PORT STEPHENS UNPLUGGED
Community Newsletter — September 2026

Welcome to the Unplugged Movement!!

Something special is happening in Port Stephens. More and more parents, educators, health professionals and community members are asking the same question: Are we giving our children too much technology, too soon?

That's why the Unplugged Movement is here: To protect childhood. To protect play. To protect connection.

Meet the people behind The Unplugged Movement

Port Stephens Unplugged is powered entirely by volunteers who live and work in our local community. Our Board brings experience across business, non-profit management, event planning, cyber security, child development and mental health. Our founding directors, Kate Preston and Barb Everson, have been joined by Rachael Regan, Dale Hourihan, Mark Preston, Matthew Andres, Nada Kochou and Smita Arora.

What is The Unplugged Movement?

The Unplugged Movement isn't about rejecting technology. It's about being intentional about when, where and how children use it - and protecting the parts of childhood that technology can crowd out. Research is increasingly highlighting the potential impacts of excessive or inappropriate technology use during childhood on mental health, cognitive development, social competence, emotional regulation, behaviour, sleep and physical health. In particular, the movement empowers parents and carers to make informed decisions about the use of technology in their homes to protect childhood, play and connection.

Our Key Messages:

Our approach is informed by research, including guidance from the **eSafety Commissioner** and other established research bodies. We also draw inspiration from movements such as the **Heads Up Alliance** and **Wait Mate**. Based on this evidence, the Unplugged Movement advocates for:

- Delay the introduction of smartphones until at least 14 years old
- Delay social media until at least 16 years old
- Keep smartphones out of schools
- Reduce unnecessary technology use in education settings, including advocating for no student-facing devices for primary-school-aged children
- Don't post your child's image online with routines, locations, school, or other identifying information

Before you post your child's photo…

Children's photos can create a permanent digital footprint before they're old enough to make that decision themselves. Images can be downloaded, redistributed or misused, and advances in AI mean ordinary photographs can now potentially be manipulated into deepfakes or sexualised images.

Before posting, ask yourself: Who can see this? What does it reveal? And does it really need to be online?
Consider removing your consent for school to take photographs and post images of your child on their social media.

What are the goals of Port Stephens Unplugged?

- Connect families through quarterly Connect & Play Family Days.
- Educate and empower parents, schools and communities through evidence-informed presentations.
- Support schools to navigate digital security, image privacy and EdTech use.
- Work with Council and local organisations to strengthen opportunities for real-world connection and play.
- Deliver digital detox opportunities.
- Produce and deliver cyber-safety programs.
- Celebrate local businesses, clubs and facilities that create opportunities for play, creativity and connection.

One of our Community Visions: Open School Gates

We want to work with local schools to strengthen community connection - including exploring ways to open school grounds and facilities to the broader community for play, connection and activity outside school hours.

What we've been doing — a strong start!

On 24 August, psychologist Emma Stilinovic from Strive Hive Psychology joined us at SPCC to talk about the impact of technology on children's mental health. Emma's evidence-informed presentation prompted some great conversations, and the feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive. Kate Preston and Dale Hourihan then shared the story behind the Unplugged Movement and how local families can get involved. Speaking both as parents and professionals, they shared their own experiences and a message of hope: change is possible when we work together.

- Kate Preston (The Unplugged Movement Chair and Clinical Psychologist) presented at the Youth Interagency Meeting on Wednesday the 26th August. The feedback was positive, with many community leaders recognising the impacts of digital technology on childhood both professionally and in their own families. One piece of feedback stood out: "The mission is huge - good luck!"
- News of the Area published recent stories on Port Stephens Unplugged and you can read them here:
    - **14th August - How a new Port Stephens movement is seeking to protect children from harmful technology exposure**
    - **1st September - Unplugged: How parents and caretakers can protect kids from technology overload**

What's coming up

SATURDAY 19 SEPTEMBER

Illuminate — Raymond Terrace | 4–8pm

The Unplugged Movement has a Stall at Illuminate! Come meet us and bring along a friend who needs to hear more! This is also a lovely evening out for the family to connect and play in real-time! We will have some games and challenges with prizes donated by local businesses who support an 'unplugged' lifestyle!

THURSDAY 15 OCTOBER

NSW Small Business Month Collaboration Event

Business Port Stephens & Port Stephens Women in Business, 6pm at Nelson Bay Golf Club. Port Stephens Unplugged is presenting to local businesspeople with an evening of fun, connection and inspiration. Tickets are $59 and include a drink on arrival, entrée, main, dessert and live entertainment.

Buy tickets here

FRIDAY 16 OCTOBER

St Philips Fair — SPCC, Salamander Bay | 3–8pm

The Unplugged Movement will have a Stall at the St Philips Fair in Salamander Bay, offering some interactive fun and the opportunity to talk about some tricky topics with our representatives.

How you can get involved — please visit the website **unplugged.org.au**.

Follow	Join	Support
Receive our newsletters and stay connected with what is happening locally.	Become a member and have a voice in the future of the movement. Members can vote at the AGM, volunteer on committees and provide feedback to the Board.	Become a Founding Sponsor or connect us with a local business that wants to support healthier childhoods, through experiences, vouchers or equipment that gets kids outdoors and engaged.

Want to become a Founding Sponsor?

We're inviting local businesses to become Founding Sponsors and help us establish Port Stephens Unplugged during our first year. Supporting Unplugged is a way for local businesses to demonstrate that they care about the wellbeing of children and young people in our community.

Our children are our future employees, customers, parents and community leaders - and the strength of Port Stephens depends on how well we support them today. If you own a business, work for a local business, or know someone who might like to support the movement, we'd love to hear from you.

Thank you to our Founding Sponsors

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CLOUD and TECH Simplifying IT. Securing Your Future.

NELSON BAY Physiotherapy and Sports Injury Centre

Magnolia.

Strive Hive psychology

You will see our Health & Allied Health Partners featured in every newsletter. These are local health and allied health practices that believe in the Unplugged Movement and support our vision for healthier childhoods.

Still.

Wavelengths Allied Health

Peppertree GP

THE STABLE PLACE

SPEECHMOVES

Echo Speech

Strive Hive psychology

BayDoctors & Skin Cancer Clinic

TAH

NELSON BAY Physiotherapy and Sports Injury Centre

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Port Stephens Unplugged

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