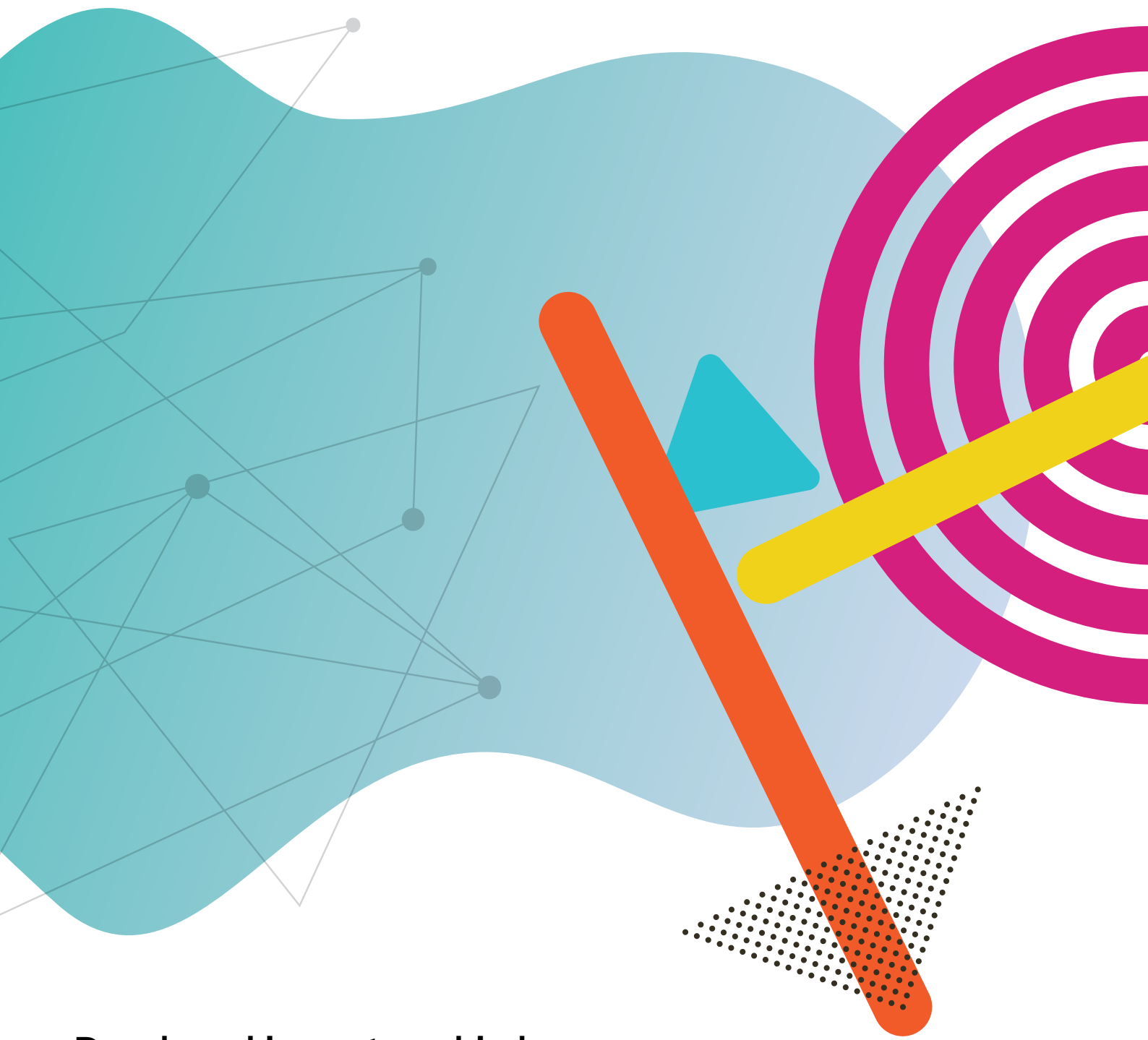


Playing IT Safe Educator Handbook



Developed in partnership by:



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Young children and technology

It has been a little over a decade since touchscreen technology launched itself onto smartphones and tablets, becoming part of everyday life.

Technology is now used by young children in school for education, and at home for gaming, socialising and learning about the world. Children are increasingly spending more time engaging with technology with others online and observing adults (and their siblings) who conduct many aspects of their lives on computers, phones and other devices.

As a result, the early childhood sector has identified an important role in supporting children's learning and development in relation to technology, and subsequently staying safe online. Educators are seeing children bringing their experiences with technology into the school environment through their play and conversations every day. Children are using phones and apps as part of pretend play, incorporating video game characters and concepts in their outdoor play and talking about the videos they watch online.

Outside of this, children are being digitally monitored through their online footprint, for example, they can be tracked by GPS systems in their parent's or carer's cars as well as through photo geotagging.

Children are increasingly growing up in a digital context and need to be supported to understand how technology works and the impact it has on their lives. Importantly, children need to be set up for a life where they are safe online and use technology in appropriate ways, supported by parents, carers and trusted adults.

What is Playing IT Safe?

The Playing IT Safe resource has been developed to support early childhood educators, parents and carers teach prior to school aged children to use networked technology in safe and appropriate ways.

Playing IT Safe offers educators the ability to adapt and respond to the learning needs of the children they teach. It can be delivered both with and without technology in early learning and home-based settings. The play-based activities allow educators, parents and carers to develop approaches and systems that keep children safe when using technology.

Developed in partnership by the Australian Federal Police, the Alannah & Madeline Foundation and the eSafety Commissioner, Playing IT Safe is aimed at prior to school age children and is affiliated with the Australian Federal Police's ThinkUKnow online child safety program and the eSafety Commissioner's eSafety Early Years Program.

Playing IT Safe resources and play-based activities have been reviewed by early learning experts, supported by research and guidelines and have been tested in early learning settings with educators and children.

Key learning areas

Playing IT Safe aims to help educators support children's learning and development in the following areas.

Children should (appropriate to their stage of development):

- Understand that the Internet is a connected network and there are benefits and risk when online.
- Be able to identify respectful behaviours both online and offline.
- Be able to identify and seek help from trusted adults in relation to negative online experiences.
- Be able to share how technology helps children and their family.
- Be able to inquire and ask questions about the things they see, say and do when online.
- Be able to give and ask for consent in relation to digital images and information.
- Be able to identify that there are safe and potentially unsafe interactions that can occur online.

Guiding documentation and design principles

The Playing IT Safe resource has three core elements guiding its design and development:

1. Early Years Learning Framework
2. Early Childhood Australia's Statement on young children and digital technologies
3. Project Design Principles

The guiding documentation outlines how educators need to incorporate technology into early learning environments.

The Early Years Learning Framework, from the beginning, has indicated that educators have a role in supporting children's learning and development.

The Playing IT Safe resource draws strongly on Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators.

“Children use information and communication technologies to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking.”

This outcome focuses on the need to ensure that children's engagement is appropriate and supported. Consider the examples given, directly from the Framework for this outcome.

This is evident, for example, when children:

- Identify the uses of technologies in everyday life and use real or imaginary technologies as props in their play.
- Use information and communication technologies to access images and information, explore diverse perspectives and make sense of their world.
- Use information and communication technologies as tools for designing, drawing, editing, reflecting and composing.
- Engage with technology for fun and to make meaning.

Educators promote this learning, for example, when they:

- Provide children with access to a range of technologies.
- Integrate technologies into children's play experiences and projects.
- Teach skills and techniques and encourage children to use technologies to explore new information and represent their ideas.
- Encourage collaborative learning about and through technologies between children, and children and educators.

The Early Childhood Australia Statement on young children and digital technologies was developed in response to an identified need in the early childhood sector for guidance on technology use with and for young children. Educators, parents and carers are seeking evidence-based practices to help them support children growing up in a digital context. The Statement does this through looking at the role of technology in children's lives in four domains:

- Relationships
- Health and wellbeing
- Citizenship
- Play and pedagogy

Playing IT Safe design principles

The following design principles guided the development of Playing IT Safe, and should guide your implementation and use of this resource:

1. Play

Children learn through different types of play. Digital learning environments must also be designed as play-based learning environments for prior to school aged children. The resource uses play-based learning in both digital and non-digital learning environments to achieve these goals.

2. Child-centred and agency

Playing IT Safe is a child-centred resource that offers children the ability to participate in guiding their learning and experience. Specifically targeting prior to school aged children, all aspects of development and design must consider the needs, affinities and capabilities of prior to school aged children.

3. Engagement and fun

When playing with technology and on the Internet, children, educators, parents and carers need to be engaged. The play-based activities aim to provide an opportunity to engage and connect, while having fun learning about technology and the Internet.

4. Co-viewing and collaboration

Playing IT Safe supports co-viewing and collaboration between parents, carers and children. Parents and carers using technology with children to incorporate supervision is a key practice for ensuring children's online safety. Playing IT Safe aims to help parents and carers develop skills to engage their children and play a role in helping them understand how to use technology and the Internet in safe and appropriate ways.

5. Inclusive and accessible

Playing IT Safe and the technology within it, must be inclusive and accessible. This means being inclusive of children of all backgrounds and abilities, and using web accessibility guidelines to support this.

How was the program developed?

Playing IT Safe draws on existing evidence-based research and programs, ensuring established processes have been implemented to explore and test different aspects of the program. This included:

- Ongoing engagement and input from academic advisor, Professor Susan Edwards, Australian Catholic University.
- The establishment of a co-design incubator with 25 early learning childhood professionals who attended workshops, advised and supported the design of activities, tested activities in their classroom and hosted external testing.

The digital interactive experiences on the Playing IT Safe website were also tested by parents, carers and their children to validate and ensure they were effective tools to support parents and carers at home.

“We have been scared about tech and asking children what they use and how.”

– Member of Co-design Incubator

How to use Playing It Safe

Playing IT Safe has been designed to provide educators with the confidence to teach young children about safe and appropriate use of technology.

While technology and its significance in children’s lives can be overwhelming to consider, an educator’s role is not necessarily to teach about the technology itself, but to create learning environments where educators and children think, talk and learn about technology together.

The activities in Playing IT Safe are designed to do just that, through supporting educators to implement play-based activities that can be scaffolded for when children begin talking about how they use technology at home.

For example, if children demonstrate accessing a parent’s phone, educators can introduce an activity about passwords. Or, if children are thinking about how different devices are connected, educators can introduce an activity to help them understand the Internet and how technology is connected. Children are using technology in a wide range of ways, in different environments and with different levels of supervision, so activities can be adjusted accordingly.

The Playing IT Safe resource fits within social and emotional learning, guiding and supporting children to understand how they should be using technology – with trusted adults, under supervision, to play and learn and always asking for permission first.

Playing IT Safe is...

An online resource that includes:

An educator section

- Play-based activities for educators to use and adapt to their early learning environment (includes printable resources in PDF format).
- An Educator Handbook and further resources to support educators teaching children about appropriate and safe use of technology.
- Advice on how to introduce Playing IT Safe in the early learning environment, including guidance for parent and carer engagement.

A parent and carer section

- An explanation about Playing IT Safe, the role parents and carers play and how to support the resource.
- Links to curated parent and carer resources about using technology and the Internet in safe and appropriate ways as a family (especially for young children).

A play section

- A series of interactive activities for parents and carers to play with their children at home, or for educators to consider when introducing to the early learning environment.

Playing IT Safe and its connection to safety

As a program affiliated with the Australia Federal Police's ThinkUKnow online child safety program and the eSafety Commissioner's eSafety Early Years Program, Playing IT Safe has the protection and safety of children at its heart. It also recognises that teaching young children about online safety happens within a space where they are learning about safety and trust in all aspects of their life.

The Playing IT Safe resource fits within aspects of the education curriculum to adopt a holistic approach to safety.

The concepts of safety contained within Playing IT Safe can be expanded to support children's understanding of key concepts around safety, both online and offline, which make up the program:

- Teaching children to trust their feelings and to distinguish between 'yes' and 'no' feelings.
- Helping children understand that they can say 'no' to adults if they feel unsafe or unsure.
- Reinforcing to children that they own their own bodies.
- Raising awareness that nothing is so bad or 'yucky' that they can't tell someone about it.
- Teaching children to speak to a trusted adult if they feel unsafe or unsure.

For example, some activities within Playing IT Safe may support discussions in the early learning centre about general safety, the police or even your evacuation or lock down procedures.

Your practice and implementing Playing IT Safe

Playing IT Safe respects the individual practice and approach that each early childhood educator brings to their role. The play-based activities and resources are designed to be used in a way that best fits with an educator's practice, including unique and individual early learning environments.

Playing IT Safe it is not specifically about 'using technology in the room' (though it does not stop those who value and have integrated technology into their practice). Rather, the resource recognises that technology is a part of children's lives and we need them to understand it and how to stay safe. The activities, discussion prompts and parent and carer resources are designed to encourage interactivity and teach children about their behaviours and experiences.

Educators are not required to run each activity in turn. As educators observe, plan and design learning environments the Playing IT safe activities can be introduced to engage children in learning that aligns to the Early Years Learning Framework and meets children at their learning level.

Examples of use

Example one:

A group of children are playing games where they talk to each other on phones. The educator refers to the Connected Home Corner activity and uses it to include further props and draws on questions to ask children to help extend their understanding of how technology is used as a communication tool.

Example two:

A photographer is coming to take the annual photos of children for their parents and carers. In the two weeks before, the teaching team use the Guess Who activity to explain to children the concept of consent and asking and offering permission to take their photo.

Example three:

One child has a strong interest in cars, and with other children they are building cars outside. Occasionally you have heard children talk about how the car 'talks' to them with directions. The educator can draw on the GPS & Tracking activity to introduce this concept.

The Playing IT Safe Portal

The Playing IT Safe Portal is the central point to help guide you and your community in supporting children's online safety. You will find this handbook in electronic form, along with all of the activities and further resources.

This is also the place to direct parents and carers, they will find resources that complement and support the activities being introduced to their children, as well as a series of digital interactives and games that they can play with their children to reinforce the messages learned in the early learning environment.

In the portal you will find three sections:

- Educators
- Parents and carers
- Digital interactives

In each of these sections you will find:

- Educator section
- Play-based activities (downloadable PDF)

- Educator Handbook (downloadable PDF)
- Printables and resources to support activities (downloadable PDF)
- Curriculum alignment tables
- Links to further resources and supporting information
- Parent and carer section
- Description of Playing IT Safe resource
- Links to resources and supporting information

Digital interactives

- Digital experiences for parents, carers or educators and children to play together
- These include:
 - Family Technology Plan
 - Share That Photo
 - Who Can Help?

Final thoughts

The early childhood sector has a responsibility to support children's learning and development in the world in which they live - a world that is rich in technology and that children interact with in many ways.

An educator is presented with an opportunity to find the best way to engage children with these concepts and support families, so that they are using technology in ways that are safe and appropriate.

Playing IT Safe has been developed to help educators to do this. It provides educators with the framework, ideas and resources to offer children and families the foundation to living a safe and healthy digital life.

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