JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW EARLY CHILDHOOD ONLINE SAFETY EDUCATION INITIATIVE LAUNCHED

A new early childhood online safety education initiative launched today aims to help parents, carers and educators teach infants, toddlers and pre-school children basic technology and online safety concepts.

Playing IT Safe was developed by the Alannah & Madeline Foundation with funding from the *Proceeds of Crime Act 2002* from the Australian Federal Police and Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE), with additional funding from the eSafety Commissioner's Early Year's program.

The initiative includes an introduction to online safety education through preventative messaging and a series of digital play-based and offline activities that children can undertake with educators in early learning environments, and at home with parents and carers.

The Minister for Home Affairs Peter Dutton said the internet is an essential part of our lives, and for children it is becoming a part of their lives earlier than ever.

"We know very young children have access to electronic devices – they may watch videos or play games on a mobile phone or tablet – and many children are spending more time using these devices because of the COVID-19 pandemic placing them more at risk of being targeted by online child sex offenders," Mr Dutton said.

Since the implementation of social distancing measures designed to contain the COVID pandemic, law enforcement agencies have seen a disturbing rise in the amount of child abuse material being shared on the dark net and an increase in the number of referrals through to the ACCCE.

"The protection of children requires a community-wide response which is why law enforcement, government and early childhood education experts have joined forces to develop this key initiative," Mr Dutton said.

The Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, Paul Fletcher said the Playing IT Safe resources build on the eSafety Commissioner's Early Years program and are designed to help parents and carers establish positive online behaviours through age-appropriate activities.

"Research from the eSafety Commissioner shows four out of five parents have pre-school aged children who access the internet, which is why it's important to establish a strong foundation for safe internet use from a young age," Minister Fletcher said.

"When a child first reaches for a digital device to watch an online video or play an education-based game, I encourage parents and carers to reach for the Playing IT Safe resources."

Programs like Playing IT Safe are critical to the protection of young children in an ever-changing online environment, and this Government will continue to support initiatives which help protect Australian children from harm.

For early childhood online safety resources and information visit www.playingitsafe.org.au and eSafety.gov.au.

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