**Parish Bulletin Article – February 2025- Insert and Activity**

**Creating a Safer Online World**

As children and young people head back to school and start the new year of activities in our parishes, it is a good time to think about how we use the internet. Increasingly, our learning, friendships, and social connections happen online, as well as in person at school and church. This makes it a perfect moment to focus on engaging with the online world safely, setting sensible limits on device use, and modelling good online behaviour ourselves.

Creating a kinder online world is a crucial step we need to take. It is essential to practice and model respect, empathy, and kindness when we are online. By doing so, we help build a safer and more supportive environment for everyone. These positive online behaviours are not only helpful for us but are also important to teach and model to children and young people.

Having regular conversations about online safety which may include conversations around possible online grooming are key in keeping the internet safe. Talking openly with children about how to use the internet responsibly helps them understand safe practices. These conversations are an easy way to help children develop good habits and stay safe in the digital world.

We should be mindful about time spent on devices. It is easy to get caught up in screen time, but making sure it doesn’t take over time spent interacting with family and friends, learning, or playing offline is important. The social skills that children and young people develop through face-to-face interactions are essential and cannot be replaced by time spent on a screen. By balancing online and offline activities, we help children and young people stay healthy, both mentally and socially.

If something harmful or upsetting happens online, such as viewing harmful content, bullying or abuse, it is important to speak up. Children should always feel they can talk to a trusted adult - a parent, friend, teacher, or parish leader, if they come across something that makes them feel worried, scared, or uncomfortable.

Adults can help by reporting harmful content direct to the online platform itself or to the eSafety Commissioner.

We can all play a part in keeping the internet safe for everyone but Parents and carers play a key role in setting rules and limits around device use, including which games, apps, and websites children can use and who they can interact with online.

Safer Internet Day is a wonderful opportunity for all of us to reflect on how we use the internet. Let us work together to create a kinder online world. We hope you will join us on **Tuesday, 11th February 2025**, to celebrate Safer Internet Day and make the internet a safer place for everyone.

The Archdiocesan Integrity and Safeguarding Department is available for advice on safeguarding matters (8210 8150 or caasafeoperations@adelaide.catholic.org.au)

Safeguarding Operations Team,

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