

Digital Compass

An evidence
based program
supporting young
people to behave
ethically online



THE
BEHAVIOURAL
INSIGHTS
TEAM

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Foundation



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Acknowledgements

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Lastly, but most importantly, we thank all of the young people who have participated in this program, allowing us a window into their world.

AT A GLANCE

What is Digital Compass?

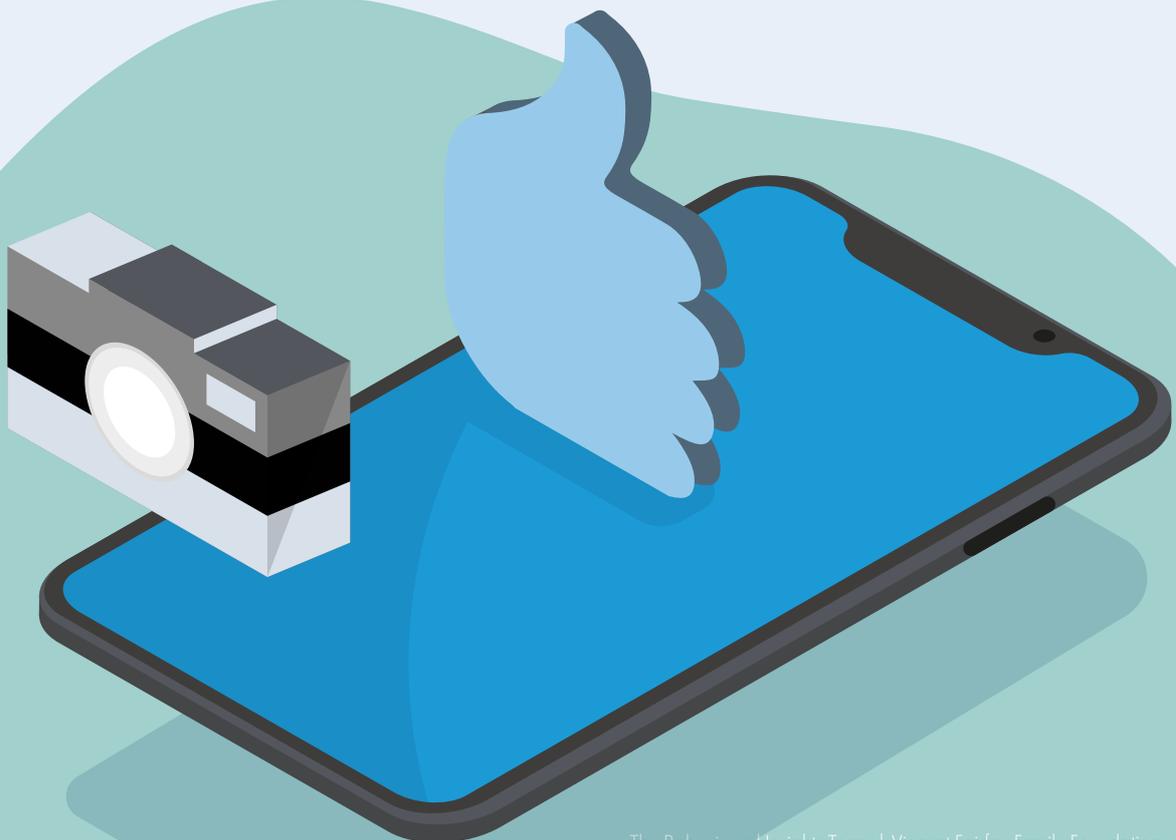
Digital Compass is an in-school program and resource created to improve online ethical behaviour. The content takes young people through a series of practical activities and guided group discussions, designed around common online experiences.

Who is it for and how is it delivered?

Digital Compass has been designed for Year 9 students. The content is aligned to the PDHPE curriculum and can be delivered via teachers or external facilitators, with teacher resources provided to support ongoing learning. Flexible options are available for delivery of the content, including an intensive 8 week program (one period per week for 8 weeks), individual content modules and school wide resources .

Learning outcomes

- How to safely intervene in online conflicts and dramas
- How to change behaviour to connect better with others online
- How to realign behaviour to what actions peers think are OK and not OK online
- How to reflect on past behaviour to modify future behaviour
- How making small modifications to online environments can have a big impact on behaviour





AT A GLANCE

Why Digital Compass?

Evidence based

Digital Compass has been designed using the latest evidence from behavioural science, and moral and developmental psychology.

Behaviour focused

More effective than increased knowledge, Digital Compass uses evidence based techniques to help young people develop ethical behaviours that can adapt as technology changes.

Designed with young people

Digital Compass has been designed in consultation with 500+ young people through deliberative forums, workshops, interviews, in-field testing and an advisory panel.

Gives young people agency

The program uses an ethical framing to guide complex ethical discussions and creates a safe space for young people to challenge existing online social norms. Young people compare personal data with their peers and are given practical tools to determine what they can do online rather than focusing on what they can't.

Robustly evaluated

Digital Compass was formally evaluated in 2021 which found:

Digital Compass increased the number and frequency of self-reported prosocial behaviours, although this was not statistically significant overall. This increase was the greatest in more challenging, visible prosocial behaviours.

Digital Compass increased the number and frequency of self-reported antisocial behaviours. Whilst we had expected antisocial behaviour to decrease, we hypothesise the reason for increasing antisocial behaviour was due to young people's increased awareness of these behaviours as problematic.

Young people told us the program had a positive impact on their online experiences: it helped them gain general knowledge about online environments, learn new coping strategies to deal with negative emotions, and learn about the responsibility and consequences of their actions online. They liked that the program was interactive and practical.

Digital Compass Capabilities

Using the literature and evidence

The primary outcome of Digital Compass is to help young people behave more ethically online; that is, to be more prosocial and less antisocial online. Our review of the behavioural science, moral psychology and developmental literature suggested five core ethical capabilities to achieve this outcome:



**Building self-efficacy
in resolving conflicts**



**Making small but significant
changes to behaviour**



**Forming and challenging
social norms**



**Reflecting on personal
values and actions**



**Understanding how technology and
our environment affect our actions**





The problem

Technology has fundamentally changed the way young people grow, learn and interact. Every decision to pick up a mobile phone, post an image, reach out to a friend, or 'pile on' when someone has posted a controversial statement, can have huge and long-lasting consequences. How we help young people navigate through these choices to become socially conscious adults, is one of our most pressing social and policy challenges.

The immersion of young people into digital environments during COVID-19 has served to intensify the need for urgent action. Available resources and programs focused on risk reduction and restriction fall short of giving young people what they really need; the capabilities to behave ethically rather than only being told what not to do.

The Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation partnered with the Behavioural Insights Team to find a better way. In 2017 we launched the CODE program to help teenagers behave ethically in a complex digital world. With scientific evidence and collaboration with young people at its core, we aimed to give young people the agency to play their own role in making our digital world a better place.

Our approach

To understand and address this challenge we conducted a wide range of theoretical and applied research. We reviewed the academic literature, consulted experts, observed service providers and interviewed parents and teachers. Most importantly, we maintained a voice for young people throughout, conducting interviews, online studies and surveys, consulting with a Youth Advisory Panel, holding mini design labs and user testing sessions. We also held the #NoFilterForum—a two day citizen's jury and design sprint with over 60 representative young people from across Sydney.

We have also drawn heavily on the behavioural sciences to inform our understanding of the problem and solution. This has meant that we are focused on changing behaviour rather than attitudes or knowledge, we draw on evidence-based approaches, and we robustly tested our solution.

What we learnt about young people, ethical behaviour and technology

1

The breadth and tone of moral panic around young people and their use of technology isn't a helpful or accurate reflection of the issues young people face...

2

... But at the same time young people do want and need help with how to act online, and we aren't currently providing adequate support.

3

The dominant approach of programs targeting online behaviour is to tell young people to restrict use and avoid risk, which does not work.

4

The messenger for change is critical. Credible facilitators or teachers and peer-based methods are critical to program success.

5

Just like us, young people aren't always in control of how they act online, and many need help to regain this agency from platforms and devices.

To apply these insights in practice we worked closely with the Alannah & Madeline Foundation to create the Digital Compass program.



The solution

Digital Compass is a school-based intervention designed to improve ethical behaviour online which takes young people through a series of practical activities designed around common online experiences (see Figure 1). Crucially, it gives agency to young people, supporting them to determine what they can do online, rather than focusing on what they can't.

Digital Compass can be run by an external Facilitator or teacher and is most suited to year nine (aged 14-16 years) students. In its complete form Digital Compass runs for one period per week over eight weeks, with alternative options also available, including modules of content and teacher resources to integrate the content across the curriculum and school resources.

Digital Compass involves class group guided discussion, core exercises to learn strategies, personal data compared with peers and reflected back to illustrate key concepts, and the opportunity to practice behaviours in a safe space in class and at home. The majority of exercises are housed within a digital platform, complemented by hands-on practical

activities. This enables seamless delivery, personalised feedback and a mix of group and individual work.

The content develops an understanding of community social norms online and encourages the development of an agreed code of appropriate online behaviours. The program also helps young people to develop a critical awareness of the way that technology and our environment can affect our behaviour, and supports young people to make small but significant changes to their online environment and how they connect with others online. It also catalyses a reflection of personal values and how actions can be better aligned to these as well as practical solutions to resolve online conflicts, in a safe way.

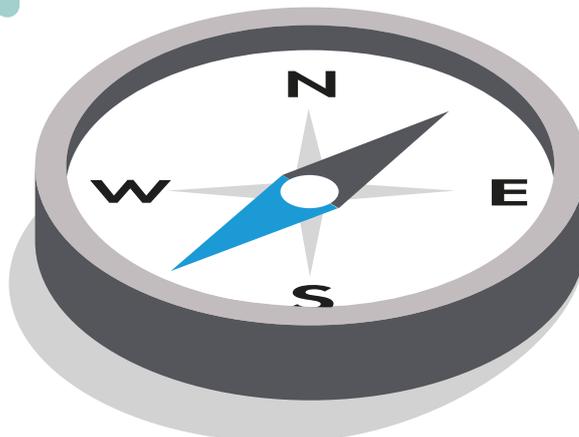
Digital Compass was piloted in 2019 in five schools in NSW and VIC with over 300 students and received encouraging feedback from young people and teachers. After being piloted, the design was further iterated and then formally evaluated in 2021.

“
It's good how the facilitator is a lot more understanding
”

“
You guys taught us how we should treat other people, and how the way we treat other people might have a consequence on them
”

“
It encouraged us to change certain things, but not enforcing it or making us do so
”

“
I liked how it was interactive... I liked that it helped us learn. It's more interactive than school. Everyone was involved
”



“
It didn't only help me online but it also helped me in the real world to solve problems... It helped me change the way I look at conflicts and issues
”



Figure 1.
Digital Compass 8 week program structure

What is being a good person?			Act on your good intentions			What to do when it goes wrong?		
1. Be true	2. Think first	3. Be aware	4. Take control	5. Take (more) control	6. Connect better	7. Solve dramas	8. Self reflect	
Start up exercise: "adults always say..."	Start up exercise: group reflection	Start up exercise: social norms	Start up exercise: mini self reflection	Start up exercise: take control	Start up exercise: mini self reflection	Start up exercise: progress celebration	What do you want adults to know?	
Values section	Decide what's right	How we act online	Digital Health Check	Deciding who's in control	Make a plan	How we deal with drama	Self-reflection	
I wish people would...			Bootcamp	Make a plan: working out a behaviour to change		Make a plan: implementation intentions	Finalise the CODE	
CODE: Our manifesto for how we should treat each other online								
Weekly "Habit Hack" challenges to practice the behaviours discussed in session								
Discussion	Core exercise	Personal data insights						

Does Digital Compass work?

Four schools and 461 students participated in a randomised controlled trial (RCT) to evaluate if Digital Compass improves ethical behaviour online. A randomised controlled trial is a robust method to determine if an intervention causes a change in outcomes by randomising participants to a treatment (to receive the intervention) or a control group (no intervention) and compares the difference in outcomes between the groups. We delivered Digital Compass in some classes within each participating school, and the remaining classes were in the control group (and did not receive Digital Compass). For the trial, the 8 week program was evaluated and Digital Compass was delivered by an expert Facilitator from The Alannah & Madeline Foundation.

The RCT was in field in Term 2 (April to July) 2021 and was due to continue the following term. However, schools moving to remote learning in response to COVID-19 meant that the RCT was unable to be completed. As a result, our ability to detect an effect of Digital Compass was reduced. In addition to the RCT we conducted 15 student interviews and held a data share back session with 57 students to explore our findings directly with the young people who contributed to them.

Analysis of the data from the RCT and qualitative research found Digital Compass can have a positive impact on ethical behaviour online, specifically:

1. Digital Compass increased the number and frequency of self-reported prosocial behaviours, although this was not statistically significant overall. This increase was the greatest in more challenging, visible prosocial behaviours. These challenging, visible prosocial behaviours are occurring less than other prosocial behaviours at baseline as they are considered by young people to be socially risky. But these visible prosocial behaviours are particularly important as they can help to establish social norms around online behaviours and influence others' perceptions of what is acceptable behaviour.

2. Digital Compass increased the number and frequency of self-reported antisocial behaviours.

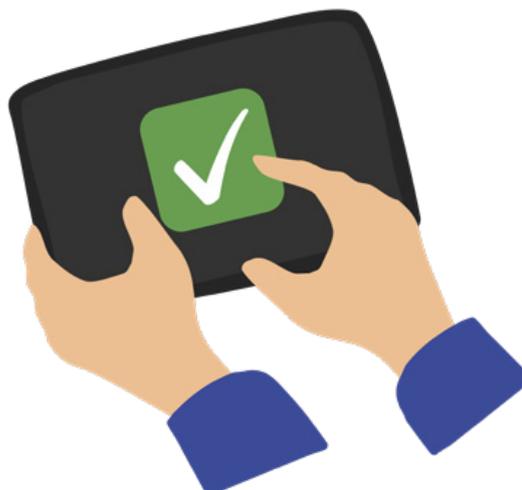
Whilst we had expected antisocial behaviour to decrease, we hypothesise the reason for increasing antisocial behaviour was due to young people's increased awareness of these behaviours as problematic, which was validated by young people in interviews.

3. Young people told us the program had a positive impact on their online experiences.

Young people thought the program helped them to understand their responsibilities online and the consequences of their actions online, learn coping strategies to deal with challenging situations or negative emotions, and gain general knowledge about how online environments work and how social media can impact their lives. Young people liked that the program was interactive, and provided practical examples of how they can shape their experiences online to become more positive through their own behaviours

Along with the evaluation findings, three learnings informed how we use Digital Compass to continue to make a positive impact for young people:

- 1.** Content and delivery needs to adapt to the local school context, the needs of young people, and be flexible in how it is delivered.
- 2.** A high quality facilitator or teacher is critical to influence positive behaviour change.
- 3.** For meaningful change, learning and behavioural outcomes need to be reinforced within the curriculum and across school resources.



Using the evidence to make an impact

It is our hope Digital Compass that will continue to positively impact the lives of young people through:

- **Customising the program to a school's context to improve ethical behaviour:** in collaboration with students and teachers, we customise the Digital Compass content and delivery to a school's context.
- **Opportunities outside of school environments to engage with young people:** for example, sporting associations for whom encouraging ethical behaviour is an important outcome.

- **Advocating and lobbying for change:** using the evidence we have generated to advocate and lobby for systemic change in education policy and industry regulation.

As our lives undergo even more digital transformation, there is no better time than now to lean in, step up and support our digital citizens of tomorrow. Get in touch with us to find out more.



Interested to know more?



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If you are a school or other group representing young people and are interested in the program please contact The Alannah & Madeline Foundation on 03 9697 0666.



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If you would like to know more about the research, design and evaluation of the program please contact The Behavioural Insights Team on 0439 037 067.