



Dear Wyndham CEC Community

As Wyndham CEC's Child Safety Officer my role is to provide advice and raise awareness on child safety. This edition of our Child Safety and Wellbeing Newsletter reflects:

- The dangers of AI to children and young people
- eSafety webinars for parents and young people on the use of AI
- News from Julia Gillard Community College

Wyndham CEC's Commitment to Child Safety

Wyndham CEC has **no tolerance** of child abuse, and all allegations and safety concerns will be treated very seriously and consistently with our policies and procedures.

AI chatbots and companions designed to simulate personal relationships are growing in popularity, but they pose some very serious risks – especially to children and young people.



"AI may shape the future, but humanity will always define its purpose." - Barack Obama

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What are AI chatbots and companions?

AI companions are chatbot apps powered by artificial intelligence, designed to simulate personal relationships through human-like conversations. The conversations can be via text or spoken word. The chatbots adapt to inputs from users and learn to respond in ways that feel personal and realistic.

Some AI companions are created for support roles, such as personalised tutors, fitness coaches or travel planners. Others are marketed for friendship, emotional support, and even romantic relationships.

Some AI companion apps enable sexually explicit conversations, particularly through premium subscriptions. Users can often customise the behaviour or personality of the AI companions to be highly inappropriate, or be led that way by the app itself. For example, they can include characters such as 'the naughty classmate', 'the stepmother', or 'the teacher'.

By early 2025, there were more than 100 AI companions available, including [character.ai](#), [Replika](#), [talkie.ai](#) and others listed in [The eSafety Guide](#). Many are free, advertised on mainstream platforms, and designed to look attractive and exciting for young users. They often lack mechanisms to enforce age restrictions and other safety measures.

Recent reports indicate some children and young people are using AI-driven chatbots for hours daily, with conversations often crossing into subjects such as sex and self-harm. Chatbots are not generally designed to have these conversations in supportive, age-appropriate and evidence-based ways, so they may say things that are harmful.

Tragically, the outcomes can be devastating. High frequency and problematic use of services that haven't been designed with user safety in mind have been linked with self-harm, including the suicide of a 14-year-old boy in the United States.

WHAT IS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE?

Artificial Intelligence, or AI, is like giving machines the ability to think and learn.



www.happion.com

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What are the risks?

AI companions can share harmful content, distort reality and give advice that is dangerous. In addition, the chatbots are often designed to encourage ongoing interaction, which can feel 'addictive' and lead to overuse and even dependency.

Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to mental and physical harms from AI companions. Their age means they are still developing the critical thinking and life skills needed to understand how they can be misguided or manipulated by computer programs, and what to do about it. The risk is even greater for those who struggle with social cues, emotional regulation and impulse control

Without safeguards, AI companions can lead to a range of issues:

Exposure to dangerous concepts

Children and young people can be drawn deeper and deeper into unmoderated conversations that expose them to concepts which may encourage or reinforce harmful thoughts and behaviours. They can ask the chatbots questions on unlimited themes, and be given inaccurate or dangerous 'advice' on issues including sex, drug-taking, self-harm, suicide and serious illnesses such as eating disorders.

Dependency and social withdrawal

Excessive use of AI companions may overstimulate the brain's reward pathways, making it hard to stop. This can have the effect of reducing time spent on genuine social interactions, or make those seem too difficult and unsatisfying. This in turn may contribute to feelings of loneliness and low self-esteem, leading to further social withdrawal and dependence on chatbots.

Unhealthy attitudes to relationships

Unlike human interactions, relationships with AI companions lack boundaries and consequences for breaking them. This may confuse children and young people still learning about mutual respect and consent, and impact their ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships – both sexual and non-sexual.

Heightened risk of sexual abuse

Ongoing exposure to highly sexualised conversations can undermine a child's or young person's understanding of safe interaction and age-appropriate behaviour, particularly with unknown adults. This can make it easier for predators to sexually groom and abuse them online and in person.

Compounded risk of bullying

There is a risk that children and young people who use AI companions because they have had bad social experiences or find personal interactions challenging will be bullied – or further bullied – if others find out.

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How can parents, carers and educators protect children and young people?

Some parents, carers and educators worry that raising awareness about AI companions could encourage their children to be curious instead of cautious. However, avoiding these hard to have conversations is not the answer.

- It's best to ask children and young people about their online interactions, help them to recognise the risks, and remind them they are not alone – you will always help them, even if they think what they did may have been wrong.
- Explain how overuse of AI companions can overstimulate the brain's reward pathways, creating a reliance on them that's similar to other problematic dependencies.
- Discuss the differences between artificial and genuine relationships, emphasising the importance of respect, boundaries and consent.

Talk about things that may be triggers – such as loneliness, boredom and stress – which can lead to reliance on AI companions – and encourage them to explore healthier alternatives. You can check [The eSafety Guide](#) for information about safety in AI chatbots and companions, particularly how to protect personal information and report abuse.

Practical strategies

Set clear limits: Use parental controls on devices, in app stores and in search engines (as well as in the companion apps, if they are available) and set boundaries for app usage with children and young people.

Identify triggers: Help them recognise the things that may prompt them into unhealthy use of AI companions, so they know to stop and think at those times.

Promote healthy alternatives: Provide alternative forms of age appropriate and evidence-based information on the topics they want to know about. Encourage hobbies, exercise and social activities.

Foster connections: Support in-person friendships, family activities and age-appropriate relationships to strengthen emotional resilience.

Encourage gradual reduction: Help them regain control by slowly reducing their AI companion app time to foster healthier habits.

Teach mindfulness: Introduce deep breathing, meditation and grounding exercises to help children and young people manage urges and refocus their attention.

Reach out for support: Support is also available through services including:

[Kids Helpline](#)[External link](#)
[headspace](#)[External link](#)

[Lifeline](#)[External link](#)

You can also check our list of other [counselling and support services](#).

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Join eSafety's free live webinars for parents

Term 3 topics:

- **Recognising online coercive control in young people's lives (45 minutes).** For parents and carers of young people in upper primary and secondary school.
- **Understanding AI Companions: What parents and carers need to know (45 minutes).** For parents and carers of young people in upper primary and secondary school.
- **AI-assisted image-based abuse: Navigating the deepfake threat (45 minutes).** For parents and carers of young people in upper primary and secondary school.
- **The changing face of cyberbullying: Protecting your child in 2025 (45 minutes).** For parents and carers of children in primary and secondary school.

Understanding and using parental controls to help protect your child online (45 minutes). For parents and carers of children in primary and secondary school.

- **Sexual extortion: What parents and carers need to know (45 minutes).** For parents and carers of young people in upper primary and secondary school.
- **Exploring the online experiences of boys and young men (45 minutes).** For parents and carers of young people in upper primary and secondary school.

eSafety.gov.au

For more information and to register now: [eSafety.gov.au/parents/webinars](https://esafety.gov.au/parents/webinars)

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Join one of the free webinars for parents and carers.

These live webinars give parents and carers the knowledge, skills and tools to support their children to have safe online experiences.

[Recognising online coercive control in young people's lives](#)

[Understanding AI companions: What parents and carers need to know](#)

[AI assisted image-based abuse: Navigating the deepfake threat](#)

[The changing face of cyberbullying: Protecting your child in 2025](#)

[Understanding and using parental controls to help protect your child online](#)

[Sexual extortion: What parents and carers need to know](#)

[Exploring the online experiences of boys and young men](#)

[Download and share: term 3 topics](#)

Recognising online coercive control in young people's lives

It's not always easy to spot when a relationship becomes controlling, especially for young people. This 45-minute webinar explores how tech can be used to control, the red flags to watch out for and how to support young people experiencing it. It's suitable for parents and carers of upper primary and high school students.

Term 3 (AEST)

- 6 August, 12.30pm

[REGISTER NOW](#)



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Julia Gillard Community College Student's Page

What's cooking at JGCC? The students!

As Julia Gillard's Community College supplies their students with a hot lunch, we thought that learning about cooking is a life skill that students should not miss out on. With the introduction of our new staff member Freya (Education Support) the students now have been helping prepare hot lunches for the whole school community. They have been busy making anything from sweet rice pudding to baked potatoes over to loaded chips with halal beef and halal chicken burgers. In the process, the students have been learning valuable life and kitchen skills. In small groups they continue to learn how to convert various recipes for the entire school, how to chop veggies, how to creatively use leftovers and how to make inclusive meals that everyone can eat.

The students come up with ideas and suggestions for meals which then are cooked together in the school's kitchen. First order of business is always that they need to adhere to food safety and hygiene guidelines before getting started in the kitchen. Then the recipe ingredients are sourced from the pantry and laid out for a smooth cooking process. Under the watch of the education support they learn how to properly handle knives to cut meat and vegetables. The students also learn how to make budget friendly recipes by making their own pizza dough and shredding cheese themselves. They actively practice their time management skill to get the food done in time for lunch. The students serve their community by taking turns in preparing lunch for each other.



The students have been enjoying the newly implemented cooking program as well. Leilani for example commented: "I feel excited in the kitchen because I love cooking, and it helps us (the students) communicate." Ahmet commented as well: "I like cooking because it makes me feel like I am part of a community." Hiba added: "Cooking makes me happy, and I enjoy the atmosphere in the kitchen."

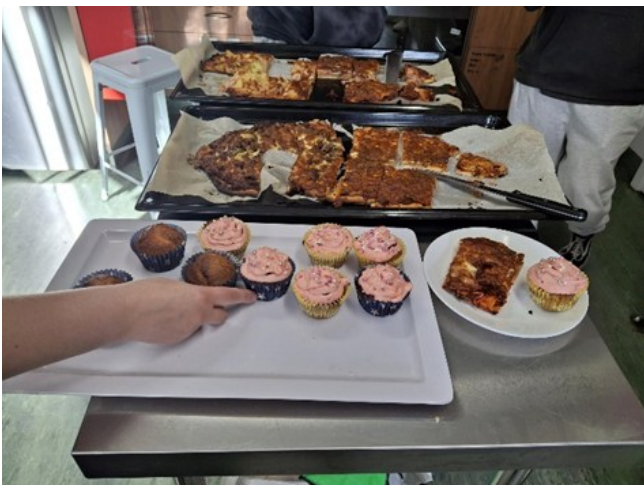
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Overall cooking has been a great addition to JGCC teaching the students responsibility and valuable life skills firsthand. It provides a welcome break to the classroom environment and shows that learning can happen anywhere.

But that's not where the fun ends. The students also learn valuable cleaning skills as they clean up after themselves. The students learn about the importance of cleaning their pots, pans and cooking utensils as well as the appliances that they used. A clean serving table and clean bowls and cutlery to eat from are also part of the student's responsibility. Luckily the dishwasher at JGCC helps take a load off the cleaning.



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Parents Information Page

Wyndham CEC has a strong commitment to Child Safety in the Julia Gillard Community College as can be seen by the following:

- Wyndham CEC has a designated Child Safety Officer—Lesley Nallawalla.
- If you have any questions she can be contacted on :0409 218 071 or at 20 Synnot St, Head Office



Support Services

- **CHILD FIRST** <https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/referral-and-support-teams>
- **ORANGE DOOR** <https://www.vic.gov.au/familyviolence/the-orange-door.html>
- **SUN SMART** <https://www.sunsmart.com.au>

24-hour telephone assistance is available through:

- **Kids Helpline (5 to 25 year olds)- 1800 55 1800**
- **Beyond Blue- 1300 22 4636**
- **Lifeline - 13 11 14**
- **1800 Respect - 1800 737 732**
- **MensLine Australia - 1300 789 978**
- <https://www.esafety.gov.au/>
- If you have been scammed online, visit www.scamwatch.gov.au.
- If you have been a victim of cybercrime, call the Australian Cyber Security Hotline on 1300 292 371 or visit www.cyber.gov.au.

The eSafety Commissioner website also has information to help parents with their children/young people if they are having any concerns or problems with social media