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Online harm is rising – and NZ needs a united response

Netsafe leading the charge to Make Aotearoa Safer Online

The community are experiencing harm online at rates never seen before. Netsafe, New Zealand's online safety organisation, has revealed they have seen a 24 percent increase in harmful digital communication reports compared to the same timeframe the previous year.

"Our experience is reflective of the wider online safety and security community," Martin Cocker, Netsafe CEO, says. "Personal experiences of harmful digital communications are on the rise, losses to cybercrime and scams continue to mount, and surging levels of misinformation is undermining trust across society."

That is why Netsafe is hosting New Zealand's first ever online safety week. Netsafety Week takes place between 26 - 30 July. The aim is to give everybody a chance to join in and help Make Aotearoa Safer Online.

"The blurred line between our online and offline lives is nearly erased, with the internet becoming crucial to the way we work, learn, and live," says Cocker. "This makes online safety relevant to everybody."

This is reflected by the many schools, businesses, government agencies and charities who have already signed up to mobilise and spread online safety messages as part of the week. Principal sponsors include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok. Dozens of iconic brands, including Whittaker's, *What Now*, RocketWerkz and Deaf Aotearoa, have also joined forces as supporters.

Netsafe has been helping keep people safe online for more than 20 years. Since November 2016, it has provided a service under the Harmful Digital Communications Act, helping over 14,000 people dealing with severe or repeated events, such as bullying, hate-speech, raced based abuse, image-based sexual abuse, and harassment in formats including text, email and social media.

Since this time Netsafe has received more than 120,000 reports from people looking for assistance on every possible online challenge imaginable. This includes assisting people who have lost a combined total of over \$90 million in online scams and fraud.

Misconceptions that online safety is an issue for the very young, or very old is debunked by Netsafe reporting stats with people aged between 22-40 making up 37 percent of reports in the past year.

"One of the things we are observing is an increase in the number of people coming to us who have been harmed by digital communications, but whose experience falls narrowly outside the provisions of the Harmful Digital Communications Act" says Cocker. "Our team works hard to find solutions and provide advice for any person harmed online – but it is

important to recognise the gaps that exist in the system today and how complex the online environment is. It is clear more needs to be done to develop safety technology, regulation, and education - and Netsafe is committed to playing our part”.

As hosts of Netsafety Week, Netsafe has invested in new resources and events to inspire positive change and to share advice to help the community have better experiences. Scams, digital parenting, bullying and hate speech are just some of the Week’s key tenons. Educators will roll out online safety lessons in schools in classrooms across New Zealand. Netsafe will also launch a toolkit for whānau to help support young people online gaming.

“The Week is an opportunity for us to work together to let people know about the self-help options available and how they can get support if they are having a problem,” Cocker added.

“Winter is typically a time more people are inside and online, and we saw this as an opportune time to launch Netsafety Week. We know there are many fantastic resources and organisations available to help, and we want to shine a light on them.”

There is still time for organisations and schools to become a Netsafety Week supporter. Find out more and sign up at netsafe.org.nz.

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About Netsafe

Netsafe is an independent non-profit organisation with an unrelenting focus on online safety. We keep people of all ages safe online by providing free support, advice, and education. Visit netsafe.org.nz for useful resources or call 0508 NETSAFE for help with an online incident.

About Netsafety Week

Netsafety Week takes place between 26-30 July. This is the first time New Zealand has ever held its own online safety week and it is designed to *Make Aotearoa Safer Online*. Netsafety Week is coordinated by Netsafe to inspire positive change and to share advice to help the community stay safe online.

This is important as Netsafe research shows one in five teenagers and one in 10 adults were harmed by something they experienced online in the previous year. In many cases, teens and adults reported being unable to eat or sleep or go to school or withdrawing from their usual daily activities.

Learn more at netsafe.org.nz