

MEDIA RELEASE

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New Life Ed program tackles alarming online risks for under-fives

Leading preventative health education charity Life Ed has launched a new digital safety skills program for under-fives, as more than 80 per cent of parents report their preschoolers are already online – and research showing most toddlers can swipe before they speak.

Life Ed Queensland CEO Taryn Black says the program comes at a crucial time, with emerging threats from AI platforms, the risk of unwanted contact, and online bullying creating escalating dangers for all young people.

“Many preschoolers are accessing the online world long before they own a device. Digital technology is already part of their everyday learning and play, so we can’t afford to wait until primary school to start teaching these skills,” Ms Black said.

“It’s critical to build safe habits and clear boundaries from the earliest years.”

Rolling out nationally this term, *Harold’s Safe Screen Time* will be delivered in preschools and early learning centres across Australia. With a focus on fun, play-based learning, hero mascot Healthy Harold guides children through stories and activities that help embed key safety messages.

The sessions teach children how to manage screen time, recognise dangers and develop essential help-seeking behaviours.

The program was developed in consultation with Early Childhood Australia and the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), and directly responds to concerning findings from the [eSafety Commissioner](#) including:

- 81 per cent of parents say their 2–5-year-old uses the internet
- 89 per cent of four-year-olds would click on a potentially harmful pop-up
- 73 per cent of four-year-olds would share their name and address online
- 70 per cent of children in that age group would disclose their age.

Students at Ormiston College’s Early Learning Centre, Puggle’s Burrow, were the first in Queensland to experience a pilot session of *Harold’s Safe Screen Time* – giving the program an enthusiastic thumbs-up.

“I learned from Harold that you shouldn’t use your screen too much,” said Ruby, aged four. “When my screen time runs out, I like to play with my Barbies.”

Cliffy, also four, said he learned to always check before clicking on something unusual.

“If you don’t know what something is on your iPad you should tell your mum or dad,” he said.

The new module strengthens Life Ed’s whole-school approach to cybersafety and respectful

relationships, supporting children to navigate the digital world from preschool through to Year 6. Life Ed Queensland's latest survey of 2600 parents (2025) found that more than 90 per cent observed at least one positive change in their child after participating in Life Ed programs.

Many parents reported safer device habits at home, with almost 35 per cent of parents noting improvements in how their child engaged with technology. One in three said their child could now recognise and report unsafe online contact – an important milestone in early digital literacy.

"Parents are struggling to keep up with the pace of change, so programs like this are providing real relief," Ms Black said.

Program evidence-base

Harold's Safe Screen Time is evidence-informed and strengths-based, aligned to multiple national and international frameworks, including:

- the Early Years Framework (ELYF)
- National Quality Standards (NQS)
- South Australia's Child Protection Curriculum (*Keeping Safe*)
- the eSafety Commissioner's Best Practice Framework for Online Safety Education
- the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendations on digital health for children and adolescents.

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<https://www.lifeedqld.org.au/>

About Life Ed Queensland

Life Ed Queensland is the largest non-government provider of preventative health education for school-aged children.

Life Ed is also a Trusted eSafety Provider, endorsed by the eSafety Commissioner, for its evidence-informed, curriculum-aligned approach to online safety and wellbeing education.

With the help of iconic mascot *Healthy Harold* and a team of specialist educators, Life Ed has been empowering young people to make safer, healthier choices for 45 years nationally and 39 years in Queensland.

The organisation works with more than 900 schools and preschools each year, reaching more than 175,000 Queensland children. Its programs cover topics such as nutrition, physical activity, drug and alcohol education, bullying and respectful relationships, digital safety and mental wellbeing.

Life Ed Queensland also delivers the state's largest school-based puberty, relationships and sexual health program, *Talk About It*, which reached more than 55,000 students last year.

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