Stakeholder	State/Territory	Location	Gender	Number of children	Awareness of booklet prior to evaluation
Parent 1	ACT	Metropolitan	Female	1	Yes
Parent 2	NSW	Metropolitan	Female	1	Yes
Parent 3	NSW	Metropolitan	Male	2	Yes
Parent 4	NSW	Metropolitan	Female	1	Yes
Parent 5	NSW	Metropolitan	Female	1	Yes
Parent 6	NSW	Regional	Female	2 (one under five, one over five)	Yes
Parent 7	VIC	Metropolitan	Female	2 (two under five)	No
Parent 8	VIC	Metropolitan	Female	1	No
Parent 9	WA	Regional	Male	3 (one under five, two over five)	No
Parent 10	NSW	Regional	Female	3 (one under five, two over five)	No
Parent 11	NSW	Metropolitan	Female	1	No
Parent 12	WA	Metropolitan	Female	3 (one under five, two over five)	No

Transcripts of interviews, with identifying factors removed, are included as Attachment 1.

Survey participation

A total of 27 individuals responded to the survey; four additional respondents started the survey and were excluded based on not having children under the age of five in their care. The largest number of respondents was from NSW, accounting for 52% (n = 13) of the total. This was followed by Victoria at 20% (n = 5). No respondents were identified as coming from South Australia or the Northern Territory. The majority of respondents resided in locations they considered “metropolitan”, accounting for 78% (n = 21) with 19% (n =

5) residing in regional locations and one in a remote area. The majority (96%, n = 25) of respondents were female.

Seventeen respondents indicated they had only children aged five and under in their care, with nine having one child and seven having two³. Ten respondents had children aged both under and over five years of age, five had one child under five and one child over five, three had two children under five and one child over five and two had one child under five and two children over five. This is summarised below in Figure 4.

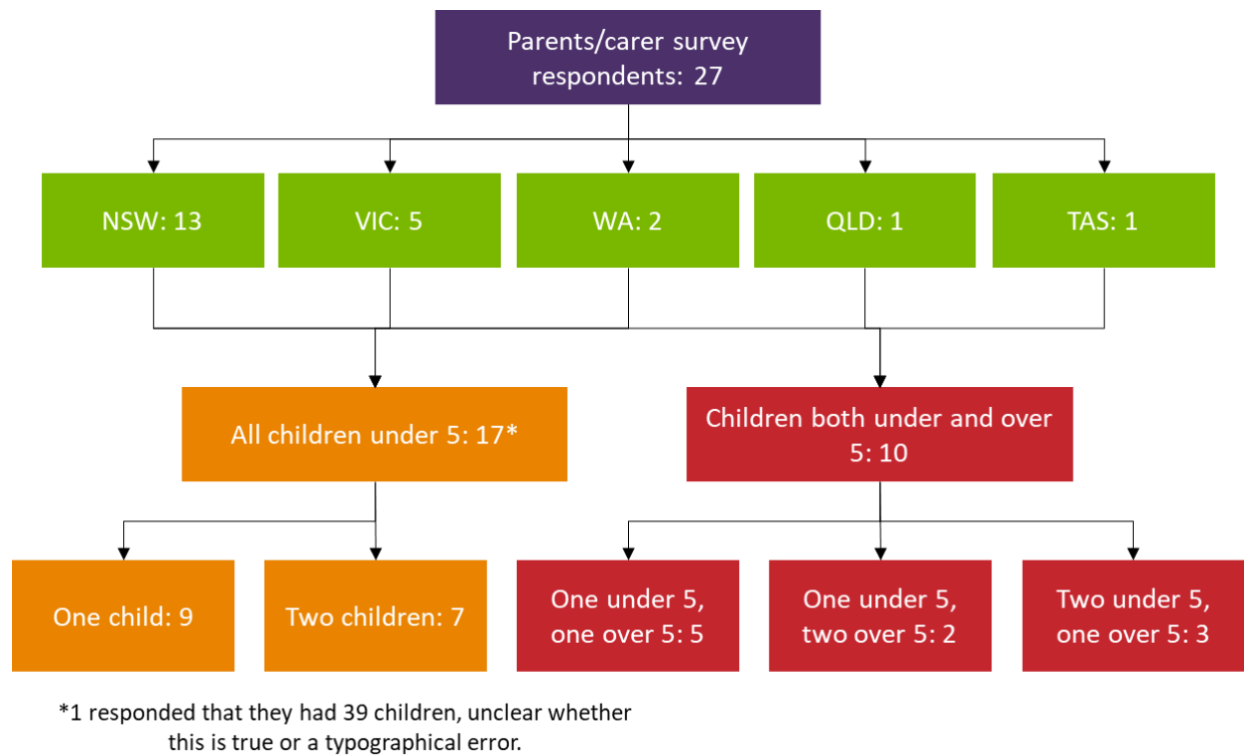


Figure 4. Summary of survey respondents' family composition

Survey responses in raw output form are included as Attachment 2. Responses to questions asking if individuals would like to continue with an interview have been removed.

³ One respondent indicated they had caring responsibility for 39 children under the age of five; it is not possible to know if this is correct (perhaps through a caregiving or educator capacity) or a typographical error.

2. Key findings from consultations with parents/carers

This chapter presents findings from parent interviews under two analytical categories. The first part of this chapter presents themes reported against an evaluation matrix produced by eSafety prior to the commencement of the evaluation. The second part reports subject-centred themes distilled from a general thematic analysis of parent feedback undertaken by the evaluator. A summary of overall findings is presented in Figure 5 below.

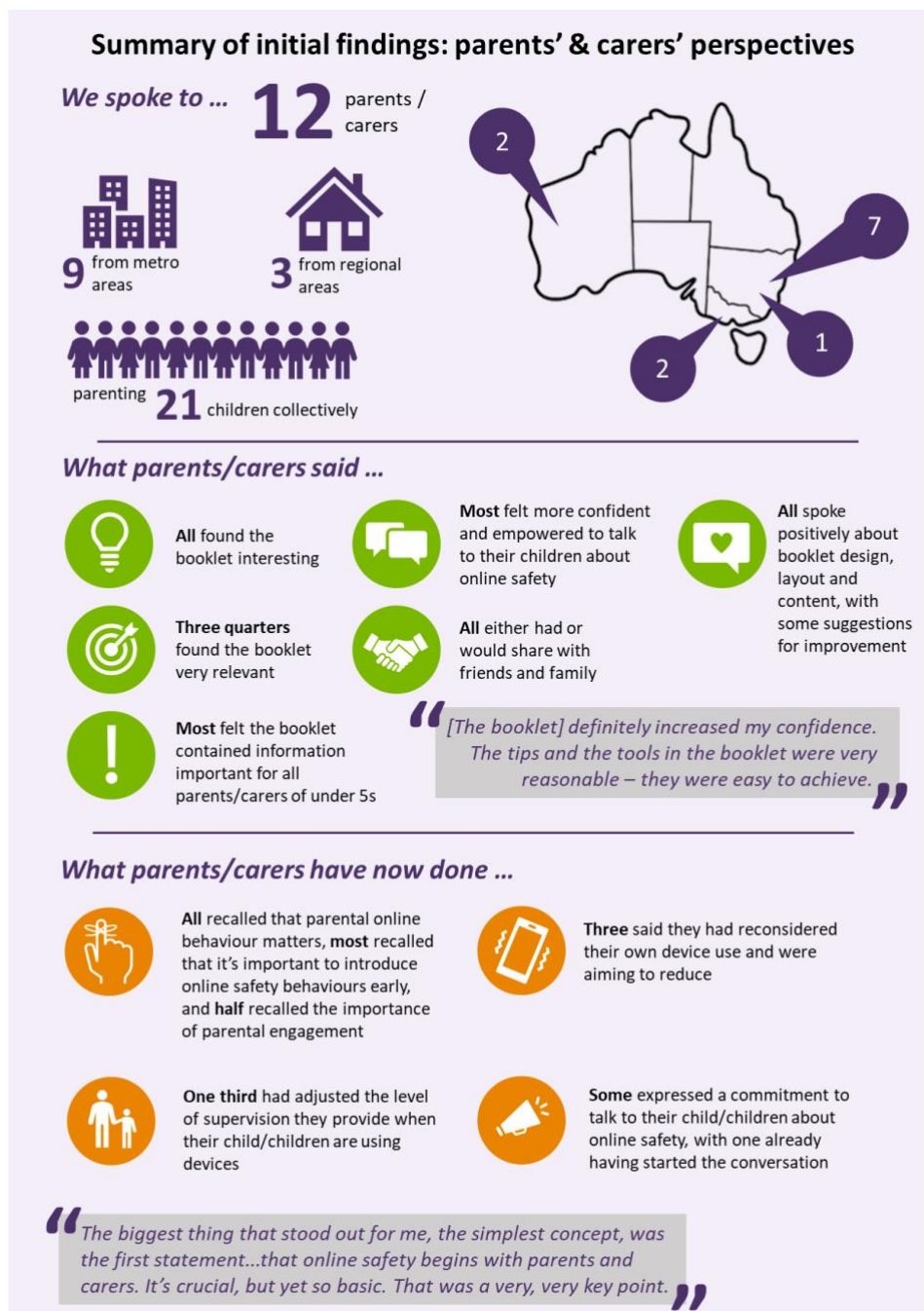


Figure 5. Visual summary of key findings from consultations with parents/carers.

2.1 Summary of data against the matrix

Against five of the six criteria, the evaluators made assessments of “exceeds expectations” or “meets expectations”, with the second criteria falling in between “meets expectations” and “does not meet expectations”. Against all criteria at least 50% of parents/carers interviewed provided information that satisfied the criteria. This is shown in Figure 6 below with a detailed description of this matrix is provided at Appendix A: Matrix.

Criteria		Standard			
		Exceeds expectations	Meets expectations	Does not meet expectations	Insufficient evidence
		Almost all parents (<80%)	Most parents (51% - 79%)	A few parents (<20%)	
Evidence of emotional engagement	Parents found the booklet interesting	100% of parents/carers			
	Parents found the booklet relevant		75% of parents/carers		
	Parents found the booklet important	92% of parents/carers			
Evidence of behavioural engagement	Parents engaged in 3+ actions			50% of parents/carers	
Evidence of learning	Parents recalled 3+ concepts		58% of parents/carers		
Evidence of confidence and empowerment	Parents report being more confident		67% of parents/carers		

Figure 6. Assessment of data against eSafety's matrix for parents/carers engagement with the booklet.

Evidence of emotional engagement

In response to poll questions presented during focus group/interview:

- 100% (n = 12) of participants rated the content of the booklet “very interesting” or “interesting”, 58% (n = 7) of participants gave a rating of “very interesting”
- 75% (n = 9) of participants rated the content of the booklet as “very relevant”, one gave a neutral rating and two selected “not very relevant”
- 92% (n = 11) of participants were in agreement that the booklet contained information which is important for all parents/carers of children under five; 83% (n = 10) of all participants selected “strongly agree” and one selected “agree”.

Evidence of behavioural engagement

Half the participants had put two or more actions into place after engaging with the booklet. Three participants stated they had put three actions into place and three participants had put two actions into place.

The most common actions in which participants had engaged were:

- recommending the booklet to family and friends, with 67% (n = 8) of participants stating they had already shared with family and friends. The remaining four expressed an intention or willingness to share the booklet
- choosing the level of supervision of their child, with one third (33%, n = 4) of participants sharing changes to the way in which they approached the supervision of screen time for their children
- considering their own digital behaviour, with one quarter (25%, n = 3) of participants highlighting the booklet had made them reflect on their own use of devices around their children.

This information is summarised in Figure 7 below.

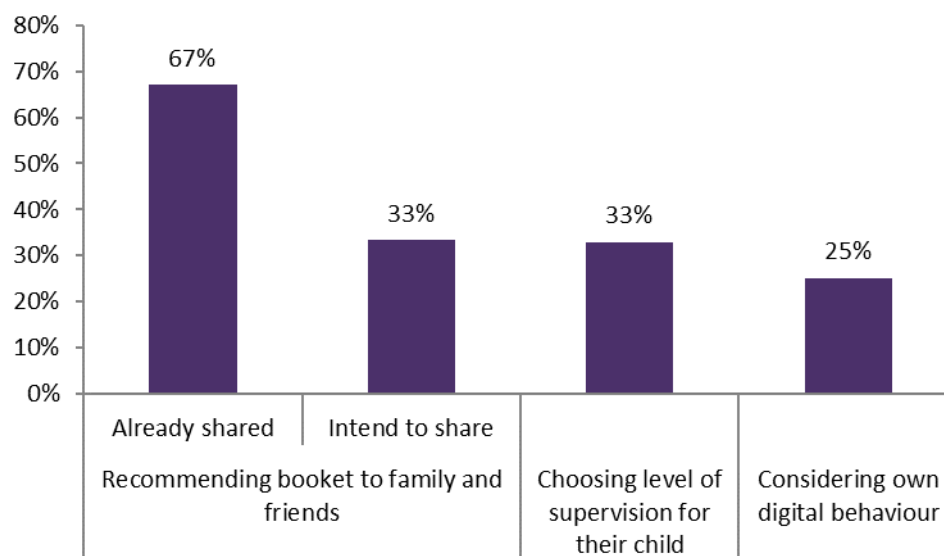


Figure 7. Graph of number of parents/carers who have indicated they have put in place a recommendation or taken an action from the booklet.

One participant stated they had used the links at the end of the booklet to find suitable content for their child and another engaged in a conversation with their child about the internet and online safety. Many participants spoke positively about their intention to put some of the booklet's suggestions and actions into practice in their homes; others stated that they felt confident they were already implementing some of the suggestions (mostly around timing screen use and the use of passcodes and parental locks).

Of those who had not put strategies into place, some expressed a belief that their child/children were too young. A few expressed the general sentiment that they had just "not yet got around to it".

Evidence of learning

Participants were asked what they recalled from the booklet. In assessing concept recall, evaluators considered information shared by participants throughout the interview/focus group, not just in response to

this question. Information recalled by participants was analysed and grouped into concepts as articulated against the matrix categories. The three most commonly recalled concepts were:

- “parental online behaviour matters” was recalled by 100% (n = 12) of participants (which included participants who had recalled ideas of the importance of modelling consent; considering own screen use; ensuring passcodes and parental locks are active)
- “online safety education needs to start from an early age” was recalled by 75% (n = 9) participants
- “parents can’t just rely on tech tools – they need to be actively engaged” was recalled by just over half of participants (58%, n = 7) and included elements such as the idea “explore together”, “supervised” and “independent” online experiences.

A quarter (25%, n = 3) of participants highlighted some of the online safety issues faced by children. One participant spoke about the importance of the online environment as a positive experience that could promote learning and development.

Fifty eight percent (n = 7) of participants could recall information relating to three or more key concepts as defined in the matrix (with the average being 2.67). The most common number of concepts recalled was three. Four participants recalled information relating to two concepts and one participant recalled information relating to one concept. Additional information was recalled from the booklet, and this is presented below under the heading “Recollection of key concepts”.

Evidence of confidence and empowerment

Sixty seven percent (n = 8) of participants expressed feeling more confident or empowered to talk about online safety with their child/children because of reviewing the booklet.

2.2 Thematic analysis of parent/carers feedback

Engagement and accessibility

Awareness of the booklet and eSafety

Six focus group/interview participants were aware of the booklet prior to participating in the evaluation; the other six were made aware of the booklet after engaging with the evaluation through targeted promotion (methods described in Recruitment). Of the six who were aware of the booklet, three stated they were also aware of eSafety, while the other three were not aware of eSafety. One early childhood educator had completed the online modules while another had learned of the booklet through their workplace. The third did not specify.

One participant who was unaware of the booklet prior to the evaluation said they were aware of eSafety through their work in a school:

“I had been aware of the Office [of eSafety], as I work in a school. We do “citizenship”, and I’m working in the library, so we are often teaching about digital citizenship and online safety and sharing our information online.” (Parent/carers interviewee)

Most survey respondents did not consider that their family and friends with children under five were aware of the booklet, with three selecting that they “strongly disagreed” with the statement, three selecting “disagree”, and two selecting “neither agree nor disagree”. One respondent was in agreement that their family and friends with children under five were aware of the booklet.

Accessing the booklet

Stakeholders can access the booklet on the eSafety website, and either clicking through or downloading it. They can also order a printed copy. All methods of access were represented in the sample group:



eight viewed the booklet by using the click through online



four downloaded it online, including one who initially clicked through



two accessed it by phone, including one who had also downloaded it



two requested hard copy versions after clicking through online, with one noting they found the process very simple.

Most users reported no issues in locating and viewing the booklet. One user who accessed it through a mobile phone felt it was not well designed for phone usage, requiring them to zoom in and out and scroll across pages. Another who accessed it directly on the website explained they found it hard to see as there was no zoom function. Their preference was to have clicked through after launching in another browser. This participant had been unable to locate the download button.

One parent/carer interviewee stated they had heard about the booklet through word of mouth but needed to engage some “specific Googling” in order to locate the correct link. Most participants did not express an explicit preference for online or printed material. One participant preferred an online version to avoid losing printed materials. However most participants did recommend distribution of paper copies through early parenting support mechanisms as a way to increase awareness of the booklet, perhaps implying a preference for a paper version.

Readability and presentation of content

All focus group/interview participants made positive comments about the content and presentation of the booklet, indicating that the content was appropriate and easy to read. Many participants liked the use of headings with a few suggesting more dot points would assist reader experience.

“When I got to a point I found it salient, valuable, and that would have been handy as a bullet point ... Sometimes the most interesting point was at the end. So having like a summary page, like a text book would be good of key learnings.” (Parent/carer interviewee)

Most participants appreciated that the booklet was not “text heavy”:

"It was written quite well and in nice plain English, and easy to understand. There was not too much text on the page or anything like [that]. Nothing that could be too overwhelming." (Parent/carer interviewee)

A few participants described the booklet as being well pitched or suited to them:

"Easy to access, easy to read. It was pitched at me and people like me. I felt like it was for me." (Parent/carer interviewee)

All respondents to the survey who indicated they were aware of the booklet were in agreement that the booklet was easy to read and understand: 33% (n = 3) indicated "strongly agree", 67% (n = 6) indicated "agree".

Why parents/carers think online safety is important

Our interviews with parents/carers revealed a number of reasons they considered the topic of online safety to be important. A few participants expressed concern about the potential risks their child/children might face when online.

"I'm actually quite terrified about it. We don't have iPads and we don't allow it. Mainly because we are really scared of it. We don't know enough about parental controls. I'm not confident in that area yet, so we just don't have it in our house." (Parent/carer interviewee)

Some participants highlighted the importance of ensuring online safety for their children as an important skill "in today's world" and something with which parents/carers need to support children.

"But it's like any skill, you've got to start them young. It's better to give them tools and teach them to learn to recognise when something isn't quite right." (Parent/carer interviewee)

"I know that all parents, regardless of how much screen time they have in their family, are concerned about online safety, exposure and inappropriate content and cyberbullying. It's at the forefront of everyone else's mind. It's such a different world. We're all so fearful of it. So we need to all be onto it as parents." (Parent/carer interviewee)

The booklet had caused many focus group/interview participants to rethink or expand their understanding of online safety for under fives.

"We probably had the approach already, that we wanted in terms of online safety. But for me, it was more for me to start as parents. Around safety. My son is too young to use by himself, but I'm going to start preparing myself and knowing what sort of decisions I have for once he starts using devices by himself." (Parent/carer interviewee)

“For my daughter, I thought she was too young, as she has just turned two. I didn’t think this stuff would affect her. She’s not really exposed to this stuff much. After I read the booklet, well it means that you start to make the connection. You start to make the connection that this does affect even the very youngest children, you think “Hang on, this really does start to affect them”. They are sitting on your lap seeing you use the phone or looking as you use it. So it makes me stop and then when I grab my phone, do I need it? This content is really relevant to [that age group]. It put it all into perspective.” (Parent/carer interviewee)

When polled during focus groups/interviews, 92% (n = 11) of participants agreed that the booklet contained information of importance for all parents/carers of children under five, 83% (n = 10) of all participants selected “strongly agree” and one selected “agree”.

The one participant who disagreed commented as follows:

“Under five is too young for this. It’s not “strongly disagree” because a few things are pertinent to young children, just at the beginning, like setting habits and good manners. And they can’t read and write to be on a social network.” (Parent/carer interviewee)

One participant stated that they felt the booklet might have relevance for parents/carers with multiple children, although they considered such parents might face additional challenges in implementing the suggestions.

“In our community, there are a lot of families with five or more kids, so there are older kids in the family. [Those parents have] done it all before, so I don’t think they’d be all that interested in the booklet. But perhaps they’re the ones that need it most – you know, those little kids are watching what their older siblings are doing online, maybe watching online gaming or something. But I guess it’s hard to have rules for one kid which differ for another.” (Parent/carer interviewee)

Seventy five percent (n = 9) of focus group/interview participants rated the content of the booklet as “very relevant”, one gave a neutral rating and two selected “not very relevant”, both citing the young ages of their children.

Most (89%, n = 8) respondents to the survey indicated they either agreed (n = 4) or strongly agreed (n = 4) that the booklet contained important information for all parents of under-fives.

A few parents expressed their appreciation for the booklet, with two acknowledging they were glad to have seen information regarding the evaluation as it had caused them to discover the booklet.

“I don’t think I would have actively sought out this information, but I’m really glad that I have got it ... I know, thinking of myself and my parent friends, we think we’re all pretty tech savvy and know about keeping kids safe online, so it was really good to get this. I didn’t expect to learn the things I did by reading this booklet.” (Parent/carer interviewee)

Survey perspectives on the importance of online safety

Survey respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement to five statements; these were offered to survey respondents who both had and had not seen the booklet. Nearly all respondents (92%, n = 24) expressed agreement with the statement “learning about online safety is important for everyone”, with 65% of all respondents (n = 17) selecting “strongly agree” and 27% (n = 7) selecting “agree”.

Sixty two per cent (n = 16) of respondents agreed that they sometimes worried about how to ensure their child/children were safe online, and 8% (n = 2) strongly agreed. When asked to rate their agreement with the statement “it can be hard to find suitable content for my child to view online”, half disagreed, with 42% (n = 11) selecting “disagree” and 8% (n = 2) selecting “strongly disagree”. A further two respondents selected “strongly agree” and 19% (n = 5) selected “agree”.

When asked if their family had put actions into place to ensure their family was safe online, 42% (n = 11) agreed, and 23% (n = 6) strongly agreed. A further 42% (n = 11) agreed that they had strategies in place to ensure their child’s/children’s screen use was appropriate for their family, with 35% (n = 9) indicating strong agreement. No statistically significant difference was found when comparing responses from those who had seen the booklet, compared to those who had not ($p > 0.05$)⁴.

The results presented above are shown in Figure 8 below.

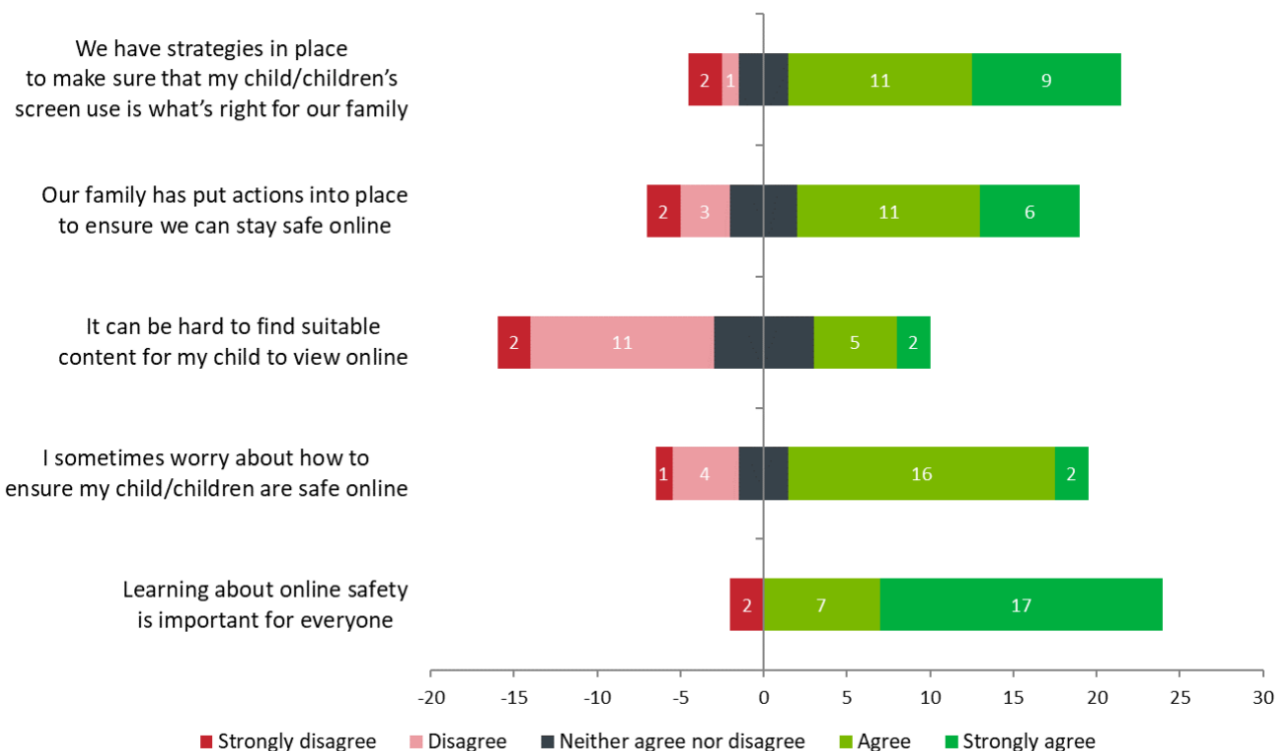


Figure 8. Agreement ratings from survey respondents (n = 26).

⁴ An independent samples t-test assuming unequal variances was applied.

Increasing parent/carers confidence

Most (67%, n = 8) focus group/interview participants stated that the booklet made them feel more confident and empowered to talk to their children around online safety.

"[The booklet] definitely increased my confidence. The tips and the tools in the booklet were very reasonable – they were easy to achieve." (Parent/carers participant)

"Yeah, I feel confident to have the talk. I think it's sort of ... I wouldn't say it's a complete comprehensive guide. It's a good starting point and then working out where to go for what." (Parent/carers participant)

Many participants highlighted that the booklet reaffirmed ideas or concepts of which they were already aware. Some stated that the booklet would or had acted as the catalyst for conversation with their child/children.

"It's just reminded me that it's really important and I really need to get on to it. So I guess, yeah, it's made me more likely to have that conversation now, to start really actively doing it in my home." (Parent/carers participant)

When asked if the booklet had increased their confidence to talk about online safety concepts with their child/children, one parent/carers said:

"Yes, it has. Although, some of the concepts are straightforward they hadn't occurred to me ... as a parent they are on point. I really took them for granted. While they are very common sense and they make sense, I didn't think about them." (Parent/carers participant)

Some participants stated the booklet was also useful to discuss online safety with partners and other family members.

"I felt confident [to talk about online safety to children], but it is good to share with my [partner]. I know [they] do not know this and they worry. It was always just put to me, but the booklet, I can share with [them]. It makes them more confident." (Parent/carers participant)

"[The booklet is] also useful to help get family onboard – without seeming too preachy or like a crazy first time mum." (Parent/carers participant)

The four parent/carers participants who did not indicate the booklet had increased their confidence explained variously that it was not yet a concern for their family, they had concerns around age appropriateness of the conversation and were still considering how to have the conversation with their child/children.

"They are all really nice concepts, but I don't think they affect five years old or younger. I don't think they affect me at all." (Parent/carers participant)

One participant was hesitant to discuss the nature of the material with their child, whom they described as sensitive. This same parent also questioned the age relevance of online safety conversations with children under five.

“The conversation around online safety ... my child is very sensitive and I don’t want to freak her out and I want her to be safe, but I don’t want [her] to be worried that the internet is a scary space. I’m not quite sure how to approach that. I felt that the booklet was more targeted to an older child – it gave advice like “hey if you have any issues, talk to mum or dad”. You know, she wouldn’t know what that is or what that would look like. I think it’s really made us think about it, but we’re not sure she’s the right age yet. How would that look to a two and a half year old? I’m not sure what I’d say.” (Parent/carer participant)

Each of these four parents/carers were participants who had not viewed the booklet until they expressed interest to participate in the evaluation.

Half (56%, n = 5) of the survey respondents indicated they agreed that reading the booklet had made them feel more confident to help their child/children to stay safe online, with 44% (n = 4) selecting “neither agree nor disagree”.

Recollection of key concepts

When focus group/interview participants were asked what key concepts or messages they recalled, they replied with a variety of concepts, recommendations and pieces of information. These have been grouped, where possible, into the conceptual categories reflected in the matrix. This data is summarised in Figure 9 at the end of this section.

Parental online behaviour matters

All focus group/interview participants recalled at least one piece of information relating to this concept, with a total of 24 instances of information being recalled by participants. These have been grouped into four categories:

- modelling consent, with 83% (n = 10) of participants recalling related information, including one participant who disagreed with the idea and another who expressed concerns over the practicality of that idea
- ensuring mechanisms are in place, such as passcode, parental locks, child-safe search engines, with 75% (n = 9) of participants
- considering own device use, with 33% (n = 4) of participants
- acknowledging that online safety starts with parents was cited by one participant.

“The biggest thing that stood out for me, the simplest concept, was the first statement ... that online safety begins with parents and carers. It’s crucial, but yet so basic. That was a very, very key point.” (Parent/carer participant)

“The idea of the modelling of consent ... It was ideas I’d thought about regularly, but it was articulated in ways that I value ... I’m not asking a two year old for permission, but I’m modelling that consent process. It’s important. Like when I show my kid how to pat a dog gently.” (Parent/carer participant)

Introducing online safety behaviours early

The second most recalled concept was “online safety education needs to start from an early age”, with 75% (n = 9) participants recalling information relating to this concept.

“What the book showed me was that it’s not too early to start thinking about it. It means I can get it all sorted in my head. I don’t want to be scrambling when the time comes, so I’m already all set up for her to stay safe.” (Parent/carer participant)

“I’d always just assumed that at under five you don’t need to think about that, but really, it starts from the very beginning.” (Parent/carer participant)

One participant felt the ideas presented in the booklet were more suited to older children.

Parental engagement

The third most commonly cited concept was “parents can’t just rely on tech tools – they need to be actively engaged” with a quarter (58%, n = 7) of participants recalling information related to this concept. Relevant ideas included parents/carers engaging with their child/children and asking about their online activity, what the child likes about the activity/content, and considering the level of supervision – “explore together”, “supervised” and “independent”.

“When they are online, sit with them, be involved, ask them why they liked something. Engaging them in a discussion and asking them what they are doing, not just plonk them in front of it and let them be.” (Parent/carer participant)

“The one thing that I’ve really taken on board is the importance of guided exploration. That’s so important. Not just letting them [use technology] and assuming that because they haven’t [done something] before, they won’t. You know, sitting with them and finding what they like and why it interests them, so you know where to look for risks.” (Parent/carer participant)

Recalled tips and strategies

Suggestions and use of strategies such as the tech agreement, timers and other transition ideas were recalled by 42% (n = 5) of participants.

“The idea of the tech agreement – that was fantastic – for three year olds. I’ll be definitely doing that with my child as they get older.” (Parent/carer participant)

Risks for children aged five and under

Three participants noted the risks present for children aged five and under, including in-app purchases, risks caused by personal information being shared through their digital footprint and the overall challenge of the new online environment.

“But what the booklet showed me ... that in reality, [online safety risks are] out there. It’s a fact of life so it needs to be addressed and I do need to think about it.” (Parent/carer participant)

Being online can be a positive experience

One parent shared the importance of the online environment as a positive space for children to learn and develop:

“It was something that I thought would be good to get across and how I could make sure that the online environment tends to be safe. I guess my aim is that I want the online environment to be fun for my kids, but also having them be aware, and street smart so having resources which make that process easier is helpful.” (Parent/carer participant)

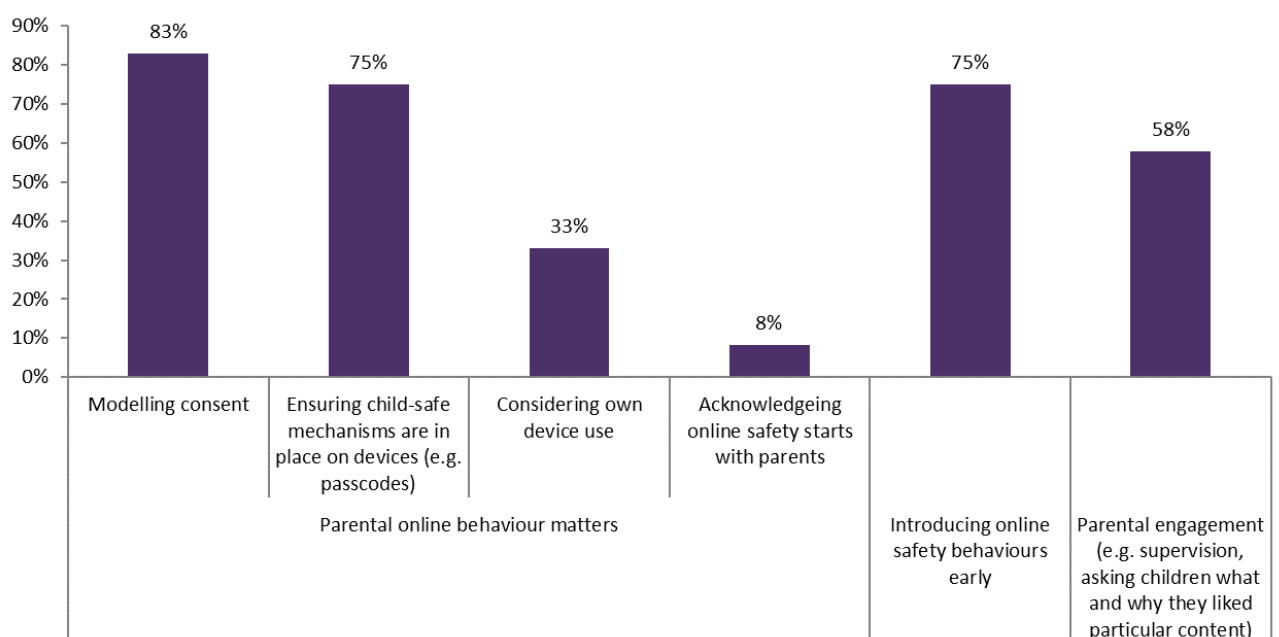


Figure 9. Number of parent/carer participants who recalled key concepts from the booklet.

Survey respondents

One third of respondents to the survey (33%, n = 3) indicated they agreed that they had learnt new things from the booklet, with no respondents indicating that they strongly agreed to this statement. When asked to share what had been a key “take away”, four respondents provided the following details:

- modelling consent is a good teaching method for sharing content; establishing permission to click is a way of ensuring online safety for children

- 0-5 year olds require guidance all of the time
- I could do more to prevent my kids from coming across unsuitable content online
- Parents/carers should not just “set and forget” with a set of rules and explanations around access for kids, but make it an ongoing topic of discussion.

Actions taken and recommendations adopted

Over half (56%, n = 5) survey respondents agreed that their family had put in place some of the strategies or actions discussed in the booklet, with one indicating strongly agree and four selecting “agree”. Most focus group/interview participants showed enthusiasm for implementing some recommendations or suggestions, whilst others had already done so.

One third of focus group/interview participants said they had considered the level of supervision required for their child/children for certain online activities and had adjusted accordingly. A few participants said they had changed where and how their children were able to use devices such as an iPad, moving it from bedrooms to shared family spaces, or actively engaging with their child/children during use.

“Yes, it has changed the way we’re doing it. We’re already looking into how to install the programs/app that can block what they see and limit what they see. We’ve also decided that our little girls will now only be at the dining room table when they are watching their shows. They normally just go to their bedrooms.” (Parent/carer participant)

Some participants expressed intent to have conversations with their child/children about the internet and online safety, and one participant had already done so.

“We’ll be having those conversations – about the internet now, because of the booklet.” (Parent/carer participant)

Three participants said they, sometimes in dialogue with their partners, had reconsidered their own device use and were seeking to model what they considered more appropriate digital behaviour

“I know I’m on my phone a lot and use it heaps and I can see my son is already really interested in it and what I’m doing. But it’s just mindless scrolling a lot of the time – nothing important! So this has been good, to consider what I’m doing with that. Using the phone less.” (Parent/carer participant)

In relation to the concept of devising a tech agreement, one parent noted the challenges of limiting device use, especially in the context of COVID-19 lockdowns:

“The tech agreement, I mean, it’s a good idea, but she’s probably too young and it’s not something that you could do now anyway, could you? I mean, it’s also not the right time. What – we make this agreement and then my husband spends all day on his computer working? [Our child] knows it’s work. It’s tough to say you’re limiting screen time and then spend all day on the computer yourself or tell her to go and do ballet and then playgroup and then preschool all on the screen.” (Parent/carer participant)

All parent/carer participants received a follow up email containing a summary of key findings and asking whether they had engaged in any further implementation activity. Four participants responded. Three, who were not aware of the booklet prior to the evaluation, thanked the evaluator and expressed their appreciation for learning of the booklet, and participating in the evaluation. As one of these participants noted:

“Yes, we have definitely made changes. We've [had] discussions as a family about online safety. We've reduced screen time and my husband and I have agreed how much time my 2.5 year old is allowed to watch and what she can watch.” (Email from parent/carer participant).

Recommendation to others

Most (67%, n = 8) focus group/interview participants had shared the booklet with friends or family, including sharing it with mothers' groups and sharing to online social media groups. The four participants who had not shared it said they either intended to share or would share with friends/family if the topic arose.

“I sent it out to my parents' group. Everyone seemed interested, but there's so much going on in our lives, I don't know if anyone actually looked at it. I'm happy to promote it – it's so important.” (Parent/carer participant)

“I'll be sharing it with my sisters though, as their children are very into technology and they share a lot of photos of social media. Online safety isn't something we've discussed as a family before. Going forward, I'd look to sharing suggestions with them, especially when they are complaining about getting their children off devices without all the tantrums.” (Parent/carer participant)

One participant had shared the booklet with a family and shared this anecdote:

“I've shared it with my aunt who has four children under eight. She found it useful. It wasn't a sit down and read thing for her though, she has four children. But she did manage to get through it. I wanted her to go through it before I shared it with my educators. When I find a valuable resource, I want to see that my aunt can read them, get her feedback, before I share it more broadly.

She told me the first thing she did was go and straight away put on parental controls on all their devices. She didn't know about them before. So she said she rushed around and did them all. She did it for all the devices and accounts for her family.” (Parent/carer participant)

One participant reported sharing it through her role as a primary school librarian, distributing it to all junior school teachers.

Most (89%, n = 8) respondents to the survey indicated they either agreed (n = 6) or strongly agreed (n = 2) they would recommend this booklet to their family and friends.

Impact of COVID on family screen time

Parent/carer participants were asked if, and how, the effects of COVID-19, including the various lockdowns and closures across the country, had impacted on their screen time, device use or engagement online. Some participants felt that COVID-19 meant their own use of devices around children had increased or that, due to online learning, their children were now spending longer on devices. One participant highlighted that screen time had initially increased but had since reduced once their child had returned to childcare.

The impacts of COVID-19 were experienced differently across the country and this was reflected in participants' responses to this question. For some, COVID-19 had very little impact on screen time, while for others it had increased dramatically:

"100%. I mean before COVID we were anti-screen time. Our daughter was only allowed 20 minutes and it was educational cartoons. Now we're doing ballet lessons online, zoo tours online, yoga online, her day care are doing Zoom calls. Its 100% changed things and she's just had so much more screen time. Also for our family, we're together now 24/7 in lockdown, so we're using it to make sure I can be alone for 10 mins." (Parent/carer participant)

For one parent/carer, the closure of parks and other locations had caused them to introduce screen time at a younger age than initially planned:

"My child is quite young, so we are just at the beginning at the screen time journey ... I did find that I turned to the screen earlier than I would have ... than if there were other options. So when libraries and parks shut down, we added an episode of Bluey or a Disney tune on YouTube to add something to the day." (Parent/carer participant)

One parent who is also an educator reflected that screen time had increased in their own house and that they had noticed more children at the centre discussing what they were watching.

"We're seeing more children coming in and they are talking about watching more TV. Parents are tired, so we know they are using the TV and phones a bit more." (Parent/carer participant)

3. Key findings from consultations with educators

This chapter presents findings from a thematic analysis of educator feedback conducted by the evaluator. A summary of findings is presented here in Figure 9:

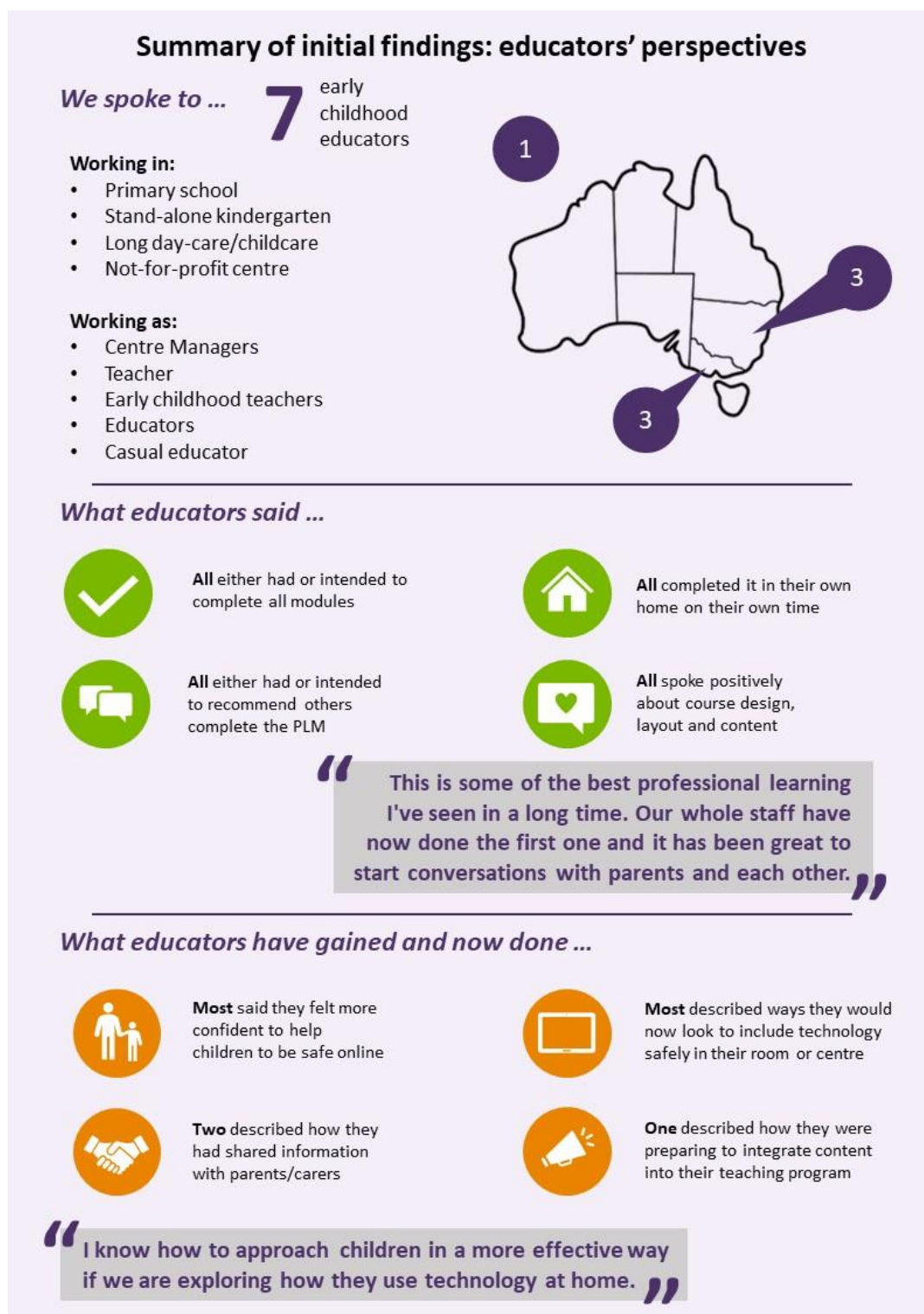


Figure 10. Visual summary of key findings from consultations with educators.

3.1 Engagement and accessibility

All educators had either completed all modules or expressed strong intention to complete all four.

“The more I did the module, the more I wanted to read. The more I wanted to know about the safety of children, for my children and my parents as well. I wanted to not only know about the children’s safety, but also to understand the policies. I read about five policies to ensure my understanding of children’s safety, confidentiality and other things.” (Early childhood educator interviewee)

All said they found the modules easy to access and easy to navigate, with only one stating they experienced a technical issue or challenge moving through the course. One educator believed that other educators at their centre might struggle to complete the course based on other challenges they face using similar programs and suggested an app might make it easier:

“We talked about not all apps being safe, but perhaps an app would be easier – [so that other educators] don’t have to remember passwords.” (Early childhood educator interviewee)

All educators completed the modules at home outside working hours. One stated they completed them when they had been moved to reduced hours during COVID-19 closures and another stated they did them at home when on sick leave. One stated they preferred to complete them at home due to the nature of the content, whilst two others stated they completed them at home to ensure they could take them at their own pace:

“On my own time. I normally do professional development at home, where it’s relaxed and I can take it at my own pace.” (Early childhood educator interviewee)

Many of the educators did not think that other educators were aware of the modules.

3.2 Content and presentation of modules

All educators spoke positively about the design, layout and structure of the course, with many stating that it had exceeded their expectations.

“It was by far one of the best things that I’ve done.” (Early childhood educator interviewee)

One anonymous respondent to the registration form (who was not interviewed) shared the following comment:

“I don’t have time to do a focus group but wanted to say that this is some of the best professional learning I’ve seen in a long time. Our whole staff have now done the first one and it has been great to start conversations with parents and each other. THANK YOU.” (Anonymous respondent to early childhood educator interview registration form)

Course elements that educators highlighted as positive included:

- the scenario challenges or video interviews with other educators
- the space to write notes within the course as it was progressing
- the ability for educators to complete in their own time, as compared with training courses or webinars.

A few educators stated that separating content into modules made the information much easier to process. One educator explained that the structural ability to undertake one module at a time would be a positive motivator for more educators to engage.

3.3 Recommending to others

All educators said they would recommend or had already recommended that others complete the modules, with one stating that they had shared it on their own personal Facebook page and posted it to educator social media groups of which they were a part.

"Yes, yes, I told my educators to do it. I told the pedagogical leader, at least one from each room should do the module." (Early childhood educator interviewee)

"I would definitely [recommend it]. If I was a leader, or in a position of leader again, I would allocate time for my staff to complete it and then have a team meeting on it. Even trying to find a way to connect in with parents – that would help a lot." (Early childhood educator interviewee)

"I spoke to the Director and the Leader, and none of them have done it or seen it. The Director was very interested for others to do it, as they want everyone to have that knowledge for supporting children when using technology. When I was talking about things I've learnt from understanding the policy, and the ways children can be safe, everyone was interested – including the Director and Pedagogical Leader." (Early childhood educator interviewee)

One interviewee highlighted how their interest in the module had increased the interest of their colleagues:

"The more I read, the more I wanted to learn. I was very enthused to share with other educators what I had learnt. And now, from my own enthusiasm, my other educators are all interested too. I very much got what I wanted out of the module." (Early childhood educator interviewee)

3.4 Practice change

Use of technology as a teaching tool

As noted by the following educator, there is a balance to be struck between access to technology and its safe use for young children:

“Technology is an important aspect for children but it is risky and needs to be moderated.”
(Early childhood educator interviewee)

Many of the educators highlighted how the modules had given them or their services the information and confidence they needed to integrate technology into their rooms and learning programs. Some said their services were concerned about the use of devices and online resources for fear they could not be accessed safely. Two indicated that while iPads had not previously been made available to children at their services, following engagement with the modules (particularly the videos of other educators speaking about their practice), the educators felt confident to approach their leadership and include technology tools in their classrooms.

“I want to talk with the other staff and discuss with them ... esafety and technology. And talk about how we can get the children to use the devices and help the children to watch certain things ... The educators could learn how to set up the iPads and then the children could access the iPads for educational purposes – like yoga, or letters and numbers.” (Early childhood educator interviewee)

One educator said that after completing the modules, they were able to select a safe virtual meeting platform, which they hoped would allow virtual incursions for their children:

“So through the [modules], we’ve been developing our forms and risk assessment tools ... And now we’ve got the system, we’re looking at doing a virtual incursion with [local water provider] as [selected platform] would be more secure.” (Early childhood educator interviewee)

One educator highlighted how COVID-19 and the subsequent online learning environment had provided really valuable opportunities for teaching students about the permanence of what they might write or record online. They also described the importance of children using and “learning a language” through the use of emojis. This had given their children the chance to use emojis to easily communicate their feelings with adults. The exercise also built a basic understanding about the inappropriate use of emojis.

Increased confidence to support and respond to children

Three educators noted the modules had given them the confidence to talk about online safety with their children. It empowered them with the skills to respond if they observed a child viewing something inappropriate, or if a child was to flag they had seen something inappropriate.

“We need to help them [children] to know what they shouldn’t be watching and when something pops up that they need to tell an educator. We can help them to use this safely.”
(Early childhood educator interviewee)

"I know how to approach children in a more effective way if we are exploring how they use technology at home." (Early childhood educator interviewee)

Communication with parents

Two educators discussed directly distributing information to parents about online safety. One educator has started including what they described as "snippets" of relevant information from the modules in the parent newsletter, a specific action recommendation from the modules. A second educator said their centre had distributed a link to the booklet and would be providing additional information to parents during an online safety week. A primary school educator, working with students in their first year, explained that the modules had given them the confidence and resources to discuss online safety with parents and to answer any questions raised by parents.

Perception of parents'/carers' knowledge/understanding of online safety and potential risks

A few educators said they did not feel parents were fully aware of the risks of the online environment for children. They stated that they had witnessed children using technology – such as watching YouTube on a phone when arriving at the centre – and had concerns that parents were not aware of the risks.

"I think a lot of parents are really blasé about it, and so many children come in in their prams with the iPhone in their hands. Maybe parents think that the kids don't understand what it is, but it's so easy to press a button and go wherever – an inappropriate site. They're just watching YouTube, but it's not children's YouTube, so the banner ads are just for whatever mum or dad Googled previously." (Early childhood educator interviewee)

One educator said they were aware of parents who had created social media accounts for their children and that the educator now felt equipped through the modules to discuss this with those parents.

"It's quite shocking and horrifying that there are parents who are creating social media accounts for their children. They are posting about and on behalf of their children online. But this is something that is not appropriate for children of those ages. We had to pull these parents aside and tell them that this was not ok. It's not okay but because we do have a good rapport with these families, we can have a conversation with them about it. We had two families in question and we were able to talk to them, using these resources. I don't know if they have changed what they're doing or just stopped including us in their social media. But I can't see it anymore." (Early childhood educator interviewee)

Online safety focus in learning program

One educator said that they were in the process of developing policies at their centre for safe engagement by children with technology. They were also working towards workshops with educators to integrate online safety into their teaching programs.

"We are going to a focus next month on esafety as a whole focus. We will implement measures to check as well. We've got a workshop planned, for the lead educators so we can streamline the use of this in our programs. And then that will help [the modules] be

beneficial for the students and the families as well. It's useful for the parents as well because the parents are learning through what the kids are doing.” (Early childhood educator interviewee)

Conditions to enable change

Educators in leadership positions described specific actions they had taken as a result of the modules, whilst other educators described that they had already, or intended to, commence a conversation with their leaders. Two educators highlighted how important the culture of a centre was when new topics or practices were being introduced. Another explained it would be up to the centre director as to whether they would be allowed to share the modules or discuss content and ideas with other educators.

“The culture of the centre is still instrumental in whether or not this will happen. If the leaders are a wall, then you just won't get it. Educators care about it.” (Early childhood educator interviewee)

A few educators explained that participation in this kind of professional learning was largely driven by individual teacher motivation; that to continue learning, individuals needed to complete modules in their own time. Two advised that engaging educators required ensuring their understanding of the potential risks to children online.

Three educators discussed other reporting requirements and regulations as barriers to implementing new practice around online safety, highlighting that they already report under a variety of safety categories at state and federal levels. One said that time and space in each day would always be a challenge for educators when working to implement new practices or processes.

4. Recommendations

Chapter 4 presents suggestions for change made during interviews/focus groups with parents/carers and educators. These are summarised in Table 4. Suggested actions are also provided by the evaluator.

4.1 Summary of parents'/carers' and educators' suggestions

Evaluation participants were provided with the opportunity to make suggestions or recommendations about the resources (the booklet or the modules) or other ways in which they felt eSafety might better communicate messages about online safety to parents/carers of children under five. Table 4 below summarises these suggestions.

Table 4. Summary of suggestions provided by parents/carers and educators through consultation.

Theme	Ideas from parents/carers:	Ideas from educators:
Circulation and promotion of the resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• wider distribution through early education services, maternal child health services and through social media⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• translation of the booklet or a key summary page into community languages
Alterations to the resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• translation of the booklet into various community languages• increased use of bullet points or the inclusions of “checklists” or a key concepts summary to increase engagement from parents/carers; one participant suggested breaking recommendations down according to the time they might take to complete• inclusion of some context as to why online safety is important and some of the risks children can face, possibly including statistics to help parents/carers understand the importance of the actions specified in the booklet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• reduction in the size of a poster (provided as part of the resources to services), or options for different sizes to allow services to select a size suitable for their space• inclusion of a section in the modules on how to raise the topics covered with young children and the potential implications for practice change with centre management and colleagues to empower educators to be advocates and champions of the content⁶• linking to current standards in relevant practice frameworks (such as the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework) so

⁵ The evaluators acknowledge that eSafety has distributed the booklet widely through these sources; this comment is included as it was frequently raised by participants. Nearly all made this suggestion, with none having seen the booklet at their child's/children's early education and care service.

⁶ The evaluators note that this content is already included in the director/manager modules.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> inclusion of a clear age range for the booklet or connecting ages with certain strategies in the booklet 	educators can clearly understand its relevance alongside other reporting, educational and compliance requirements ⁷
Additional resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> production of flyers or simple posters focused on one concept or one action for display at places parents/carers frequent development of a mobile friendly version of the booklet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> production of A3 or A4 posters detailing key concepts for display at services, so parents/carers can view content when dropping off or picking up their children

4.2 Evaluator reflections and suggestions

Feedback from evaluation participants indicates that the resources have been well received and are considered to be of high quality, easy to access and easy to understand. Despite this, awareness of the booklet and modules in the general targeted populations appears relatively low.

Current reach figures for the booklet are challenging to calculate as one major distribution channel of the booklets was through early childhood services, where booklets may have been viewed by a number of families or no families at all. Assuming that every hard copy booklet distributed (22,600) was viewed by at least one family with children under five, the information is reaching 1.4% of the potential target population⁸. Assuming that each online view and download was by a unique user of the target parent/carer population, then the reach achieved is 0.29%⁹. Of note is that not one parent/carer interviewed had seen or was aware of the booklet through their early education service. Taking into account the time at which the booklets had been distributed (last week of January – second week of February 2020), it may be the case that fewer parents/carers viewed the booklet than otherwise might have, due to the impact of COVID-19. Across Australia, COVID-19 resulted in decreased childcare attendance¹⁰, either due to parental choice or lockdown measures. Restrictions also reduced the opportunity for parent/carer – educator engagement due to social distancing requirements and new policies introduced at drop off/pick up. It may be possible that messaging from eSafety regarding the booklet was less prominent as parents/carers focused on other pressures, such as transition to homeschooling/online learning or managed the additional pressures and stress which has been documented as being present during the global pandemic¹¹.

⁷ The evaluators note that this content already included in the director/manager modules.

⁸ Assuming 1,572,400 families with children 0 – 4, based on ABS data 2019, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-status-families/latest-release#data-download>

⁹ Assuming 1,572,400 families with children 0 – 4, based on ABS data 2019, *ibid.*, and a total of 3,600 online views of the booklet and 932 downloads.

¹⁰ For example, “Australian childcare operators fear they will have to close without a government lifeline”,

¹¹ See: “Mental Health Ramifications of COVID-19: the Australian context”, http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/20200319_covid19-evidence-and-reccomendations.pdf

Parents/carers who viewed the booklet felt the content was of value and important for all parents/carers of children under five. All parents/carers interviewed had either shared the booklet or stated an intention to share the booklet. However, half of those interviewed had not viewed or heard about the booklet prior to nominating to participate in the evaluation. There was similar feedback from educators, who reported that, to their knowledge, colleagues and centre managers were not aware of the modules. All educators said they had either recommended the modules to colleagues or would do so, with a few putting structured programs in place to ensure their staff had the opportunity to complete the modules and/or discuss the content.

A few parents/carers said either they did not consider this topic to be relevant for parents/carers of children under five or that, without the prompt of the evaluation, may not have considered engaging with the booklet because they felt confident in their current level of knowledge. Some educators said they would now consider safety matters regarding the use of devices within their rooms. They did not necessarily recognise the flow on effect that improved teaching and modelling might have on improved child behaviours outside the centre.

Despite holding very positive attitudes towards the resources and strongly recalling key concepts, levels of consequent action were relatively low among all stakeholders. Only a small number had taken steps to adopt suggestions or change their practice. Parents/carers did not yet feel the recommendations were necessary yet due to the family's own device use or the age of their children. The level of action (or not) taken by educators appears related to their role; those in leadership positions were more likely to have taken action.

Drawing on this feedback, the main barriers in booklet and module uptake appear to be:

- target populations not being aware of the resource/s
- target populations not initially considering the topic relevant to them and their families or service
- limited time for both parents/carers and educators to put actions into place
- in the case of educators, perceived lack of power or leadership scope to implement any changes or introduce conversations around key concepts.

Suggested actions in line with these areas are offered below.

Increasing reach and awareness of the booklet

Suggested actions: increase opportunities for parents/carers to view the booklet

eSafety is already distributing the booklet through early childhood services, however greater targeting might increase the effectiveness of this action. eSafety might therefore consider:

- Continuing distribution through early childhood services, accompanied by a targeted campaign to educators. Ensuring distribution of the booklet occurs once a large proportion of educators has completed the modules. Including clear guidance about how services might distribute information to parents and how educators might implement actions/ideas from the booklet.
- Targeted promotion through a topic “week”, for example during National Child Protection Week. Services could be provided with targeted/suggested learning activities, copy for distribution to parents/carers and the broader community.
- Distributing the booklet as part of parent information packs, for example at maternal and child health appointments or in preschool packs.

- Producing a series of online or print posters focused on one key action or issue. Distributing these through social media or as a media campaign in new parents' centres, parenting rooms, public libraries and other places parents with young children frequent. This could follow the "tips by text" model from Ready4K in the United Kingdom¹². These posters could be distributed to target different parent cohorts and be produced in various languages. They could also include a web link, directions and a QR code for users to download a copy of the booklet.

Parents/carers rely heavily on peer networks when seeking advice about parenting challenges or concerns (Sanders, Lehmann & Gardner, 2020). eSafety might therefore consider:

- promoting the booklet through peers or other parent/parenting figures to support additional uptake
- using video snippets, such as "real" parent reflections to increase parent/carer recognition of the importance of the content of the booklet.

The evaluators accessed local Facebook support groups in order to increase recruitment for this study. The literature suggests that parents/carers find parenting Facebook support groups a trusted source of advice, support and solidarity (Bridges, 2016). eSafety might therefore consider:

- engaging administrators of relevant Facebook groups in order to share and promote the content of the booklet (a full list of Facebook groups targeted for this research is provided as an appendix to *Snapshot Report 2*)
- hosting Facebook live events to discuss key concepts and why online safety is an important consideration for parents/carers of children under five.

Suggested action: clearly identify reasons for parents/carers to view the booklet

Some parents/carers did not consider online safety as relevant for children under five until they reviewed the booklet. Some educators considered that parents did not understand the potential risks of children being exposed to online content. eSafety might therefore consider:

- Including context and clear reasons *why* online safety for under fives is important in the booklet. This may increase parents'/carers' motivation for engaging with the booklet.

Increasing parent/carer and educator action

Suggested action: create "cheat sheets" of activities for parents/carers or educators

While parents/carers and educators found the resources easy to read and the content well-presented, it may benefit from being presented in other, a more accessible, formats. Parenting resources, such as "Stay Alive, Do the Five"¹³, or the home safety checklists from KidsSafe¹⁴ are good examples. eSafety might therefore consider:

¹² See:

¹³ See: <https://laurielawrence.com.au/kids-alive/>

¹⁴ See: <https://kidsafe.com.au/home-safety/>

- producing “cheat sheets” with clear, dot point, steps of actions for parents/carers or educators to take which may increase action.

Suggested action: provide action plan templates

Goal setting is an effective tool in supporting behavioural change or the performance of certain behaviours, and has been found to increase positive parental behaviours, such as reading to children (Mayer, Oreopoulous, Kalil & Gallegos, 2015). eSafety might therefore consider providing:

- a downloadable action plan template, similar to the tech agreement, for parents/carers, identifying key actions/recommendations from the booklet and prompting the parent/carer to set timelines for completion
- a downloadable action plan template for educators, specific to their role within their service, or for services generally, outlining how to become an “online safe service”.

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Appendix A: Matrix

Below is the full matrix, including definitions, provided to Synergistiq by eSafety at the start of the evaluation.

Criteria	Standard			
	Exceeds expectation	Meets expectation	Does not meet expectations	Insufficient evidence
Evidence of emotional engagement	Almost all parents find the booklet interesting	Most parents find the booklet interesting	Few parents find the booklet interesting	
	Almost all parents find the booklet relevant	Most parents find the booklet relevant	Few parents find the booklet relevant	
	Almost all parents find the booklet important	Most parents find the booklet important	Few parents find the booklet important	
Evidence of behavioural engagement	Almost all parents engage in a few (around 3) actions	Most parents engage in a few (around 3) actions	A few parents engage in a few (around 3) actions	
Evidence of learning	Almost all parents recall a few (around 3) concepts	Most parents recall a few (around 3) concepts	A few parents recall a few (around 3) concepts	
Evidence of confidence and empowerment	Almost all parents report being more confident and empowered about their capacity to deal with their children's online safety.	Most parents report being more confident and empowered about their capacity to deal with their children's online safety	A few parents report being more confident and empowered about their capacity to deal with their children's online safety.	
Rubricspecific definitions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost all: 80% of respondents or above. • Most: The majority; between 51% and 79% of respondents. • Few: 20% of respondents and below. • Actions: As expressed in the booklet, actions can be understood as parents doing any of the following – talking to their children about online safety; considering their own digital behaviour as a model for their child; implementing parental controls; choosing their level of supervision; downloading the family tech agreement; managing screen time in the context of screen practices; choosing quality online content for children; teaching children to ask for help; recommending the booklet to family or friends. 				

- **Concepts:** As expressed in the booklet, concepts can be understood as any of the following – that parental online behaviour matters; that online safety education needs to start from an early age; some of the online safety issues faced by children aged five and under are (access to inappropriate content, contact with strangers that might pose a risk, clicking on pop-ups, spending too much time online); that parents can't just rely on tech tools – they need to be actively engaged; that being online can be a positive experience for young children and can promote learning and development; that some of the risks for their children include: access to inappropriate content, contact with strangers that might pose a risk, clicking on pop-ups and spending too much time online.