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## **Day 2, Thursday 15th September**

12:20-12:30pm: eSafetyWomen – Empowering Women to Take Control Online

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TERESA CORBIN: Thanks for that session. That was really, really interesting. Wide-ranging! You'll need a rest after this! But lunch is coming soon. In the meantime, I want to introduce our next speaker. So if you guys want to head off the stage, we'll bring Andree up onto the stage... Andree is our Acting eSafety Commissioner, and the eSafety office is a relatively new office – a couple of years old now. One year. Feels like longer! OK. What Andree will be speaking about today is really important because, initially, the office was very focused on the needs of children, but more recently, they have produced some more materials and done a lot more work in relation to women and domestic violence. I'm going to hand over to Andree for that. Thank you.

ANDREE WRIGHT: Thank you, Teresa. Perhaps we could start with the video...

>> This video promotes the Australian Government's eSafety for Women webpages. It shows six women aged between 18 and 60 years, receiving threatening messages on mobile devices. The messages appear in text on the screen next to the women.

>> It's always with you. Helping you. Connecting you. Making life easier. But it can also be used against you. Have you experienced abusive, threatening or persistent online behaviour that makes you feel unsafe? Have you been harassed online by someone who's accessed your personal details? Maybe you're worried about someone you know who is being attacked online or through social media. Is someone trying to control or blackmail you with intimate and embarrassing photos or video? Or has your phone been tracked by someone without your consent? When all you want is to be left alone? Then maybe your finances and communication with others are being controlled by someone you fear – even someone close to you. If you have experienced any of this, it may be time to act. The same devices that can be used to harass, abuse and threaten you can also be used to protect and empower you. Women experience abuse daily through technology, but there are things we can do to take control. Find out how at [esafety.gov.au/women](http://esafety.gov.au/women).

>> The video concludes with an end credit of the Australian Government crest, alongside the title Office of the Children's eSafety Commissioner, and the url is: [esafety.gov.au/women](http://esafety.gov.au/women).

ANDREE WRIGHT: Hello, everyone. It's great to be here today to present the work that's being done by the office, and Teresa mentioned that, while we were originally set up to be the Children's eSafety Commissioner, we do realise that what is almost a truism – that it takes a community to raise a child is true, and this is an area we felt we needed to actively move into. So the theme of ACCANect – empowering consumers to stay connected – fits perfectly with our eSafetyWomen work. Into signing eSafetyWomen, the number one aim was to help keep women connected safely online. As you saw in the opening video, eSafetyWomen is for every woman, because abuse can happen to any woman. eSafetyWomen focuses on countering online abuse and helping women take control of their online lives. Our work complements that of domestic violence agencies on the front line. And agencies such as Our Watch, who are leading the nation towards positive cultural change. Our eSafetyWomen program does three things – first, we provide tools to equip all women to protect themselves and their loved ones against all forms of online abuse. Second, we train front-line staff who work with women at risk, and they show the women who come to them, how they can protect themselves and their

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children online. Thirdly, we increase awareness and understanding of online abuse so that all women can identify it, call it, and respond to it. We know that most women who experience abuse offline will also experience abuse online. Including through their phone. Often, this abuse means that they're having their phone and their computer use – and possibly their banking – monitored and restricted by someone they fear. The abuse often involves receiving abusive and threatening messages, or being cyber-stalked. It sometimes means being threatened with the release of explicit photos or videos. Women who have experienced domestic violence are often socially isolated. Helping them to maintain safe online connections is therefore particularly critical. Women who have fled dangerous relationships have often left behind pretty well everything that was familiar and comforting to them. These women are making sacrifices to ensure that they can keep themselves – and their children – safe. Helping them stay connected online is critical for their mental health, their social and working lives, and their ability to engage as a valued member of Australian society. eSafetyWomen empowers women. It provides them with knowledge and skills to help them build a technology-safe barrier around themselves and their children. So we're focusing on the things that will immediately improve safety. We use videos and checklists to show women how to use the in-built security and safety devices on their phones and other digital gear. We show them how to use the privacy and safety features on social media sites. We also teach women about the ways technology can be misused to cyber-stalk and abuse them, and how they, in turn, can use technology to present this. By providing knowledge and skills, we help women take back their power. We also train front-line domestic violence workers who are best placed to help women who are most at risk. We moved into this space at the end of May and, in June alone, we held 26 workshops with front-line workers. We've now reached every state and every territory in Australia, and we are heavily booked – we are taking bookings from front-line workers through into 2017. So, who are these front-line workers? They're social workers. They're counsellors. They're legal workers. They're shelter workers. They're educators. They're psychologists. And they're youth workers. All of these have attended the training. Feedback shows that the workshops are providing greatly needed advice and support to the front-line worker community who, in turn, are passing it on to the women most at risk. eSafetyWomen is actively increasing every woman's ability to identify and respond to online abuse. Online abuse, as I said, can happen to any woman. But we also know that it can be hard for a woman in an abusive situation to see that it is abuse. So to help women become more familiar with what online abuse looks like, and less accepting of abusive behaviour, eSafetyWomen provides detailed case studies. The case studies show examples of online abuse that have occurred in real life. They help women identify whether they're experiencing similar online abuse, and the safe ways they can then take control. So I want to end with showing you a powerful case study based on a real-life situation involving a young mother named Alicia. So we're going to see a video which shows you part one of Alicia's story.

>> Does your ex-partner harass, threaten or track you via social media, your mobile or other devices?

That is cyber-stalking, and stalking is a crime under state and territory laws.

>> Ryan was violent and controlling. When my daughter Sophie was four, I made an e-safety plan and took out a violence order, and finally he left. But a few weeks later, he started texting me every day, abusing me, demanding full custody of Sophie. Every time my phone beeped, my heart would race. Until the court decided I had to give Ryan unsupervised access to Sophie. When Sophie was with him, he wouldn't let me talk to her. He sent me abusive texts and told me that Sophie hated me and wanted to live with him. And then he posted lies about me and my family on Facebook. He said that I hurt Sophie and that she wasn't safe with me. Some friends started avoiding me. Luckily, a few good friends and family supported me. I wanted to block Ryan from my Facebook and mobile, but I was afraid of making him angrier. Especially when he had Sophie. He seemed to always know where I was. I was scared he was somehow watching me. Sometimes, the garage door would open remotely, and a couple of times, the power was turned off at the fuse box.

>> Being cyber-stalked is very stressful and frightening, so seek support for yourself and your family. Stalking is dangerous. Never wait more than two weeks to report it. And please go to police earlier if you're worried. Ask your local police what evidence they need. Find out more at eSafety for Women.

ANDREE WRIGHT: So, if Alicia's story resonates with you, or reminds you of someone you care about, please visit eSafetyWomen to watch the second half of that video and find out how Alicia was able to take control of the situation. And that's just one of a number of video case studies and a wealth of other resources that we're offering which will help women and young girls in Australia today. Thank you very much.

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(APPLAUSE)

TERESA CORBIN: Thank you very much for that, Andree. That was really good. And I'm sure that people will pass the message on and get it out in the community for you. So, thank you. And everybody, would you like to have lunch and maybe ask Andree some questions over lunch if you want to continue the conversation...? Thanks.