

Quick reference guides for responding to online safety incidents

eSafety Toolkit for Schools

Creating safer online environments



This resource includes a series of quick reference guides for responding to online safety incidents. It can be used with eSafety's [Respond 1 - Online incident assessment tool](#). For further information or support, refer to eSafety's [Respond 3 - Guide to responding to serious online safety incidents](#) and [Respond 4 - Guide to responding to the sharing of explicit material](#), or refer to education department or sector policies and procedures.

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eSafety's Quick reference guide for responding to **mild** incidents



Understand and assess

- Reassure students that they have done the right thing by reporting the incident.
- Consider the best interests of the student/s involved — this should guide a response.



Manage the response

- Manage the response internally in line with behaviour management wellbeing and online safety policies and procedures.
- Focus on providing support for all students and involve them in decision making.
- Explain the process and potential outcomes to all involved.
- Consider whether involving parents/carers would help to resolve the situation.



Resolve the conflict

- If a student/s knows strategies and can respond appropriately, only minimal teacher intervention may be needed beyond supporting students.
- Focus on restoring relationships and ensuring all students feel safe and supported.
- Address behaviours and provide education about acceptable use and respectful online behaviour.
- Encourage students to delete the inappropriate content and/or report it to the social media service.



Record and reflect

- For younger students, let parents/carers know that there has been an issue. Explain how the issue has been resolved, unless there a good reason not to involve parents/carers — for example, because it causes further harm.
- For older students, their level of maturity and autonomy should be considered, as well as whether it is appropriate to let them tell their parents/carers first.
- Record the incident, response and actions taken.



Monitor

- Monitor whether the behaviour has stopped.
- Regularly check that students feel safe and supported. Adjust plans if necessary.

eSafety's Quick reference guide for responding to moderate incidents



Understand and assess

- Reassure students that they have done the right thing by reporting the incident.
- Consider the best interests of the student/s involved — this should guide a response.



Manage the response

- Manage the response internally in line with behaviour management, wellbeing and online safety policies and procedures
- Focus on providing support for all students and involve them in decision making.
- Explain the process and potential outcomes to all involved.
- Consider whether involving parents/carers would help to resolve the situation.



Resolve the conflict

- Focus on restoring relationships and ensuring all students feel safe and supported.
- Address behaviours and provide education about acceptable use and respectful online behaviour.
- Encourage students to delete the inappropriate content and/or report it to the social media service.



Record and reflect

- Let parents/carers know that there has been an issue. Explain how the issue has been resolved, unless there a good reason not to involve parents/carers — for example, it causes further harm or hampers a police investigation.
- Debrief with staff and students, where appropriate.
- Record the incident, response and actions taken.
- Review existing policies and procedures following the incident.



Monitor

- Monitor whether the behaviour has stopped.
- Regularly check that students feel safe and supported. Adjust plans if necessary.

eSafety's Quick reference guide for responding to **serious** incidents



Understand and assess

- Reassure students that they have done the right thing by reporting the incident.
- Consider the best interests of the student/s involved — this should guide a response.
- Be aware that some cases may be unlawful and may activate state and territory reportable offences or mandatory reporting requirements. Always seek support from the school Principal/school leadership team when responding.



Collect and preserve evidence

- Gather facts, including profile/usernames and document what has happened.
- Do not view or copy explicit images — refer to eSafety's [Respond 4 - Guide to responding to the sharing of explicit material](#).
- For non-explicit material, where possible, take screenshots or record URLs.
- Explicit material might be nudes, sexual images, or photos of illegal and restricted content (especially child sexual exploitation material). Do not take screenshots of this type of material.
- Check state, territory or school policy. Only confiscate or search students' personal devices with informed consent or if permitted by policy.
- For explicit, illegal and/or restricted content, do not take screenshots but record URLs, account profiles or usernames, or other information about where the material is located.



Manage the response

- Focus on providing support for all students and involve them in decision making.
- Determine who to inform and when to involve others (e.g. parents/carers, other staff or students).
- Engage parents/carers as soon as possible so that the school and the family can work together to respond to the incident, unless there is a good reason not to involve parents/carers, for example when it causes further harm or hampers a police investigation.
- Explain the process and potential outcomes to all involved.



Remove content

- If material is circulating and causing harm, and evidence has been collected and preserved, encourage students to delete the material and/or report it to the social media service where it was posted.
- If cyberbullying content has not been removed 48 hours after a complaint was made to the social media service, [lodge a complaint](#) with eSafety, making sure that the student has given their permission.
- For cases of image-based abuse, [lodge a complaint](#) with eSafety, making sure the student has given their authorisation.



Resolve the conflict

- Focus on restoring relationships and ensuring all students feel safe and supported.
- Address behaviours and educate on acceptable use and respectful online behaviour.
- Assess whether school-wide communication is appropriate and or what type of intervention is required, such as engaging external providers or support services.
- Consider referring students to external organisations such as [Kids Helpline](#) for ongoing or one-off counselling, if required.



Record and reflect

- Record the incident, response and actions taken.
- Complete a [Respond 9 - Post-incident checklist](#).
- Review existing policies and procedures following the incident.
- Debrief with staff, students and parents/carers, where appropriate.
- Explain the process and potential outcomes to all involved.



Monitor

- Monitor whether the behaviour has stopped.
- Regularly check that students feel safe and supported. Adjust plans if necessary.

eSafety's Quick reference guide for responding to **severe** incidents



Understand and assess

- Reassure students that they have done the right thing by reporting the incident.
- Consider the best interests of the student/s involved — this should guide a response.
- Be aware of mandatory reporting obligations.



Support student safety, welfare and wellbeing

- If you are concerned about the safety, welfare and wellbeing of a student or suspect unlawful behaviour — report the matter immediately to the Principal or school leadership team.
- The Principal/school leadership team may consult with the child protection/student wellbeing officer before contacting local police or child protection agency.
- The Principal/school leadership team should contact local police and/or make a [report online for cases of online grooming](#) or inappropriate behaviour towards children online, for example:
 - adults making online contact with a child under 18 with the intention of facilitating a sexual relationship; or
 - an adult eliciting, sending or uploading sexualised material depicting someone under 18.



Collect and preserve evidence

- Gather facts, including profile/usernames and document what has happened.
- Do not view or copy explicit images — refer to eSafety's [Respond 4 - Guide to responding to the sharing of explicit material](#).
- For non-explicit material, where possible, take screenshots or record URLs.
- Check state, territory or school policies. Only confiscate or search students' personal devices with informed consent or if permitted by policy.



Manage the response

- Engage parents/carers as soon as possible so that the school and students' family can work together to respond to the incident, unless there is a good reason not to involve parents/carers, for example when it causes further harm or hampers a police investigation.
- Focus on providing support for all students and, where appropriate, explain the process and potential outcomes to all involved.
- Consider referring students to external organisations such as [Kids Helpline](#) for ongoing or one-off counselling, if required.
- Assess whether school-wide communication is appropriate.



Remove content

- If material is circulating and causing harm, and evidence has been collected and preserved, encourage students to delete the material and/or report it to the social media service where it was posted.
- If cyberbullying content has not been removed 48 hours after a complaint was made to the social media service, [lodge a complaint](#) with eSafety, making sure that the student has given their authorisation.
- For cases of image-based abuse, [lodge a complaint](#) with eSafety, making sure the student has given their authorisation.



Record and reflect

- Record the incident in your school incident management system (or via school reporting documents) and follow up according to school or sector policies and processes.
- Complete the [Respond 9 - Post-incident checklist](#).
- Review existing policies and procedures following the incident.
- Debrief with staff, students and parents/carers, where appropriate.



Monitor

- Monitor whether the behaviour has stopped.
- Regularly check that students feel safe and supported. Adjust plans if necessary.