

Facebook, Twitter ‘dangerous’, says Prime Minister Scott Morrison

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Exclusive: Prime Minister Scott Morrison has labelled social media companies “dangerous” as he called on the tech giants to take more responsibility for the dissemination of fake news and children using their services.

In an exclusive interview with News Corp Australia, Mr Morrison said his children are not on social media and companies like Facebook and Twitter had a “moral as well as a broader societal responsibility” to educate kids and adults about being more sceptical about what is on their sites.

“These are valuable tools but they can also be quite dangerous in the wrong hands,” Mr Morrison said.

“Just because you read it on the internet doesn’t mean it is true and it is important that kids understand that.



PM Scott Morrison with his wife Jenny and their daughters Lily, nine, (left) and Abbey, 11, at Parliament House in Canberra. Picture: Jonathan Ng

“Our kids don’t go on social media, but at some point when they do ... (they have to understand) you don’t assume that everything there is genuine and you have to develop that scepticism.

“These are valuable tools but they can also be quite dangerous in the wrong hands. If you create these things then you have a moral as well as a broader societal responsibility in terms of how they are used.”

The Prime Minister’s comments were part of an interview about kids literacy and are being reported tomorrow on the National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence.

The federal government will also tomorrow launch an online safety campaign on TV and radio to combat cyber-bullying.

And they come after submissions to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission’s digital platforms inquiry, including News Corp’s, were made public.

More than 2.4 million students across 5726 schools will take part in the National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence and commit to strategies and education to reduce its prevalence.

Eminent child psychologist Michael Carr-Gregg said social media companies needed to be held more accountable, for bullying, image-based abuse and fake news.

“It would seem as if some of these companies have the ethics of a cash register,” Dr Carr-Gregg said.

“No kid should have a social media account until they are 13 and parents should monitor and supervise them closely.”



Child psychologist Michael Carr-Gregg says social media companies need to be held more accountable.

Digital safety expert Kristy Goodwin agreed that social media companies needed to do more and had a “moral responsibility” to keep younger users safe.

“There needs to be a more stringent age verification process because we know that so many kids under the age of 13 have social media accounts and their parents are oblivious,” Dr Goodwin said.

Scomo Tech Giants: 'Parents' TVC

She also said that one solution to protect kids more online and make them more aware of the dangers of fake news and content was to have social media companies or the government provide educational training before accounts were able to be set up.

More than a third (34 per cent) of kids online (aged 8-13) used social media services according to a 2016 survey by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner.

Of these kids, their top social media services were YouTube (66 per cent), Facebook (56 per cent), Instagram (53 per cent) and Snapchat (30 per cent).

Communications Minister Mitch Fifield said protecting children online was one of the highest priorities of the government.

“The Government is doing everything it can to protect children online,” he said.



Communications Minister Mitch Fifield says protecting children online was one of the highest priorities for the government. Picture: AAP

“This (radio and television campaign being announced tomorrow) is about helping parents, carers and teachers to play their part and give them the tools they need to help young people be safe online.”

Education Minister Dan Tehan encouraged all schools to get on board with reducing cyber bullying and keeping kids safer online.

“We want every student and every school to use the National Day of Action to send a loud message that bullying won’t be tolerated,” he said.

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