

## Technology Giants & Our Kids

Google, X (formally Twitter), Meta (the parent company of Facebook, Instagram, and Whatsapp) and other big tech companies do not care about you or your kids. They don't care about bad actors, scammers, paedophiles, abusers, bullies, or anything that could impact their bottom line.

After surveying 27 of the biggest names in tech, the e-Safety Commissioner's Office found that, *"Many companies weren't even using available tools and technologies to detect child sexual exploitation and abuse material, let alone detecting grooming or live streamed child abuse. What's more, there were no real barriers to stop users creating new accounts and reoffending."*

Zuckerberg, Sandberg, Musk and all of the other executives at these big tech companies are culpable. There's no denying that.

But the real culprits are the politicians who are failing to act. We're dealing with it at an Australian level where we just pass the buck to the USA, and in the USA it's an exercise in cynicism. It's not just the platforms. It's the politicians too – who are ironically trying to create a gotcha moment that will go viral on the very platform they're trying to catch out with their "gotcha" moments.

When X and Google plainly ignore our e-Safety Commissioners warnings and even fines, we are going nowhere fast. Until feckless politicians legislate, we're not going to see change.

We could fix so many of these problems so easily. Claims of complexity are overblown. We have rules around when kids can drive, drink alcohol, finish school... The online world doesn't have to be any different. But our politicians won't age-gate tech at all – not even pornography (where the Federal Albanese government walked away from an e-Safety Commissioner recommendation for an age-gate trial last year).

**The bottom line: there are no benefits to the world or to our children's lives from social media at the young ages they're given access.**

Meta won't implement safety measures to stop our kids from seeing pro-anorexia content. They won't implement basic procedures to block IP addresses from known scammers and paedophiles. They won't remove explicit content that messes up our kids. And the list goes on.

The mendacity of this company is astonishing. They speak with such duplicity. They weaponise their armies of PR people and effectively scrub the negative realities of their product because at the end of the day, it's all about the money. The politicians, the shareholders, the economy... they'll let profitability rule over the wellbeing of our kids.

## So what's the upshot?

We have government legislation and organisations to protect our environment and our industrial relationships. But 'big tech' are immune. They can't be touched. Their balance sheets are bigger than that of several countries in the world, and governments won't go near them.

Cigarettes require warnings. They highlight that smoking them can kill you. But there's nothing like that for tech.

And that means that as parents we have to pick up the pieces and take individual responsibility since we have ineffective elected officials who care more about kow-towing to mendacious, duplicitous tech billionaires than helping our kids. Their focus is on prosperity over protection and ironically, society is the poorer for it.

## What can parents and carers do?

1. Be across your kids' tech. Keep them off it as long as you can. But when you do give them the go ahead, be aware of who they're talking to and what they're viewing.
2. Be firm on screens never being allowed in bathrooms and bedrooms. It's just not safe.
3. Have regular and consistent conversations with your kids about the risks that come with their tech, and invite them to share what's going on with their friends and tech. Be up front and describe "capping," "sextortion," and so on. Don't water it down or they won't understand the seriousness of it.
4. Make sure they know they can come to you if anything happens that's concerning.
5. Use resources from the e-Safety Commissioner and the Australian Centre To Counter Child Exploitation so you know what's going on.

And finally, hope that tech executives grow a conscience or that politicians grow a spine and start doing something at a society-wide level for the wellbeing of our kids (but don't hold your breath).



**AUTHOR**

### Dr Justin Coulson

Dr Justin Coulson is a dad to 6 daughters and grandfather to 1 granddaughter. He is the parenting expert and co-host of Channel Nine's Parental Guidance, and he and his wife host Australia's #1 podcast for parents and family: The Happy Families Podcast. He has written 9 books about families and parenting. For further details visit [happyfamilies.com.au](https://happyfamilies.com.au).

