

# Digital Compass

An evidence based program supporting young people to behave ethically online.

August 2020



# Acknowledgements

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# Executive summary

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## The problem

Adolescence is a period of change for individuals and society, which sees a pivotal transition of young people into well-rounded, socially conscious adults. Technology has fundamentally changed the way young people grow, learn and interact, and has made this transition more complex—and public. 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 is one of our most pressing social and policy challenges, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only served to intensify this need. However, current resources and programs fall short.

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, our program aimed to give young people the agency to play their own role in making our digital world a better place.

## Our approach

Over the past three years we have conducted a wide range of theoretical and applied research. We reviewed the academic literature, consulted experts, observed service providers, interviewed parents and teachers, and carried out a market scan. Most importantly, we maintained a voice for young people throughout, conducting interviews, online studies and surveys, developing a panel for rapid feedback, and holding user testing sessions. We also held our #NoFilterForum—a citizen’s jury and design sprint with over 60 representative young people 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 are committed to robustly testing our solutions.



## Key findings to date

1. We discovered that 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. We found that the dominant approach of programs targeting online behaviour was to tell young people to restrict use and avoid risk, which does not work.
4. We heard that the messenger for change is critical. Many parents and teachers don't feel confident helping out with issues online, and credible facilitators and peer-based methods are critical to program success.
5. We realised that 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

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

The program is delivered by an expert Facilitator and in its complete form runs for one period per week over eight weeks, targeting the year nine (aged 14-16 years) cohort. We have incorporated class group guided discussion, core exercises to learn strategies, personal data collected and compared with their peers then 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, with a few hands-on practical activities included. 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 examining how to resolve online conflicts.

Figure 1: Digital Compass 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?

The short answer is we don't know yet, but the signs so far are promising. 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. Young people rated their overall experience of Digital Compass 8 out of 10, and three quarters of young people said they intended to continue to change how they behave online. Teachers were positive about the personalised nature of the program, practical solutions, focus on behaviour change and way in which students were engaged.

To assess its impact, a robust evaluation commenced in July 2020 and will conclude in 2021. This evaluation will determine whether young people who complete the program behave more ethically online than those who have not.

## What the future holds

As we await the results of the evaluation, we continue to look to the future and what needs to be done to support young people online. Our vision for the future of Digital Compass involves strategies at three levels:

1. Rolling out Digital Compass across schools in Australia;
2. Expanding the reach of Digital Compass beyond the classroom;
3. Influencing the wider digital environment through industry and policy change.

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.

## What do young people say about Digital Compass?

"I liked the whole approach of the program, not to just put it down, but to have an active game plan"

"I liked Digital Compass because it encouraged us to change certain things, but not enforcing it or making us do so"

"Receiving my data was really cool"

"It's good how the facilitator is a lot more understanding, most of the time we are told it's just like this is bad...with the whole technology thing"

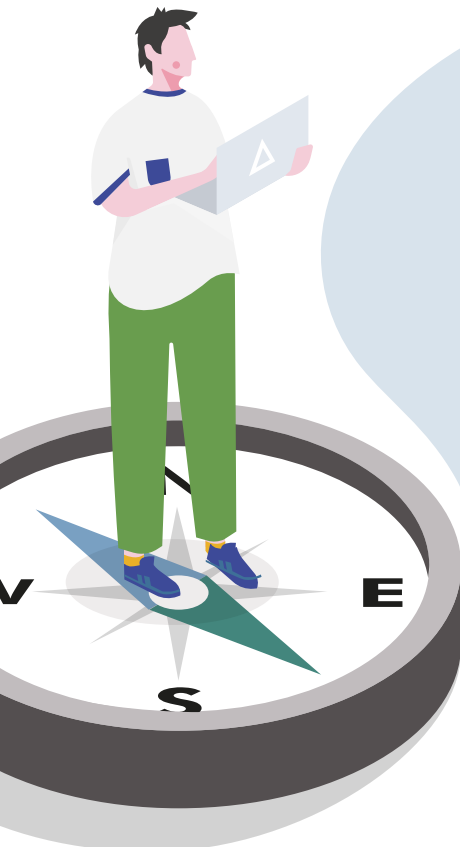


## What do teachers say about Digital Compass?

"Digital Compass was effective because it is not telling the students what to do, but it is about their ethics and behaviour and it was a focus on them to think about it....."

"The engagement with the students was great, you talked their talk"

"The way the program engaged with their attitude and their lifestyle was great"



# Foreword

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**In 2017, the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation (VFFF) launched the Code for Online Decisions and Ethics (CODE) program in partnership with the Behavioural Insights Team, to help answer one of the pressing questions facing society: how can we spur the ethical development of young people and do so in a world of rapid technological change?**

VFFF has a long standing interest in developing ethical leadership in Australia. The Vincent Fairfax Fellowship was established in 1994 to encourage the development of ethical leadership and moral courage and to honour Sir Vincent Fairfax as an outstanding leader. Sir Vincent envisaged that leadership in Australia would be shaped by people with their thoughts, beliefs, decisions and actions grounded in a sound ethical framework. The year-long Fellowship continues to be delivered annually to equip Australian leaders with the conviction, skills and knowledge to make considered decisions, having regard to those affected and treating others as they would wish to be treated. More than 350 Fellows have now graduated from the Fellowship.

Building on this history, a Fairfax family retreat in 2014 identified the ethical development of young people as a lead area of family interest. To inform this, VFFF formed an Ethical Development Working Group, including experts in the areas of philosophy for children and applied workplace ethics, working alongside members of the Fairfax family and VFFF Board. With the aim of identifying a catalytic contribution towards the ethical development of young people, the Working Group used a Theory of Change framework to guide its work. Over a five month period, the Working Group agreed a specific goal, outcomes required to achieve the goal, and a set of principles for the design and delivery of activities. The resulting theory of change had a future orientation, focusing on teenagers and the choices they make using online communications technology.

Since 2017, VFFF has worked in close partnership with the Behavioural Insights Team on this groundbreaking initiative. The international debate about technology and ethics continues to take on new intensity and the effects of technology on mental health and educational outcomes are gathering sustained attention from policymakers. VFFF is especially pleased that young people are at the centre of this program, informing its development, providing honest feedback and bringing a balanced perspective to the debates that often occur without their voice.

VFFF is excited by this work and its potential to transform the way young people interact in their online environments. We look forward to its continued development and to others joining the current group of partners to ensure its future success.

**Jenny Wheatley**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation





# 01 / The problem

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During adolescence, young people need every chance to develop into well-rounded, socially conscious adults. How we help young people achieve this transition is an immense but critical goal shared by parents, schools, community organisations and governments alike. How young people act, and how they interact with and relate to others, profoundly impacts both themselves and their community. Although this challenge is timeless, technology has and continues to dramatically change the way in which young people live. Every decision to pick up a phone, post an image, reach out to a friend, pile on when someone has posted a controversial statement, can have huge consequences. High profile cases, including the tragic suicides of young people, can demonstrate just how severe these consequences can be. As well as being important now, how young people act today will also shape how they act into the future, and determine what role they will play as citizens in our future.

## **Technology has fundamentally altered the way young people develop.**

Many of the decisions young people face are familiar, but come with far more significant consequences in this new context. Other decisions are distinct to this generation of young people, arising from technology itself. The use of technology has also been linked to other negative impacts, with mobile phone 'addiction', social media-induced mental health problems, and increasing rates of obesity in young people all significant concerns.

## **Available programs fall short of providing necessary support.**

These new technologies are here to stay. However, with so much rapid change, young people are often left navigating this connected, digital world with little support. Many organisations, schools and governments react by trying to help young people avoid risks, or attempting to restrict technology use. Where programs or initiatives do succeed in preventing unsafe behaviours—and often they do not—they fall far short of giving young people the skills and experience to behave ethically themselves in the future. Programs instead need to equip young people with the generalisable skills and experience they will require to navigate new challenges in continuously changing online environments and flourish as ethical citizens in a digital world. How we better offer this support to young people is one of the most pressing social and policy challenges facing educators and policy makers.

## **We designed the CODE program to solve this problem.**

The Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation partnered with the Behavioural Insights Team to find a better way to help young people. Taking VFFF's broad goal of spurring the ethical development of young people in a world of technological change, we narrowed in on the ethical behaviour of young people online. The literature on ethics and the general psychology literature suggests that supporting young people to behave more ethically, can be the most effective way to encourage ethical development. In 2017 we therefore launched the CODE program, with the aim to support young people (aged 12-17 years) to behave ethically online. With scientific evidence and engagement with young people at its centre, our program aims to give young people the agency to play their own role in making our digital world a better place.

To introduce how we approached this complex task in more detail, we've asked and answered four important questions below:

- Why does ethical behaviour matter?
- How does ethical behaviour work in practice?
- How is ethical behaviour different online?
- What do behavioural insights add?

## 1.1 Why does ethical behaviour matter?

Ethical behaviour starts with the duties we have to other people and is a foundation stone of a well functioning society. Intuitively, we know that we prefer to live in a world in which we all treat each other well, and that this is important for every individual's health and happiness. We become socially conscious adults by understanding these duties to others and behaving in a way that reflects this understanding to ensure we all can live well together.

Theories of ethical development tell us that the first stage of ethical development is shifting from acting to protect personal interests to acting to uphold social norms. Acting in a way that maintains our duties to others and society is thought of as the minimum that is required to be a positive and productive member of society.

Technology has changed how we communicate and connect with each other and as a result our social interactions with each other have undergone significant changes. Acting in a way that maintains our duties to others and society is undoubtedly more complex with online technologies that keep us connected to more people more often. As young people find new ways to socialise, learn and express themselves, they are encountering many new ethical challenges in the process. Many young people are entering online environments at a time when they are still developing ethically and they are attempting to navigate these challenges often alone and unsupported. Technology will continue to change the way we live, so the best we can do for young people is to equip them to behave in a way that reflects their duties to others, and enable them to become positive citizens of our technology-driven world. This is the aim of the CODE program.



## 1.2 How does ethical behaviour work in practice?

Although it sounds simple, deciding what is 'ethical' or 'unethical' behaviour can actually be tricky. For one thing, no behaviour plays out in a vacuum, and the context in which we behave can be critical to understanding what is ethical or unethical. Another problem is that what's right and wrong can be interpreted differently according to different philosophies; for example, some argue we should focus on intention, and others on the consequences of our behaviours. There are a number of more universal 'truths' about ethical behaviour which we have used to guide our CODE program, and which we have explored below.

### **Ethical behaviours are those which create good for others, and promote social harmony.**

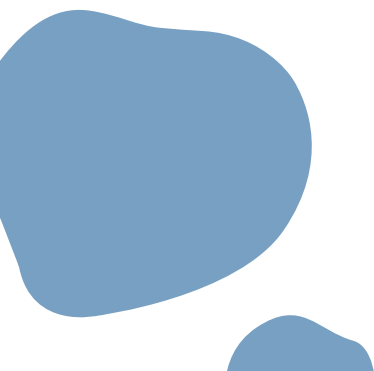
One simple way ethics has been thought about classically is that behaving ethically involves acting in a way where we maximise the 'good' experienced by everyone (e.g. Bentham, 1789; Mill, 1861), and fulfill our social obligations to treat others as we hope to be treated (also known as the 'Golden Law'). This might mean to not harm others, and to bring good about for others when you can. We can also use this guiding principle to decide whether more complex behaviours are ethical or not by asking ourselves questions: will my action make the world better? What would happen if everyone did what I did? How would I feel if everyone could see what I just did? Sometimes the terms 'prosocial' and 'antisocial' behaviours are also used in place of ethical and unethical, underscoring the importance these behaviours have on social cohesion.

### **Adults can guide but not mandate what ethical behaviour is for young people.**

We as adults can struggle to define ethical behaviour in online contexts for young people. We haven't heard of many of the behaviours that occur, we don't know what it feels like to experience them, and what is considered right and wrong changes over time. Not to mention, we are also prone to behaving unethically online ourselves. Image-based abuse, online trolling and relational aggressions are just as commonplace in many adult circles. In our program we make sure not to impose a top-down morality. Instead, we spend time working with young people to define for themselves what ethical behaviour is. In the absence of a clear moral code for the digital world, helping young people design and articulate their own code is a critical task which underpins the rest of our program.

### **Being a 'good person' doesn't mean we always behave ethically.**

Many of us understand what it means to be 'good', and have good intentions and moral values. This is not the same as behaving ethically. There are lots of situations where we fail to apply the moral standards we hold. This can happen passively, where we do not notice the ethical aspects of a decision (not realising, for example, that posting an embarrassing photo might cause real harm to a friend), or actively, where we take steps to convince ourselves and others that the standards do not apply in this case (for example, shifting the blame onto your friend for taking the embarrassing photo in the first place). Researchers call the former 'ethical fading' and the latter 'moral disengagement' (Bandura, 2015). We might see this discrepancy between our values and our behaviour in a number of contexts, such as when we are tired, when we are emotionally provoked, when the recipient of our behaviour is someone we don't know or don't particularly like, or when we are behaving reactively and not thinking through the consequences of our actions. These differences between our values and our actions underscore why it's important to focus on ethical behaviour as the outcome we are focused on, not ethical reasoning or ethical development.



### Snapshot: How do we develop ethically?

How we come to behave ethically has been studied mostly by studying how ethical thinking develops. Theorists' understanding of this ethical thinking has seen several big shifts. The view of the child as blank slate, absorbing whichever morality was presented to them, was replaced in the 1960s by 'stage-based' theories. These saw children moving step-by-step from a focus just on themselves and their own desires, to wanting to conform and fit in, to making decisions based on their principles (Kohlberg, 1984). More recently, stage-based theories have been undermined by evidence that people can use multiple stages of reasoning at the same time, and swap between them. No single theory of ethical development has since reached the same level of prominence, and a number of competing ideas continue to be debated.

In our use of theories to guide intervention design, we have deliberately kept ethical behaviour rather than ethical thinking as the focus. To do this, we have drawn on theories of ethical development with a stronger focus on behaviour (e.g. Rest's neo-Kohlbergian approach), as well as theories and evidence from other research areas such as social, cognitive and learning psychology.

### Ethical behaviour can mean both 'everyday' and 'tough' choices.

In practice, what this means for young people can look different on any given day. To help narrow down ethical and unethical behaviours, we have split them into 'tough' choices and 'everyday' behaviours:

- 'Tough' choices are the rare serious dilemmas young people experience, which can have profound consequences. They look more familiar to us, because it's usually what we hear about in the media. They include image-based abuse, hate speech and serious bullying. These behaviours are often linked to specific technologies and are therefore more generationally distinct to the young people in our target group, making it hard for parents, teachers and even the police to assist. Tough choices are often represented in program content, and there is already a high awareness of them among young people.
- 'Everyday' behaviours instead include the daily back-and-forth and small disputes which make up the vast majority of ethical decisions young people face. These can include decisions like not including someone in a group chat when making plans, poking fun at a friend by sharing an unflattering video, or organising with a few friends to all go against one person on a gaming platform. They can also include prosocial decisions, like deciding to reach out to someone who seems to need it, making positive posts and messages, or sticking up for someone who's getting piled on. The consequences of these small behaviours can often go unnoticed, as they are characterised by little to no feedback on the impact of the action. Even though these behaviours individually seem small, they can have a big impact over time or if someone is feeling vulnerable. They also occur more frequently. Knowing what the 'right' course of action is in these grey areas is particularly difficult, and often dependent on a nuanced context. Young people consistently reported wanting more guidance for these types of questions. Despite this need, these everyday behaviours are more often neglected in program content. This is likely because they rarely make the headlines, and adults aren't as aware of them.

'So it's that choice: do I like it, do I ignore it? Either way it's going to impact both parties, so it's one of those challenging moments where you're like, should I respond to this, should I not, should I tell the other one that, you know, this person posted this, or do I just leave it?' - **Interview participant**

When we spoke to young people and looked at program content in our market scan, we could see that while the support provided to young people is heavily weighted towards 'tough choices', what they are most often asking for is actually help with these 'everyday decisions'. Our CODE program aims to correct this balance.

### 1.3 How is ethical behaviour different online?

Technology has changed how we communicate, connect with each other and even construe reality. This is no truer than for young people, many of whom have only lived during a time in which broadband and social media were prolific. This has led to a series of key shifts relevant to ethical behaviour, explored below.

#### **The implications of technology for ethical behaviour are profound.**

Throwaway comments can now spread quickly to huge numbers of people and then persist, searchable and publicly visible, for years to come. Online anonymity can free bad actors from negative repercussions, and people say things they would never say publicly as a result. The lack of direct human contact and social context can make it harder to empathise with those we interact with online, and harder to know when we are causing harm. We can also communicate with others at all times, including when we are tired, distracted or irritable. Conversely, these same social contexts can offer new ways of providing support, meaning and information. This can be particularly true for marginalised groups, who can find and connect with others in ways that are more challenging offline.

### How does being online affect the way we act?

#### For the bad ...

- Negative acts have wide reach, can persist indefinitely and publicly.
- Anonymity can lead to worse behaviour.
- Lack of social feedback makes it hard to empathise and realise we've acted negatively.
- Interacting at night and when we're tired can make negative acts more likely.

#### For the good ...

- Increased opportunity for connection.
- Ability to access and share information.
- Marginalised groups able to establish, maintain and benefit from safe places

**The rapid pace of change with online technologies can leave young people, parents and schools struggling to keep up with emerging issues.**

This dramatic shift has outpaced our capacity to fully understand these new changes and their implications, and consequently has also outpaced our ability to best support young people. Resources and advice can quickly become out of date and irrelevant, and traditionally static curricula and legislation are failing to be as reactive as required. No truer has this been than during the coronavirus pandemic, where young people became further embedded in the digital world. During lockdowns, where they were once switching off regularly throughout the day, some students experienced the entirety of their education and social interactions online. This has likely led to a range of additional issues as well as opportunities. Dynamic programs are required which respond to new issues and platforms as they emerge, and programs need to give young people the practical skills to modify their behaviour to deal with this changing environment.

**Snapshot: What are young people doing online?**

Young people spend most of their time online connecting with friends, creating and sharing content, and consuming content created by others—both to be entertained and informed. However, many young people commented that they spend the most time on their schoolwork, which often involves going online for components particularly in the later years of high school.

Young people said that when they were interacting with others, it was generally people who they were friends with at school, or had met face-to-face with at some point. The exception to this was online gaming, which was more often with strangers. They consumed lots of content from those they didn't know, without interacting directly. This includes following brands and popular personalities— not necessarily just celebrity personalities, but also 'vloggers', influencers and others who create channels discussing topics such as sports, games, fashion and make-up.

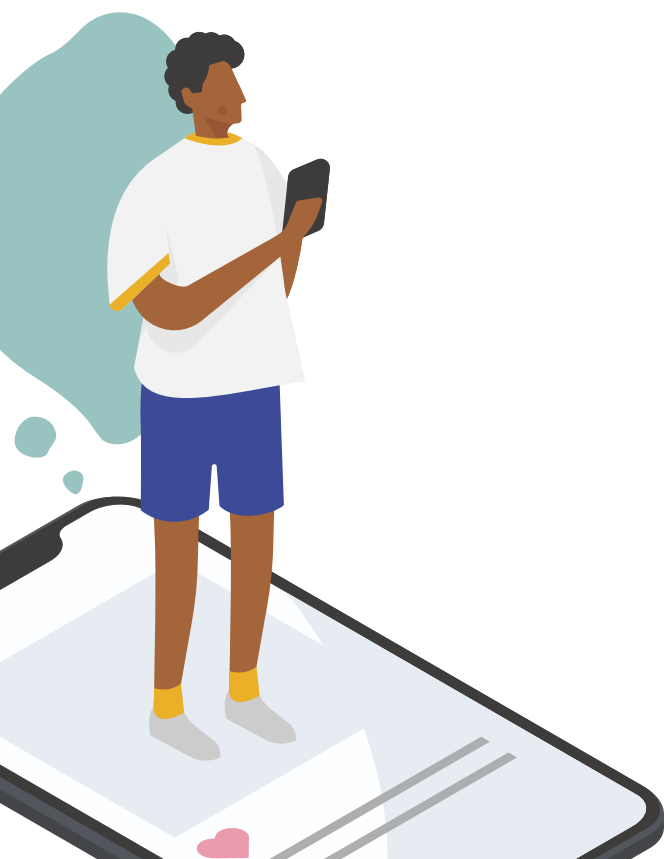
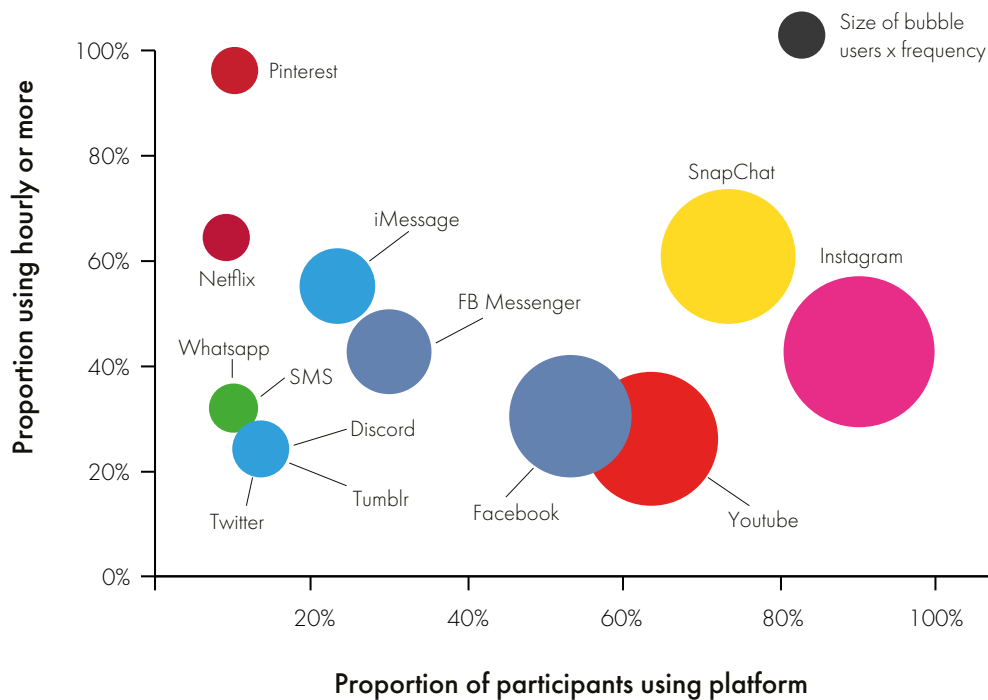


Figure 2: BIT mobile study diary 2018



As shown in the graph above, when we asked them in 2018, we found that Snapchat, Instagram, Youtube and Facebook were the platforms most used. Illustrating first hand how rapidly platform use changes, we looked at this again in 2020. We found that Facebook had almost dropped off the graph entirely, with Netflix, Spotify and the new platform TikTok now vying for fourth place. This constant evolution means that programs need to strike a balance between responding to the key features and problems on different platforms, without fixing materials to particular platforms.

### **Whilst the environments may be unrecognisable, many ethical behaviours are familiar.**

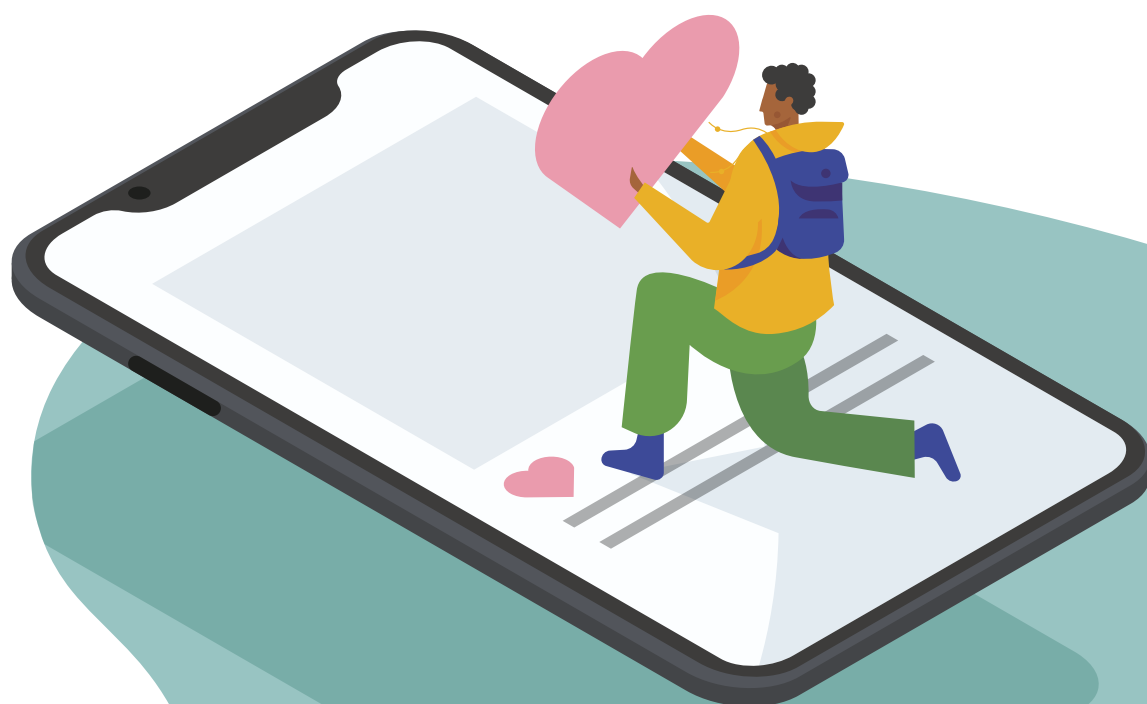
Providing effective support also involves recognising which underlying experiences have not changed, as much as recognising those which have. Many of the interactions that happen online today are driven by underlying social dynamics (making and breaking friendships, or exchanging gossip) that would be familiar to people 20 or 100 years ago. Standing up for others, interpersonal conflicts, shaming, sexuality and self-development are behaviours that occur offline and have always been part of 'growing up', and have just taken new forms in a digital environment. New behaviours which have manifested as a result of digital technology are image based abuse, public persecution of victims and online hate speech. However even here, the underlying motivations are familiar: to gain acceptance, respond emotionally and test identities.



## 1.4 What do behavioural insights add?

Behavioural insights are insights translated from evidence in the behavioural sciences into practice. At BIT, we work in a number of policy areas to understand how key findings from behavioural economics, social psychology and other disciplines can be used to produce socially positive change. In this context, there are four important ways in which the behavioural insights approach adds significant value to solving our problem:

- **A better understanding of how to address the problem.** As we explore in more detail in our Key Findings, our understanding of behaviour and motivation enables us to better understand, and hence solve, the problem at hand. For example, we know that seemingly irrational forces can affect our ethical behaviour (such as the ‘morning morality effect’ where we make more ethical decisions in the morning, when we have more cognitive resources available) and that focusing on changing an individual’s physical environment is always more effective than relying on them to use willpower.
- **A focus on changing behaviour.** Many other programs in this area aim to increase knowledge, or change attitudes. By instead focusing on changing the ethical behaviours and habits of young people, we are more likely to catalyse real change, and a change that remains relevant as technology evolves.
- **A strong value placed on evidence.** Rather than making assumptions or relying on second hand reports, we use a range of sources of evidence to gain a deep understanding of our context. We have outlined the many research activities we used to develop solutions in the CODE Program in Section 02. Across the program, including the perspectives of young people was a core feature of our approach to generating this evidence.
- **A commitment to testing our solutions.** Our grounding in science and empiricism is not just restricted to the evidence we use to inform intervention design, but also shapes the way we test our solutions. We design pragmatic but rigorous evaluations to answer these core questions: does our intervention work, by how much, and for whom?

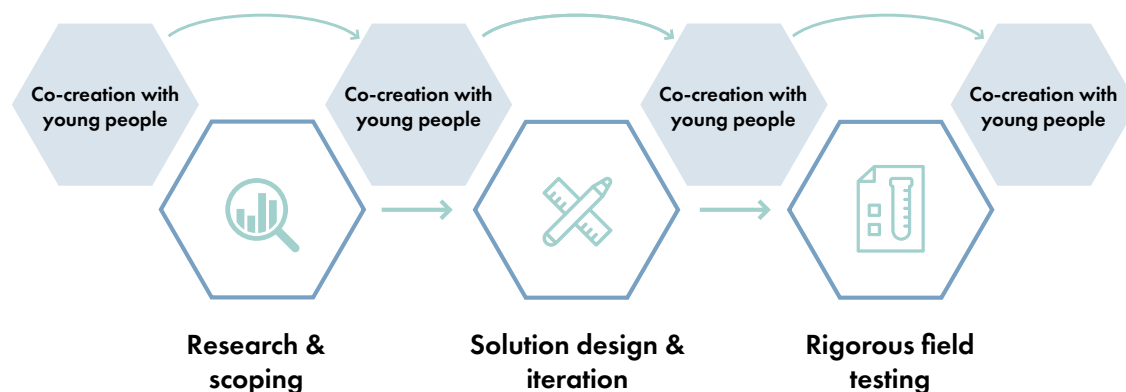


## 02/ Our approach

### 2.1 Our process

We used a staged approach to respond to this multifaceted problem. As shown below, we worked closely with young people throughout program development. We started with a research and scoping stage, moving to solution design and iteration, before rigorously field testing our initiative. In this program space there are many well-meaning but not always well-evidenced approaches rolled out. We hope that, beyond Digital Compass, our approach to program design will inspire the sector to combine both more authentic collaborations with young people and a commitment to robust evaluation.

Figure 3: Our process diagram



#### Co-creation with young people

From the outset, we put the perspectives and experiences of young people at the heart of the CODE Program. This was important to make sure that we were defining and responding to the problem properly, as well as ensuring that information directed at young people passed the 'eye-roll' test—young people quickly disregard trite, outdated, insincere or hypocritical advice. We used consultation with young people in different ways across the life of the program: to understand the problem, contextualise international evidence, and then to design, test out and refine ideas.

'A lot of the stuff [schools] tell us is really outdated. Like, we were told if someone is bullying us, say "stop I don't like it". Try that in the playground, you're going to get laughed at! It needs to be updated really.' - **Youth Advisory Panellist**

## Research & scoping

We carefully planned a series of activities to better understand where young people, parents, teachers, academics, frontline service providers and policy-makers felt the problems and opportunities were. Triangulating such different perspectives can be tricky, but is important to make sure that we are checking our biases, testing our theories and grounding our understanding in real experiences. We used this program stage to refine our focus. We started with ten potential interventions, and then using the criteria of likely feasibility and impact, we moved to three, and then finally one: Digital Compass. This helped us zero in on our particular area: using the behavioural sciences to help young people behave ethically online.

## Solution design and iteration

Once the idea for Digital Compass had been conceived, we began to develop the intervention components and delivery channel. In close collaboration with the Alannah & Madeline Foundation, we used our research activities and what we know about the behavioural sciences to develop an intervention that gave young people the agency to make their digital lives better. Before finalising the design, we took a minimal viable product to pilot in schools. Using this information, we were able to further refine and resequence the program.

## Rigorous field testing

A big part of how we work at BIT is to test our solutions—to see whether they work, and by how much. In this space, programs are often not evaluated (e.g. Cantone et al., 2015), or are evaluated based on how much participants or schools liked them. This means ineffective or even harmful strategies may be funded and rolled out. We therefore committed at the outset to robust evaluation to see whether our intervention led to real and sustained changes in ethical behaviour.

### Collaborating with a service delivery partner

We decided to work closely with a service delivery partner early in the solution design phase, rather than designing our own intervention and recruiting a partner. Working with the Alannah & Madeline Foundation in this way was critical to the success of the process and the pilot. The way in which they engage young people in workshops, their understanding of the school context and their relationships with schools fundamentally shaped the development of the Digital Compass intervention. The Alannah & Madeline Foundation brought with them a series of best practice methods to create a safe environment for young people to expose their vulnerabilities and discuss complex ethical issues in front of their peers. Their style of facilitating with storytelling, guiding rather than dictating, and their authentic respect for the autonomy and knowledge of young people was critical to the success of the program. To solve complex social problems, we often need to combine the expertise and strengths of multiple partners.

**A note from our partner:**

For over a decade, the Alannah & Madeline Foundation has led the way in the development and delivery of tools and programs to build the digital literacy of children and young people. We do this to help them use technology appropriately and stay safe online. We have undertaken this work as the internet has continued to grow and evolve into a ubiquitous, mobile and indispensable aspect of our lives. The emergence of technology like smartphones, touchscreens and big data alongside the changing policies and approaches to the use of technology in schools and the expectations of parents on their children's technology use means that our approaches to digital literacy and online safety must evolve.

We regard Digital Compass as a key aspect of that evolution. Technology requires more than the ability to manage settings and use different apps and programs. Technology is deeply human. The data that is generated, stored and accessed, the images that are taken and shared, the relationships that are maintained and managed. Technology is where we live our lives and teenagers especially understand this through their lived experience. And, while they may know how to sign up, to login, post and connect – there are many things they don't know or need to learn. Where existing programs and tools have not yet ventured is the space where students learn to think about the consequences and impacts of their technology use on their lives and that of their peers, and how they can manage and foster positive behaviours that support them, rather than getting stuck in a loop of negative behaviours. This is why the Alannah & Madeline Foundation is so invested in Digital Compass and why it is what young people need. It is a program that asks them to think critically about their values and the values of others while supporting them with practical ways to act with respect for others online. It is not a program about things that are in the future. It is not a program that authoritatively tries to tell them what they should and shouldn't do. It is a program that respects their experience, offers them agency and gives them skills and knowledge so that they can change their own behaviours and create their own positive experiences online and in our digital world. Digital Compass has students turning off distracting notifications, unfollowing celebrities on social media who make them feel inadequate, identifying how they can check in on friends in positive ways and learning how to check others on language and behaviours in online gaming. In a world where adults use social media to spread misinformation, to abuse, to hurt, to provoke and act in ways that don't represent the values or ethics of a modern civil society – young people need role models and lessons in what it is to live an ethical life in this world. Digital Compass offers them that.





## 2.2 Our research activities

We used a number of research methods and activities throughout these program phases. These are outlined in more detail below, and the insights we gained are laid out in Section 03 & 04. In all activities, we made sure we had a representative split of participants based on Australian demographics, largely recruiting through market research companies or social media.

### Research review

We used the academic literature to determine which interventions hold up when rigorously tested, and which really succeed in changing behaviour for the long-term. This also helped us get to grips with the underlying mechanisms at work, asking, for example, what really influences ethical behaviour?

### Formative research with young people

We conducted interviews, workshops and an online diary study, with close to 70 young people from different schools, backgrounds and ages participating. This helped us to visualise what the online world looked like for young people in New South Wales, and what they perceived as the most pressing problems and exciting opportunities.

### Scoping with service providers

We spoke to practitioners about their frontline experience with young people to understand what they typically see, what they had implemented, and what had worked or not worked. We conducted a series of site visits and workshops with three core partners: ReachOut, The Alannah and Madeline Foundation, and Top Blokes Foundation. We also interviewed other leading organisations working in this space, including NGOs such as High Resolves and PCYC. This gave us a cross-section of the ways ethical behaviour and the digital world are being brought together in Australia today.

### Consultation with academics and experts

We formed a program executive group at the project outset, made up of expert representatives from academia, industry and education. This allowed us to draw on their experience and networks, as well as test our early ideas and understanding of the key issues. As we refined our program, we then established a partnership with developmental researcher Dr Caroline Moul of the University of Sydney to enable rapid academic input and feedback into our program.

### Youth Advisory Panel

Alongside our program executive group, we formed a group of six young people of different ages and genders to provide continuous input and feedback into the program. We met with them periodically both face-to-face and online to make sure our work remained grounded in the perspectives of young people.



### Parent interviews

We interviewed 19 parents, discussing ethics, online technologies and their parenting practices, and the key challenges they face as parents in our changing world. This showed us where parents saw the most important gaps in their children's development online, as well as where their perspectives either reflected or were misaligned with those of the young people we had spoken to.

### Market scan

We carried out a thorough review of the programs, materials and interventions for young people already available, or which had previously been available, on the market in Australia and overseas. We did this to determine whether we could establish new partnerships and avoid reinventing the wheel if there were viable products which already existed, to learn from what hadn't worked or gained traction previously, and to make sure our program was meeting an unmet need.

### #No Filter Forum

In April of 2018 we hosted an event to bring together 61 young people from diverse backgrounds to debate and design solutions for the program. For a snapshot, see <https://vimeo.com/275564064>. This two-day in-person event included:

- A pre and post event online environment where attendees engaged online with posts, videos, polls and discussions,
- On day one: A 'citizens' jury' where young people responded to the question 'How do we make good choices in an online world' and told us how they want to be supported by industry, schools, their parents and peers,
- On day two: A 'design sprint' where young people engaged in designing, prototyping and responding to our early intervention ideas.

### Teacher interviews & focus groups

We also conducted interviews and focus groups with a representative set of 13 teachers across New South Wales. Teachers are on the frontline of how ethical and unethical behaviour plays out online, and schools are an effective channel of engaging and reaching young people. Their perspectives were pivotal in understanding how Digital Compass could be delivered in practice to young people.

#### What is a citizens' jury?

A citizens' jury is an innovative way of canvassing the opinions of everyday people to guide decision-making, usually in government policy. BIT previously worked with the Victorian health promotion organisation VicHealth to run a citizens' jury on approaches to tackling obesity. A citizens' jury typically involves presenting everyday people with relevant evidence, and asking them to debate and then vote on policy solutions. In our citizens' jury, we had presentations of evidence by 'expert witnesses' from Instagram, Google, education and academia. These informed discussions and debates in small groups facilitated by adults, followed by voting and responding as a group.

Solution  
design and  
iteration

2018





### User testing

While designing a number of potential interventions in parallel, we ran user testing workshops with young people. These workshops allowed us to quickly test out and modify intervention components, as well as ask for help with pragmatic design considerations such as program length, structure, channel and target group.

### Piloting in schools

Before we finalised the design of Digital Compass, together with the Alannah & Madeline Foundation we ran a pilot version of the intervention in three schools in New South Wales and two schools in Victoria. We tested the intervention in two different year groups, year 8 and year 9, and with three different delivery models varying length and spacing. We used a process evaluation of the pilot to answer three questions:

- Is this program feasible to deliver?
- Is this program ready to deliver?
- Can this program be successfully implemented?

The pilot allowed us to prototype the program through iterating and learning in the field. Through carefully trialling out several variations, we could seamlessly situate the evidence-based intervention we had developed into the real day-to-day school format in which it will be delivered. We used this invaluable feedback to refine and finalise the Digital Compass intervention ahead of trialling. These changes included focusing on year 9s, resequencing activities, and shifting to 8 sessions over a term to give more time for exercises and opportunities to work on the content at home. This was made possible by working hand in hand with our delivery partner the Alannah & Madeline Foundation, through observation of the workshops, collecting data from young people and from the schools themselves. We could learn what worked, make adaptations and get immediate feedback. The pilot also gave us confidence that the program had the potential for impact with 75% of those who completed the pilot intending to continue to change how they behave online.



**Solution  
design and  
iteration**

**2019**

### COVID-19 research

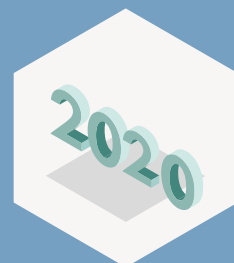
As part of our commitment to ensuring Digital Compass remains relevant to young people's current experiences and context, we conducted a small sample of in-depth interviews in June 2020 to understand how COVID-19 had impacted young people's online behaviour. Many young people reported observing an increase in prosocial behaviours online during COVID such as peers helping each other with schoolwork, more positive gaming environments and friends supporting each other privately and publicly. Young people also suggested that on the flipside people were engaging in more antisocial behaviors such as casual racism and digging up old posts and images to ignite drama. Many young people expressed regret at how distracted they were by online whilst trying to do schoolwork and interestingly many felt quite disconnected as their online interactions were not sufficient substitutes for face to face interactions at school. This research served to reconfirm the nuanced experience of young people online and the positive and negative ways in which young people connect online.

### Robust evaluation

Lastly we are evaluating Digital Compass in 2020/21 to answer the question: does our intervention work? The evaluation will be conducted in Sydney metropolitan secondary schools involving year 9 students. The evaluation will tell us if young people who participate in Digital Compass behave more prosocially and less antisocially online than students who have not completed the program. Results of the evaluation will be published in 2021.



**Solution  
design and  
iteration**



**Rigorous  
field testing**





### **Formative Conversations - [View Video](#)**

Initially, we also piloted a second intervention called 'Formative Conversations' in close partnership with the Top Blokes Foundation. The Top Blokes Foundation runs a successful program called Junior Top Blokes. In this program, cohorts of 10 boys aged 14-17 go through a 16 week mentoring program with a pair of young facilitators. In one hour sessions, they explore a series of everyday ethical challenges such as anger management, respectful relationships, and online bullying. The results from the program so far suggest that it can prompt big changes in participants' outlook, maturity and behaviour. The Top Blokes facilitators note that one major limiting factor on their program's impact is that they aren't able to target the family or family environment. If principles from the program aren't upheld at home, there's little they can do to help the young person. Parents also loomed large in our discussions with young people in our research, with many young people reporting wanting help from their parents—but on their terms.

Our Formative Conversations intervention aimed to facilitate this support. Over 16 weeks, we used the challenging ethical issues raised by the Junior Top Blokes program as a springboard for conversations between young people and their parents which wouldn't otherwise happen. We did this by texting parents snippets of the content, as well as probes for them to use to initiate conversations with their son. The program participants retained their agency by getting to select which option would be sent to their parents - and they were able to opt out of more provocative content. Based on pilot feedback data, we also decided to include texts to the young people, so that both are equal participants in the conversation.

Our pilot of this light-touch intervention revealed many positive effects, and was well received in spite of the potentially jarring nature of these hard conversations. [Check out what young men had to say about the benefits of the Formative Conversations intervention.](#) However, the consortium decided to reduce the breadth of CODE work and focus on the Digital Compass program for its wider reaching goals. The Top Blokes Foundation have continued to work on the refinement, roll-out and scale of the formative conversations add-on, with support from BIT.

## 03/ Key findings

In the three years since we started this project, we have learned a lot about young people, their use of technology and the way they act online. Some of this mirrors evidence published in other domains, but many of the insights we discovered aren't well documented, and definitely aren't well known. We've distilled these insights down to five key findings.

► **ONE. 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...**

If we looked to the media, some government resources or to a number of school-based programs, we'd be forgiven for thinking that today's young people are navigating an online moral wasteland. Cyberbullying, image-based abuse, public shaming and online predation are made to seem like everyday occurrences. Phones and laptops are talked about as only offering constant distractions, leaving young people unable to focus on their schoolwork and endlessly wasting time on frivolous pursuits.

We didn't find evidence to support this position. These extreme negative behaviours do occur, but are rare. Most young people had at most heard of a friend-of-a-friend who had experienced them. We instead saw strong evidence that on balance young people find the online world to be a positive place where they can grow, be informed, find support and experiment with their identity. This was especially true for young people with diverse sexual or gender orientations. Despite potentially only having a handful of students at school who understood their differences, they could access large and accepting communities of like-minded young people (and older people) to draw from.

However, we did find evidence for the existence of this moral panic from our parents and teachers, suggesting it is not solely a media creation. Many teachers were in favour of an outright school phone ban for young people, and spoke of the very negative impacts phones and social media were having on their students. Many parents felt ill-equipped to deal with their children's behaviour online, and used a variety of techniques sporadically (e.g. banning devices, reading their personal messages, introducing rules about screen time) to attempt to help.

It's not surprising that adults can feel a panic about the ethical development of young people. Humans suffer from what's known as an '[availability bias](#)' which means that we tend to view easy-to-remember and salient examples of things as being more representative than they are (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). This means that if we hear of a few extreme negative cases, we can come away thinking that these events dominate the social lives of young people. Whereas really, if we remember from Section 01, many young people are mostly just focused on schoolwork! We shouldn't ignore the potential for negative experiences online, but need to use nuance when describing this potential harm. Young people are mostly developing similarly to the way generations before grew up, with a few added complexities.

## ► **TWO. But we do need to act, as we aren't currently providing adequate support.**

While retaining this nuance, we do note that the level and type of support we are currently giving to our young people to navigate the online world is not cutting it. This position was held by the majority of young people, teachers and parents we spoke to. This help was requested for a variety of problems, including how to resolve conflicts online, how to balance being online with other needs, and how to offer support to others.

Evidence in the literature also suggests that there is a need for extra help, with a focus on the maladaptive use of technology such as phone or gaming 'addiction', and poor emotional wellbeing from overuse (e.g. Horwood, & Anglim, 2019). Until now, much of this evidence was based on statistical associations (e.g. Shakya, & Christakis, 2017), which are tricky to interpret because people with anxiety or depression may be more likely to use technology maladaptively, rather than their use of technology causing or enhancing emotional disorders. However, newer experimental studies provide stronger evidence that the wellbeing of young people is being impacted by overuse, and certain types of use (for example, following mainly influencers or celebrities, which invokes unhealthy comparisons). One study found that even 10 minutes browsing on Facebook can significantly deteriorate a participant's mood (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian & Halliwell, 2015). Although we think the panic around digital addiction and the mental health effects of online technologies might be somewhat exaggerated, they are undoubtedly problems for many in our target group. This can be for young people who are overusing forms of technology, those who have pre-existing mood or emotional disorders, those lacking social or familial support and for females (e.g. Kelly et al., 2018).

At different points during our research activities, we asked young people to design or develop interventions—not worrying too much about expense or feasibility. This method can be used when working with young people to generate core themes of desired solutions, which can then be refined into more feasible solutions. A common, and surprisingly simple, solution proposed by young people was having a 'school social media counsellor'. The idea here was that young people wanted to be able to take their phone or laptop to someone trained (but young enough to understand!) and ask for help when they find themselves in a tricky situation.

Designing programs and resources to provide this support is no easy feat though. Young people use technology and online spaces in diverse ways, with the problems encountered in a group-based chat unrecognisable compared with those on say an anonymous gaming site. Different young people are more or less likely to inhabit these spaces, meaning that content tailored to one platform or medium will leave behind others who aren't big users of them. Adults can also underestimate young people's knowledge and sophistication. It is easy to assume, for example, that a nicely designed app with the right information will be enough. In fact most young people have seen that information before, or discarded similar solutions as impractical. Lastly, we have to pass what we coined as the 'eye-roll' effect. Getting even minor details out of date, or appearing too trite or moralistic, can quickly lead a whole group of young people to switch off.

Overall, we saw that ethical behaviour (or being a good person online) is something young people grapple with and care about. Especially when it comes to ethics online, many do not want to be stuck with the status quo. They want more support from industry, schools and parents, and want to be involved in designing the solutions that affect them.

'I just want someone to guide me through it, without trying to control it.'

**- #No Filter Forum participant**

### ► **THREE. Telling young people to avoid risk doesn't lead to ethical behaviour.**

One reason that current programs aren't offering adequate support is that many focus on avoiding risks. This might include telling parents to monitor internet and technology usage, content advising young people to switch off or log off when experiencing conflict, and advice to avoid interacting with 'strangers' online. Young people were clear that these types of strategies are ineffective and unrealistic.

For example, a common program run in schools is to use fear-based messaging, often with a local police officer, to discourage sexting and image-based abuse. This typically involves stressing the criminal consequences of sharing (as usually the image subject or recipient are minors), as well as the long-term personal consequences of having these images available online for download. However, no evaluation we are aware of has assessed whether this approach is effective. When we spoke to young people, many were desensitized due to the frequency of this messaging, were sceptical of the likelihood of these consequences, or had developed methods to try and avoid the consequences (for example, concealing faces or using rapid-deletion technologies as in Snapchat).

Even if they were effective though, this message neglects arguably more important ethical dimensions. Withdrawal and avoidance are not effective conflict resolution or emotional response strategies in the long-term (Third et al., 2014). Firstly, they inhibit development by discouraging young people from encountering experiences from which they can learn and develop. Secondly, they encourage self-focused thinking that puts the individual's wellbeing as key, and others' as secondary. We observed this ourselves with many young people, as they struggled to formulate conclusions for common hypothetical ethical scenarios that benefited anyone other than the person. Teaching young people to engage with the world in this way does them a huge disservice. Returning to the example of the fear-based messaging from police, even if trying to scare young people into not sharing explicit images was effective, this advice neglects the more important ethical lesson: of the social and emotional impact of image-based abuse on the victim. One young person in our pilot said that in all the talks they'd been to about texting, they only ever discussed the sender. No-one had ever focused on the ethical issues of the person sharing it, breaking the trust of the sender.

Young people seemed to understand this loud and clear. They are constantly being told what 'not to do', but are desperate to be helped through 'how to' online.



## ► **FOUR. The messenger for change is critical.**

We also found that the messenger in interventions is critical, and program content needs to be delivered by messengers with credibility. Parents and teachers both felt ill-equipped to deliver advice and support in navigating the online context. Young people reported wanting help from their parents and schools, but on their terms. They said that they didn't want information that's overly focused on the negatives, that offers unrealistic strategies, or that doesn't respect their capacity for self-determination. These competing and complex problems combine to mean that finding alternative sources of delivering this support is key.

In our program, the role of the facilitator in providing this assistance is pivotal. Young people don't want the answer just handed to them. Most have a deep-seated confidence in their ability to make good choices. They want the chance to pin down their own principles, which they can then turn to when things get difficult. The success of Digital Compass relies on having a skilled facilitator who is credible, knowledgeable and able to draw out these perspectives—but can still guide young people towards more nuanced ethical positions when necessary.

We also incorporated peers as messengers. One of the defining developmental features of our target group of young people is their reliance on peers (Fabes, Carlo, Kupanoff & Laible, 1999). This time in their life sees a transition from the family-focused relationships of their younger years, without yet developing a focus on romantic relationships. Here, for most young people, friendship groups are a key source of emotional support and influence. Interventions that utilise peer connections show greater buy-in and acceptance, can utilise powerful group norms to change behaviour, and can more readily facilitate identity development (Glodich & Allen, 1998). However, peers can also inhibit the experience of school-based programs, where it can only take one influential person in the class to undermine a facilitator, and where many young people don't feel safe being honest about their experiences online.

We experimented with how to leverage peer-based connections without leaving program content vulnerable to these downsides or flaws. We did this with intensive and sequential user-testing, and by asking young people to help us design aspects of interventions. The feedback we received from young people suggested that by combining anonymous components with peer-voting and facilitator feedback, we were able to create a safe space for open and honest communication between young people about how to behave well online.

'When everyone has the group discussions, it brings topics that might come to your head, in a bit more of a like, friendly vibe... When you're trying to confront your friends, just them, it's often you can get shut down very easily... But when you bring it up to everyone [in the Digital Compass discussion] and everyone talks about it a bit, it might get the message across a bit, it's a lot friendlier to bring up things... No one wants to publicly say you're wrong, I don't like your opinion.' - **Digital Compass participant**

► **FIVE. Like us, young people aren't always in control online and many need help regaining this agency.**

Young people's physical and online environments have a big effect on their behaviour. This starts with the devices they have access to, when and how much they are allowed to use them (are young people allowed to keep their phone in their bedroom overnight, or take them into the classroom?), the apps and platforms they use, and the design of those apps and platforms. We often underestimate the impact of the environment on our behaviour, assuming that our intrinsic 'self' and values are more important than irrelevant details like how an app is structured or what others are doing. In fact, we are hugely vulnerable to the impact of our environment, and unconsciously take cues from others all day.

Most young people are not aware of these environmental effects, often built-in deliberately by the tech industry. When we first discussed it, there was often confusion—the first time we asked young people about whether they felt in control of their use, we were met with confused glances and responses like 'I don't give my Mum my social media password'. However, when we spent the time exploring how platforms are engineered to be addictive, many young people were galvanised by this realisation. Some young people had already tried and failed to change their behaviour online, and many reported feeling immense relief that they weren't just 'lazy'. They were very interested in understanding and discussing the specific ways that platforms and companies tried to hook them, such as likes and Snapchat streaks, and finding ways to overcome these. We found similarities between their reaction, and the strategy shown to be effective in the healthy eating literature—where framing food advertisers as manipulative and deceptive leads to healthier food choices (Bryan, Yeager & Hinojosa, 2019). Young people appear to respond to this framing by feeling the need to rebel against authority, and this effect is particularly strong in young men.





Unfortunately, just wanting to change usually isn't enough, and this is a context where the gulf between our good intentions and our follow through (usually termed the '[intention-action gap](#)', Sheeran, 2002) is large. 'Nudges'—small changes in our environment with big effects on behaviour—have proven a useful tool for policymakers, but they can also be used by individuals to enhance their agency (e.g. Service & Gallagher, 2017). In a digital context, young people can alter their own environment, setting time limits on addictive or corrosive apps on phones, leaving mobile devices in another room or setting reminders to engage in a certain action. A tweak to the environment can produce a permanent shift in behaviour without the need to for constant willpower and self-control.



# 04/ Designing our solution

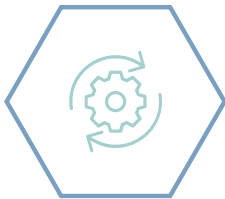
To design our solution, we used the evidence from our research review to determine the core capabilities young people need to behave ethically online and our key findings to establish design principles to guide the program details.

## 4.1 Digital Compass capabilities

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:

1



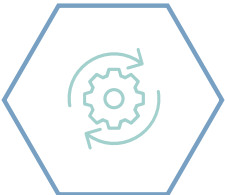
**Building self-efficacy in resolving conflicts**

2



**Making small but significant changes to behaviour**

3



**Forming and challenging social norms**

4



**Reflecting on personal values and actions**

5



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





### **Building self-efficacy in resolving conflicts**

We reviewed the evidence on resolving adult interpersonal conflicts, but there was very little research on how young people could diffuse or solve dilemmas, particularly in the online world. The current advice available—switch the device off, tell a teacher or parent, ignore the ‘bully’—was not useful or practical. We therefore used findings from the adult literature as a broad framework for effective actions, and leveraged the knowledge of young people through peer-based responding and feedback to generate the solution most likely to work.

### **Making small but significant changes to behaviour**

As we outlined in Section 03, we often aren’t completely in control of our behaviour, and can need some help when we want to change ingrained habits. We used the behavioural science literature around implementation intentions (Gollwizer, 1999) for goal setting (known as ‘If... Then...’ plans) and making changes to the environment (a key aspect of behavioural therapy, Terjesen et al., 2018) to provide this help. As well as supporting them to act in line with their values now, developing strategies to change habits early in life will give young people the skills to exert more control over their behaviour and environment in the future.

### **Forming and challenging social norms**

Humans are social creatures, and we are strongly influenced by the behaviour of those around us. This is no truer than for young people, who are more attuned to the actions of their peers than any other age group. With bad behaviour often being more salient and receiving more attention, it can appear more common and socially accepted than it really is. Having an opportunity to discuss and recalibrate social norms can promote positive peer pressure and lead to prosocial attitudes and behaviours: when we discover that we are behaving outside of a social norm, we tend to modify our behaviour to be in line with the perceived norm (Cialdini, 2017). Young people report that the ‘grey areas’ online—where it isn’t clear what the ‘right’ decision is—are the most challenging. By focusing on these areas rather than obviously ‘good’ or ‘bad’ behaviours, and allowing young people to debate the nuance, we maximise the impact of this activity.

### **Reflecting on personal values and actions**

Despite the reliance of many leadership and ethics seminars on identifying values, there is little empirical evidence that asking individuals to select and endorse values important to them impacts ethical development or behaviour. For this reason, rather than designing content around values identification, we used a brief activity to define and select values to 1) draw young people into the idea that they already have an ethical code of some form, and 2) provide a scaffold for them to contrast their ideal and actual behaviour in self-reflection. Prompted self-reflection is a practical technique to help people recognise the reality that we all inevitably make mistakes, and reflect on these so that we learn from these mistakes to better align our behaviour with our values. As this can provoke anxiety and rumination in some people, we used evidence from the literature to minimise the chance that this occurs. This includes first reflecting on experiences where their values and behaviour were aligned, and asking them to recount the negative scenario in the third person to provide ‘emotional distance’ (Ayduk & Kross, 2010).

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

We noticed during our many workshops with young people that there was often a ‘penny-drop’ moment where young people realised the extent to which the online environment influences their behaviour. Some young people felt relieved that it wasn’t their laziness or lack of willpower that left them engaging online in ways they weren’t proud of. Some felt empowered by the understanding. Some also felt galvanised to push for industry change. Given the impact of this conversation and demonstration on young people, we built this in as a core element of the Digital Compass.

### What we left out of Digital Compass

It's also important to note what we haven't included. Our research activities revealed a number of areas that seemed initially promising, but didn't pan out. These included:

- **Training empathy**, for example by using strategies such as perspective taking ("... now put yourself in their shoes and picture what this would feel like").
- **Training emotional literacy**, for example by asking young people to label complex emotions and discuss what underpins them.
- **Building inhibitory control**, for example by practicing tasks that require young people to inhibit a trained or automatic response.

When exploring these further, we didn't find good evidence that light-touch interventions using these strategies could effectively change behaviour. Some, like perspective taking, have even on occasion backfired (e.g. Sassenrath, Hodges & Pfattheicher, 2016). The limited empirical studies we found were also often conducted in much younger samples of primary school aged children (e.g. Scott & Graham, 2015) so were not transferable to our target cohort given the differing level of cognitive development.

We found in our market scan that many of these activities are built into other programs. This is potentially because traits like empathy, emotional literacy and inhibitory control are correlated with ethical behaviour. However, whether they cause or just co-develop alongside ethical development as young people mature is unclear. Not to mention, even if they are causative, this doesn't mean they can be trained in brief programs in a way that is generalisable and sustainable.

**“...The primary outcome for Digital Compass is helping young people to behave more ethically online.....”**

## 4.2 Digital Compass design principles

Using our key findings, we developed five guiding design principles to help us design the details of Digital Compass:

**Table 1:** Five design principles

Research finding	Design Principle	Implications for Digital Compass
<b>The breadth and tone of moral panic isn't accurate.</b>	Young people largely want to behave ethically online.	Fundamentally, our program assumes that being a good person is something young people grapple with and care about. While many young people report that their online experiences are mostly positive, a minority report having negative experiences, or don't have the social support to buffer against negative experiences. Exploring how some people experience the online world, and looking at issues from a different perspective, can lead many young people to begin to question how they can change their online behaviours for the better.
<b>We do need to act as we currently aren't providing adequate support.</b>	Young people need to be the agents of change.	<p>We can't dictate what it means to be a good person online, and we can't force young people to change. Our role instead is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• catalyse shifts in perspective that encourage changes in online behaviour</li> <li>• provide the practical support and tools for young people to use to achieve and maintain this change, and</li> <li>• create a safe space where young people feel supported to make changes.</li> </ul>
<b>Telling young people to avoid risk doesn't lead to ethical behaviour.</b>	Young people need opportunities to trial, practice and report back.	Poorly designed programs rely on simply 'telling' or lecturing young people about what they should not do. We instead focus on 'what can you do?'. We know that behaving ethically sometimes means leaning in to difficult situations rather than avoiding them. We provide opportunities for young people to try out strategies in-class in a supportive setting, then at-home, and regroup to troubleshoot if things didn't go to plan. We have designed and developed a digital platform which enables young people to try out behaviours online in a safe space, before implementing in their usual online platforms.
<b>The messenger for change is critical.</b>	An experienced facilitator, peers and data are key teaching tools for young people.	We found early in our research activities that hearing about problems or concepts in the abstract can lead to young people disengaging. We turned this into a key design principle, and we collect and reflect back our young people's data wherever it is relevant to the program content. This both has the impact of personalising as well as 'proving' to young people that the concepts we discuss are real. We also provide the opportunity for young people to compare their data to their peers, and find that this can help them validate their experiences or see areas where they need to improve. Using data in this way effectively catalyses self-reflection in young people on their use of technology, in a way that being told generally about the impacts of technology does not achieve. We also use an experienced Facilitator who guides young people without judgement and creates a safe space for discussing complex ethical issues. We use peer voting, peer discussions and peer feedback within exercises.
<b>Like adults, young people are not always in control online and may need help regaining this agency.</b>	We encourage young people to reevaluate their environments and make immediate changes	We use data to highlight to young people where they may not be as in control as they thought and then encourage them to make small modifications to their online environment. This demonstrates how small changes, such as unfollowing someone on instagram, can have a large impact.

## 05/ Digital Compass

Digital Compass is our school-based intervention to help young people build the skills and strategies they will need to navigate their online worlds. Digital Compass is an 8-week facilitator-led program that takes young people through a series of practical activities designed around common online experiences. Digital Compass gives young people the agency to make their online world better by supporting them to work out what they can do online, rather than focusing on what they can't.

### 5.1 Digital Compass program structure and activities

Digital Compass is split into three main phases as outlined in Figure 4 below:

1. What is being a good person?
2. Act on your good intentions; and
3. What to do when it goes wrong.

Below we describe some of the core program activities in each phase.



Figure 4: Digital Compass 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					



## Phase 1: What is being a good person? (week 1-3)

### Phase 1 learning objectives; young people:

- Understand the values most important to them
- Know the considerations for deciding if an action is ethical
- Recognise how values differ and how our behaviour is influenced by others around us

### Values selection: reflecting on personal values and actions

*What is the aim?* To get young people to select the values important to them, using these values as an anchor throughout the program.

*What's involved?* Rather than just asking young people to blindly pick their values, we use techniques from an area of psychological therapy called 'acceptance-based therapy' (e.g. Roemer, Orsillo & Salters-Pedneault, 2008) to guide informed and thoughtful decisions.

### How we act online and the CODE: forming and challenging social norms

*What is the aim?* To establish a shared 'code' for online behaviour, and to correct any misconceptions that bad behaviour online is just part of the status quo.

*What's involved?* We give young people the agency at the outset of the program to generate and agree appropriate online social norms, by each week agreeing a behaviour or action that would make the online world a more positive place. We discuss these actions with relation to ethics—we have a series of social obligations that we have to adhere to in a civilised society or it would be chaos. We also introduce moral principles by applying them to these everyday online dilemmas or scenarios. Later in the program, we ask young people to rate a set of online behaviours as mostly OK, and mostly not OK. For example, sending screenshots of a conversation to a best friend to get advice, sharing personal views on a topic that is a bit controversial, or creating new group chats that don't have a member of your group in them. Young people then get to see how their response differed from the group norm. The facilitator can highlight and discuss where some group norms might be socially problematic, and give young people the chance to change their response.

## Phase 2: Act on your good intentions (weeks 4-6)

### Phase 2 learning objectives; young people:

- Understand how being online makes them feel and how this compares to their peers
- Understand how the tech industry controls their online environment and what they can do to take back control
- Know how to change their own behaviour to make online more positive

## Deciding who's in control: understanding how technology and our environment affect our actions

*What is the aim?* To show young people how features of their technology can heavily influence their behaviour.

*What's involved?* In a mixture of discussion and group activities, we explore the ways that our online environment can impact our decision making. Young people are shown some of the 'tricks' tech companies use to keep us online, even when we may have lost interest or enjoyment. We also explore the other ways our online environment can impact the choices we make—from whether we're online at night while tired, to who we are interacting with, to how the norms of a particular platform dictate how we behave on it. As well as discussing this, we also show young people how they are personally affected by their digital environment. We provide them with their online behaviour data (the Digital Health Check), analysed, aggregated and compared to their peers to show how often they are using technology, that being online can sometimes not make them feel great, and that some platforms have a more negative effect than others.

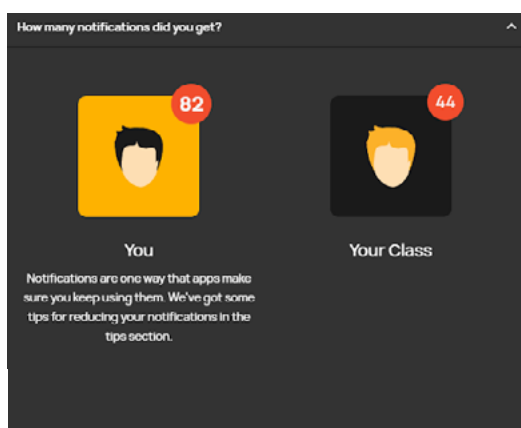
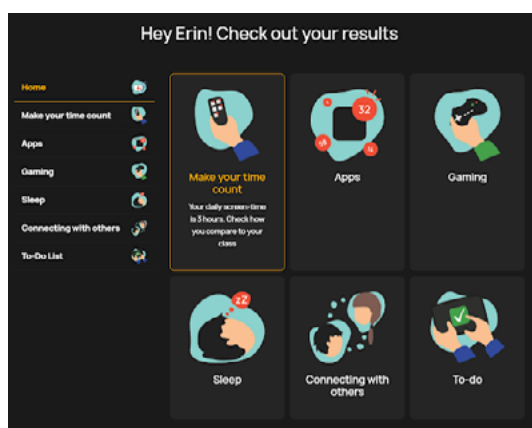
## Make a Plan and Bootcamp: making small but significant changes to behaviour

*What is the aim?* To help young people change the way they interact online and engage with technology, and give them strategies that can help in the long-term.

*What's involved?* Importantly, we start the program by asking young people to try and change their behaviour without any help. This helps young people realise that just deciding you want to change something isn't usually enough; our willpower is rarely as strong as we expect it to be. During the program, we then use two methods to assist in changing behaviours:

- **Tech bootcamp:** We provide young people with their online behaviour data compared to their peers, to help point out where they might want to make some changes. We then support them to achieve this by making immediate physical changes to their digital environment (for example, setting personal time limits for social media, or unfollowing people who make them feel bad) to make them feel better, get more sleep or be less distracted.
- **Behaviour plans:** Young people select a behaviour that they identified at the program outset as important to cultivating positive online environments. They then work through our goal setting framework to guide the development of a concrete, measurable goal, and an 'If... Then...' plan to help them achieve this. The facilitator checks in on these plans in subsequent weeks, troubleshooting particular barriers they've faced and giving time to iterate their plans.

**Online behaviour data:** How data is presented to young people



## Phase 3: What to do when it goes wrong (weeks 7-8)

### Phase 3 learning objectives; young people:

- Learn how to safely intervene in online conflicts and daily dramas
- Learn how to practice self-reflection without rumination

### How we deal with drama: building self-efficacy in resolving conflicts

*What is the aim?* To help young people develop conflict resolution skills by crowd-sourcing solutions to everyday conflicts, and give them a chance to practice in a safe environment.

*What's involved?* The facilitator starts by presenting some general principles for conflict resolution (see hints & tips). Students then see a brief scenario which is an anonymised amalgamation of experiences other cohorts have reported throughout the program. This scenario is housed in the digital platform, which mimics the features of a social media platform. The class individually and privately responds to how they think the conflict should be handled. The facilitator runs through the most common responses, and discusses any implications of resolving the conflict in this way. The class has the chance to identify the best responses, and these are saved in the platform for future reference. Young people then have the chance to reflect on this, and note both how they would ordinarily have responded to such a scenario, and how they would now.

### Self-reflection: reflecting on personal values and actions

*What is the aim?* To give young people the skills and opportunity to learn how to practice productive self-reflection strategies.

*What's involved?* Young people reflect on a time they acted inconsistently with their values online, and then re-write the scenario based on how someone acting in line with their selected values would behave. Young people then think about a time they could routinely practice self-reflection.

### Key tips to resolve online conflicts:

- **Don't join in.** Avoiding joining in on the pile on, no matter which side of the argument you agree with.
- **Take a minute.** Wait to post until you're calm, and take a moment to think about what you want to say.
- **Keep it light.** Keep your comments easy going and use emoji to make your tone clear. Try to defuse the situation with a distraction, change of subject or a joke.
- **Get help.** Ask someone you trust for their perspective and advice. If things get ugly, report it to the platform, your parents or the school.
- **Consider reaching out in private.** Arguments don't need an audience, and sometimes they are better fixed by chatting to the people involved privately.
- **Take it offline.** It's easier to talk through most problems face-to-face.



## 5.2 Format

Digital Compass involves a mix of program content and media to ensure that facilitation is seamless, young people are kept attentive throughout, and we maximise the long-term impact of the program. Note that this is the format we have rigorously tested Digital Compass in, but we can also provide flexible alternatives to meet the needs of different schools.

**Table 2:** Digital Compass program format

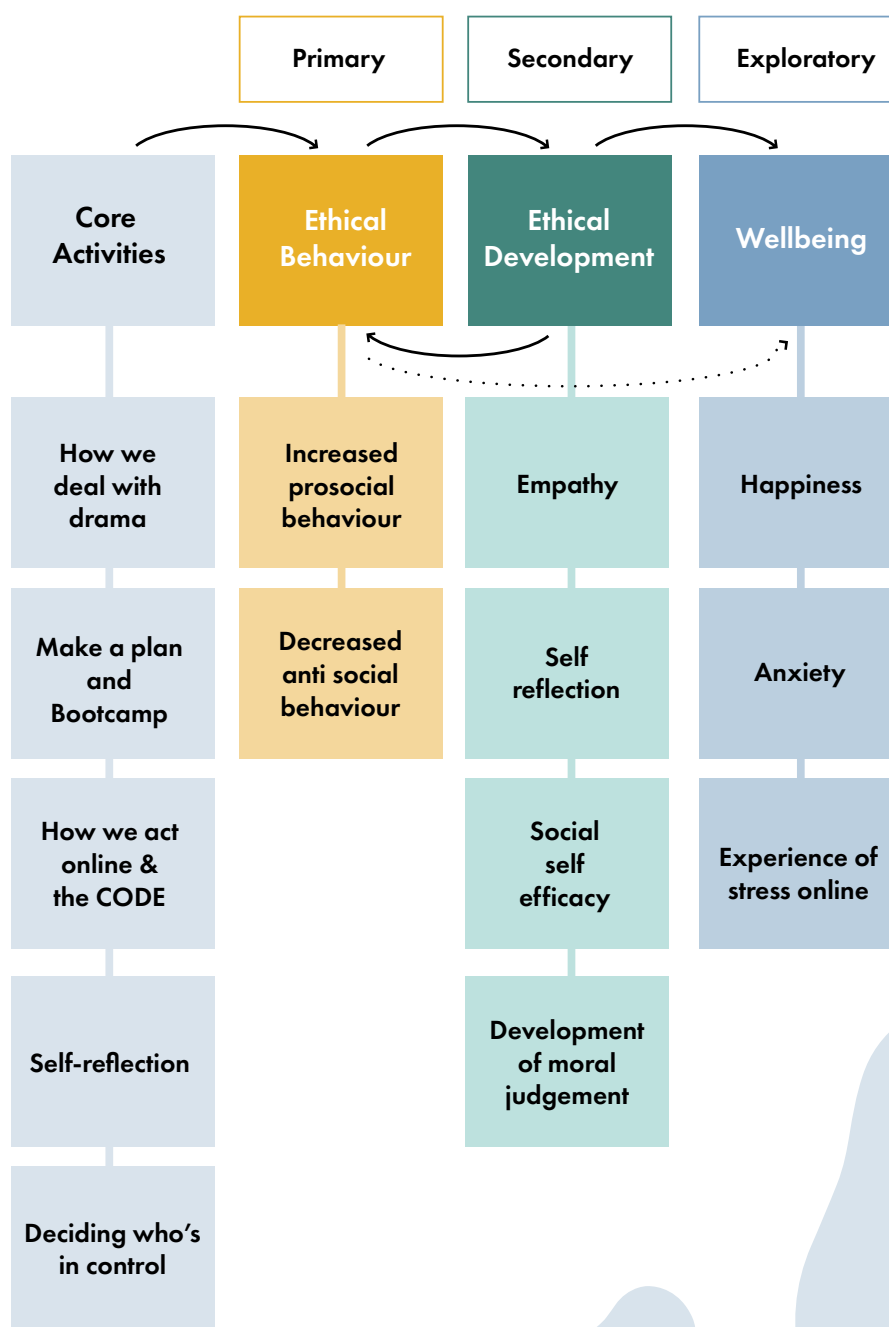
Facilitation	A facilitator is required to guide students through the program content and enable peer-based components. Both students and teachers felt that it was ideal for this to be an external facilitator, rather than a teacher. A digital platform aids in this facilitation, providing a place to practice behaviours in a simulated environment, as well as allow a mix of group and individual exercises.
Target group	<p>The program targets the year 9 (aged 14-16 years) cohort. Based on empirical evidence and our own user-testing, we found that this cohort presents the ideal target group as they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have enough experience with online technologies and ethical and unethical behaviours to understand program content,</li> <li>• have the right level of social, emotional and cognitive development to complete and benefit from the tasks, and</li> <li>• are young enough that we can influence behaviours before they become more ingrained.</li> </ul>
Content type	<p>The program has a mix of education, practical activities and feedback. This involves class and group guided discussion, core exercises to learn strategies, personal data collected and reflected back to illustrate core concepts, and the opportunity to practice behaviours both in class and at home.</p> <p>The majority of exercises are housed within the digital platform, with a few hands-on practical activities too.</p>
Group size	The program and its activities are designed to work best within a standard class size (approximately 25 students) to enable intimate discussions about difficult concepts, whilst also preserving anonymity in some components.
Length	The program, in its evaluated form, runs for one period per week for 8 weeks. It is designed to fit within a school term and still enable time between sessions and longer-term feedback. We also piloted other formats including a one day intensive session, and a 3 workshop program delivered fortnightly. Although we found the 8 week version was the best accepted, other formats can be used to allow flexibility for schools in implementing the program.
Curriculum alignment	We designed the program to align with several aspects of the NSW curriculum. The program aligns with the New South Wales PDHPE curriculum; health wellbeing and relationships (PDe9, PDe7, PDe2, PDe6) and healthy safe and active lifestyles (PDS-10, PDS-2, PDS-6, PDS-9), as well as the NSW Design and Technology curriculum; information and software technology. The program is also aligned with the Ethical Understanding General Capability from the Australian Curriculum.

## 5.3 Evaluation

The impact of Digital Compass is being evaluated in 2020/21 in schools in metropolitan Sydney. Our evaluation will be able to tell us which of our outcomes we were able to change, and by how much. We will focus on our primary 'ethical behaviour' outcomes, using our secondary 'ethical development' outcomes to shed light on the process of change, and our exploratory 'wellbeing' outcomes to see how a change in behaviour might impact psychological outcomes.

This report will be updated with the findings from our evaluation in 2021.

**Figure 5:** Theory of Change digram - 'ethical behaviour outcomes'



## 06/ What the future holds

Developing the Digital Compass program has been the culmination of four years of work from all of our partners, and from the young people who have supported, shared insights for and participated in the program. However, we don't see the work of the CODE program as close to being finished: there are still many ways we could provide more and better support to young people online. Our vision for the future of Digital Compass involves strategies at three levels:

### ► ONE. Rolling out the Digital Compass across Australia

Firstly, we aim to expand the reach of Digital Compass beyond the schools we have currently trialled it in, and beyond New South Wales. The challenge of helping young people to behave ethically online is universal, and a top of mind issue for most schools and most parents. This issue will not go away, and schools continue to look for innovative ways to address it. We hope that the Digital Compass program can be a key method through which schools across Australia can achieve this. Expanding the reach of the program will also involve reviewing alternative delivery models (e.g. short term intensive programs (3-4 weeks) and full day programs) which we trialled in the pilot phase given flexibility in delivery is an important consideration for schools. There is also an opportunity to consider alternative delivery models for remote and regional areas, such as a mix of offline and online delivery.



## ► TWO. Expanding the reach of Digital Compass beyond the classroom

Schools are the most effective way to reach and influence young people (Weare & Nind, 2011; Tiofi & Farrington, 2011). However, the relationship between young people, their class peers and teachers is just one aspect of their lives. There are a number of ways in which we would like to open up Digital Compass to incorporate more social support for change, and spread this change further:

- Close peers—change instigated within a classroom won't be sustained if the close peers of young people don't accept it; these are key relationships to target.
- Social network—the large social networks of young people offer an opportunity to exponentially expand the reach of the Digital Compass.
- Parents—bringing parents into the equation is an important next step, reducing the moral panic about online behaviour and helping parents and young people to communicate more productively about troubles online.

The way that we could do this would vary depending on the group. It could involve using messaging prompts such as text messages and emails to bring parents into Digital Compass content, or designing content specifically for parents. We could ask young people to bring in their peers to help support their behaviour change and help them commit to actions. We could design specific content for young people to use when navigating certain issues or platforms online, as a sort of playbook—for example, providing short and simple antidotes to fake news posted on a friend's feed. We could use social network analysis to identify the key influencers within schools to expose the Digital Compass content to, in order to maximise the social impact that our program has by leveraging their influence to create new positive social norms. The opportunities are endless, with our current base Digital Compass offering just the beginning.



### ► **THREE. Influencing the digital environment through industry and policy change**

During the CODE program we have had the unique ability to work closely with young people, frontline service providers, parents, schools, academics and the Department of Education. From this vantage point, we occupy a key position to facilitate change in industry and policy to meet the needs of young people, by advocating for change on behalf of young people.

We have begun this work by making submissions to government inquiries, guiding government decision-making on some projects, and by holding and hosting events to elevate the views of young people on key issues. As well as continuing these efforts, we will continue to listen to stakeholders to determine where else to focus. We've had countless ideas and requests from young people for change. These have been for smaller and easier adjustments, such as more formal involvement of young people in the development of platforms and policies, to larger and more structural changes, including changes to platforms to accommodate self-reflection, and better screening for hate speech. We see supporting our stakeholders to achieve these aims as an ambitious but pivotal aim for the CODE program.



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# Digital Compass

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