Under the patronage of
His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mabarak Al Nahyan
(UAE Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence)

International Conference on
"Children's well-being in a digital world"

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"CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING IN A DIGITAL WORLD"

eSafe Conference

6th February 2023
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EMIRATES SAFER INTERNET SOCIETY

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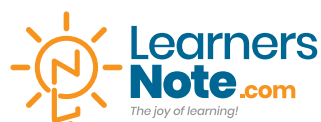MARKETPLACE FOR EDUCATION

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SPECIAL EDITION ESAFE CONFERENCE

As technology continues to advance and play an increasingly important role in our daily lives, it's crucial that we ensure the safety and well-being of children in the digital world. This requires not only educating children about safe online practices, but also addressing the broader issues surrounding digital well-being for both children and families.

As we gather for the eSAFE conference, under the patronage of H.E Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mabarak Al Nahyan, UAE Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence, it is with great enthusiasm that we reflect on the importance of ensuring the safety and well-being of children in the online world. Our first edition of the conference brings together international speakers and subject matter experts to share their knowledge and insights on the latest trends, challenges, and best practices in online safety, security and wellbeing.

Eng. Adel Salem Alkaff AlHashmi

Chief Editor - eSafe Newsletter &
Chairman - eSafe Conference &
Vice Chairman - Emirates Safer Internet Society

At Emirates Safer Internet Society, we believe that by working together and leveraging the expertise of different stakeholders, we can create a safer and more positive digital experience for children and families in the United Arab Emirates. We will continue to work towards this goal in joint efforts with all our regional and international stakeholders.

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"CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING IN A DIGITAL WORLD"

eSafe Conference

6th February 2023
Hotel Anantara Eastern Mangroves, Abu Dhabi

AGENDA

9:00 AM

WELCOME SPEECH
ENG. ADEL SALEM ALKAFF AL HASHMI
eSafe Conference Chairman &
Vice Chairman - Emirates Safer Internet Society

9:10 AM

KEYNOTE SPEECH 1
H.E. DR. MOHAMMED AL KUWAITI
Head of Cybersecurity, UAE Government

9:25 AM

KEYNOTE SPEECH 2
IAIN DRENNAN
Executive Director of WeProtect Global Alliance, UK

9:55 AM

COFFEE BREAK

10:10 AM

NATIONAL ANTHEM

10:20 AM

INAUGURAL SPEECH
**H.E. SHEIKH NAHYAN
BIN MABARAK AL NAHYAN**
Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence, UAE

10:40 AM

eSafe CHILD ONLINE PROTECTION AWARD

11:30 AM

SHORT COFFEE BREAK

11:45 AM

RAISING DIGITAL NATIVES
A Safer Surfing Experience
Animation Video by eSafe

11:50 AM

1ST PANEL SESSION
"Safety of Children in the Digital World"

12:40 PM

LUNCH/PRAYER BREAK

1:30 PM – 2:15 PM

2ND PANEL SESSION
"Children and Families Well-being in the Digital World"

2:20 PM – 3:10 PM

3RD PANEL SESSION
"Role of Civic Engagement and Partnerships in Promoting Digital Well-being"

3:15 PM

eSafe CONFERENCE CHAIRMAN
"CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION"
University Students & Volunteers

3:35 PM

eSafe CONFERENCE CHAIRMAN
CLOSING REMARKS

SAFETY OF CHILDREN IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

MS. SANJANA BHARDWAJ

Online Child Protection Expert

Children's lives are increasingly intertwined with the digital world; the distinction between "online" and "offline" that existed for previous generations has diminished for many children today. Children around the world want and need to use the Internet and digital services for school, entertainment, to get information, and to be in contact with families and friends. Indeed, with the digitization of so many essential services, children increasingly have no choice but to interact with the digital world as part of their daily lives.Their digital footprints can start even before birth, with ultrasound photos and due dates shared on social media.

Digital connectivity has been labeled the "silent hero" of the recent pandemic, with more and more children adopting digital technologies for work, online learning, socializing, games, and keeping in touch with loved ones. The constraints imposed by the virus not only meant that many younger children began interacting online much earlier than their parents might have planned, but the need to juggle work commitments left many parents unable to supervise their children, leaving young people at risk of accessing inappropriate content or being targeted by criminals in the production of child sexual abuse material.

Negative online interactions, such as critical comments or a lack of "likes," contribute to perceptions of exclusion and disconnection, while unfavorable social comparisons with other users can adversely affect self-esteem through exposure to highly curated lives. This in particular affects adolescents, as the development and maintenance of social connections are crucial during this life stage. With children growing up in a hyper-digital environment, they are at increased risk of experiencing adverse outcomes of social media use, such as psychological distress, exposure to inappropriate materials on the website, cyberbullying, and harassment.

The increase in screen time and reliance on digital technologies has resulted in an exponential rise of the internet and online markets, leading to an explosion of online child sexual exploitation and abuse. They include sexual exploitation and abuse, cyberaggression and harassment, incitement to suicide or life-threatening activities, exposure to harmful content, privacy violations, and exploitative digital marketing practices. These risks have the potential to seriously harm children.

Online safety doesn't happen by accident; we need to work diligently across sectors, across research disciplines, across regions, and across countries to enhance child safety in the digital environment. We need a better understanding of the risks children are likely to face online to develop appropriate policy responses. It is critical to openly discuss the risks that children and young people face online, to teach them how to recognise risk and prevent or deal with harm if it occurs, without overly frightening or exaggerating the dangers.We need to equip children with the skills to navigate the digital environment effectively and ethically so that they better understand the digital risks they face.

Parents need to support children and young people so that they can benefit from technology safely. They should have a balanced approach and recognise the wide range of benefits that the Internet can provide. Parents may be inclined to focus on the many positive educational and skill-building benefits that can be gained online, but it is important that they also consider and appreciate the social benefits that children may gain.

Exposure to these risks can affect children's emotional well-being and academic outcomes, undermine their privacy in the short and long term, and have financial implications too. However, it is important to remember that not all children face significant risks online, and that not all of them result in actual harm.

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With information and communication technologies (ICTs), schools have an opportunity to transform education and help pupils fulfill both their potential and raise standards. Creating a safe ICT learning environment has several important elements, which include the following: an infrastructure of whole-site awareness;

responsibilities, policies, and procedures; an effective range of technological tools; a comprehensive e-safety education; a programme for everyone in the establishment; and a review process that continually monitors the effectiveness of the ICT learning environment.

There are a number of opportunities today for industry, in collaboration with government, academia, and NGOs, to collaborate more closely to share best practises in addressing child online safety. Without meaningful participation from private companies and industry, we cannot fully understand the scale and nature of online child sexual exploitation and abuse or identify solutions to it.
Governments, technology companies, families, and other people must support children so that they are free to enjoy the digital world and are not exploited or put at risk. Children all over the world deserve the same protections. A holistic approach and a coordinated response at all levels and across regions are the way forward to protect children from online risks and potential harm and empower them to fully benefit from online opportunities.

Ref: Children's rights in the digital world, OHCHR
Ref: Protecting Children in the Digital Age, OECD Forum
        Network
Ref: ITU Guidelines
Ref: UK Council for Internet Safety
Ref: Child Rights in the Digital Age, UNICEF

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CHILDREN & FAMILY WELL-BEING IN DIGITAL WORLD

Technology helps children become independent learners more quickly. Once they learn how to access digital information sources safely, they're able to explore the topics that interest them on their own. Children learn the importance of building communities and how to interact with people in social situations.

Through this article, we are focusing on the digital wellbeing of children and their families. The wellbeing of every person is embedded in a larger social and environmental context that depends on and relates to the health and wellbeing of the people and groups within it. Families are part of this larger context, but they live in complex socio-economic environments. The wellbeing of each person depends upon opportunities for appropriate economic participation and social and political engagement. And a healthy society is made up of people who are willing and able to work collaboratively towards a sustainable future. Digital interaction has become almost indispensable for participation and progress in the modern world, and the development of these skills is an essential part of adult preparedness.

With the incorporation of technology into our daily lives, an increasing number of children and families have to balance their physical and virtual relationships and interactions. The internet has opened spaces for individuals to connect beyond their physical borders. Online communities have become platforms for engagement and addiction. Virtual worlds are playing an important role in our lives and are important parameters contributing to our wellbeing.

Concerns have also been raised about the time children spend using digital technology and its effect on their physical activity and mental health. Evidence suggests moderate use of digital technology can be beneficial to children's mental wellbeing, whereas excessive use can be detrimental. As children get older and spend more time with digital technology, they experience more positive and negative impacts on their wellbeing. Parents are concerned that children will actively engage in risky and dangerous behaviors, such as contacting people they do not know.

Across the 38 member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), research shows that children spend more time online than ever before and at younger ages. Policymakers are struggling to balance potential opportunities with online risks.

Digital technologies expand the boundaries of information available to people and enhance human productivity, but they can also imply risks for people's well-being, ranging from job losses and cyber bullying to breaches to online security and privacy. It shows that countries that have harnessed the largest benefits from the digital transformation can still face large risks. This implies that, through specific interventions, governments may help mitigate the adverse effects of digital technologies while allowing people to reap their benefits. Conversely, inadequate policies or a lack of appropriate regulations may leave people exposed to the risks of the digital transformation without reaping its full benefits.

"Wellbeing" in a digital world simply means the processes and pathways for accessing the benefits of digital participation in ways that manage risks and maximize opportunities for us all.

Wellbeing in a digital world includes the relationships between digital participation and developmental, emotional, physical, and social wellbeing. It happens in the context of a wider world. It applies to everyone. It changes all the time. Digital well-being is a holistic and balanced approach to our interactions in the digital world as citizens, communities, and an overall digital nation.

There's no doubt that the Internet and technology will continue to play an elevated role in the lives of millions of children. Digital devices bring joy and opportunities into the lives of children and young people, but also risks and challenges. The main pillars for wellbeing are the same in our digital lives, and its main cornerstone is a balanced life. Rest, active movement, social relationships, play, and routine should be well balanced in our digital lives as well. When these things are in balance, digital devices will not harm well-being. Children and their parents are broadly aligned on how digital activity affects them, but having a supportive environment with open communication appears critical for the wellbeing of children and families. Parents need to proactively find ways to engage with their kids' interests, discover appropriate content, set ground rules, and teach them to be confident online explorers.

We have an opportunity to reimagine a safer world for children online—one that prioritizes and protects their physical and mental well-being—and create a future where children and young people are prepared to benefit safely from the impact of connected technology.

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2.   (https://www.hyperisland.com/digital-strategy)
3.   https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/topic/digital-services-act
4.   Digital wellbeing by Google
5.   Together for a Better Internet: Impact Report 2020

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eSafe Conference Director,
CEO & MD Tachyon Group

ROLE OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS IN PROMOTING DIGITAL WELLBEING

Civic society engagement is evolving at a rapid phase to match with the digital transformation happening worldwide – as the physical spaces are constricting, online platforms are fast becoming the preferred means of this engagement. Developments in digital technology, and the speed at which they emerge, drive innovation and new applications that touch our lives in different and often profound ways. Civic spaces are continuously emerging online paving the way to greater activism and unconditional support to social movements offline.

While there are numerous opportunities and aspirations associated with digitalization, there is also a crucial need to understand and mitigate the challenges it presents to society, specifically the well-being of users. Blogs, petition platforms, crowd funding sites, e-voting and other online forums and tools offer new means for individuals to contribute to shaping political debate and drive 'real-world' change. The reach of civic voice has increased multifold, as has the voice become more fragmented and more individualized.

The COVID-19 crisis has underlined the importance of digital wellbeing, with emerging research showing that many users are experiencing increased difficulty maintaining control over the time they spend online. The need of the hour is for all stakeholders to build purposeful collaborations to advance the digital wellbeing of users and of young people in the space of online entertainment – gaming, gambling, and social media use.

Promoting an enabling environment for civil society to contribute to sustainable development and digital inclusion by supporting legal frameworks that protect internet rights and freedoms of all people; digital infrastructure programs and digital literacy policies and training programs for the marginalized civil society groups is becoming imperative.

Conscious efforts need to be made to improve the information environment and build well-networked, empowered communities where supportive roles for the digital entertainment industry, government, and independent organizations are outlined clearly.

States, across the world, are increasingly finding innovative ways to allow civil society to participate in decision-making processes. In this article, we will focus on the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Government initiatives - the UAE has given great importance to e-participation and leveraging modern technologies and ICTs to engage all segments of its community in developing public services and future plans and strategies. The UAE is a member country of the WeProtect Global Alliance – an entity which brings together governments, the private sector, civil society and international organizations to develop policies and solutions to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse online.

On 28 September 2020, the UAE Government launched a major public e-participation project titled 'Designing the Next 50', which engaged all segments of the society: public and private sectors and citizens and residents in designing the next 50 years of the UAE.

Wyakom, an online platform, was launched to engage members of the Abu Dhabi community in identifying and solving social challenges. The UAE Council for Digital Wellbeing develops and implements policies to ensure digital wellbeing of citizens. It also raises digital awareness of all segments of society on purposeful use of technology.

In 2021, UNICEF and du, from Emirates Integrated Telecommunications Company (EITC), signed a partnership to support national partners in increasing awareness, promoting behavioral change, and ensuring the availability of all required support services for children and parents in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and beyond.

Civic engagement trends in which adolescents and young people themselves seek to participate and look for the means and tools to do so need to be channeled through so their voices can become the very pivot of people centered solutions. This can spur innovation and promote sustainable mobility behaviors, with volunteers being powerful agents driving these efforts. The 'Youth Circle' initiative started by the UAE Federal Youth Authority provides opportunities for young people to connect, share their stories and opinions with the wider community and to take meaningful action towards the larger good of the society.

There are visible enhanced efforts in engaging civil society partners towards promoting digital wellbeing across the different population segments here in the UAE, at the core is becoming responsible and informed digital users towards improving positive online experience.

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UNICEF Report: Children in a digital world, 2017
OECD Report: Civic engagement and governance, 2016
OECD Guidelines for Civic Participation Process, 2022
UAE Government Portals – Digital Wellbeing Council; Youth Authority; Ministry of Interior; Dubai Cares

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