

# Checklist to create a safer online workplace



You can use the ideas in this checklist to build a safer digital environment for your workplace. They were developed by eSafety and Safe Work Australia.

Workplace bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment and other forms of abuse, can happen in person, online or using digital technologies and devices. This behaviour is sometimes known as ‘technology-facilitated abuse’ or ‘tech-based abuse’.

Work health and safety (WHS) laws require employers to protect the health and safety of workers. This includes managing the risks of online abuse.

Online abuse can come from anyone connected with work, including colleagues, managers, customers, clients or suppliers. It can happen onsite, while working from home or from another location. It can also impact people outside work hours.

Wherever and whenever online abuse happens, it’s never acceptable and should not be considered part of doing a job.

## Set up for safety

### Manage tech safety

- Choose software, online platforms and digital tools that prioritise [safety, privacy and security](#).
- Avoid using simple email naming conventions (for example, full names) that make it easy for others to contact your workers directly.
- Consider using technologies that monitor and filter emails and other workplace communication channels, such as word and phrase filters, to keep them free from abuse. Make sure any monitoring is reasonable and proportionate, and that you consult with workers when making decisions about how to control risks.
- Consider also using filters to limit access to inappropriate websites.
- Avoid having workers use personal phone numbers or social media accounts to communicate with clients or customers.
- Don’t post worker information (including full names, videos or photos) without their informed consent.



## Understand the risks

- Understand which platforms and tools are used at work, including websites, social media, email, messaging apps, file sharing services and chat groups.
- Assess whether your existing work platforms and tools meet safety, privacy and security standards. Consider whether the settings can be changed to improve protection. Apply the same assessment to any new tech prior to use.
- Check if workers interact with clients or customers using their personal devices, or if they need to maintain an online presence as part of their job. If this needs to continue, ask them to do the same safety, privacy and security assessment and adjust their settings to appropriate levels.
- Consider if any staff are more at risk of online abuse, including bullying or sexual harassment.
- Conduct workforce surveys to better identify and understand workplace hazards.

## Set and revise policies and procedures

- Check your policies and procedures for use of platforms and tools are consistently applied and regularly reviewed and updated.
- Clearly communicate your policies and procedures to all levels of staff.
- Explain acceptable use of workplace communication platforms including social media, emails, chat channels and workplace devices such as mobile phones.
- Share a clear definition of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour concerning work and online technologies. Use examples of online abuse including bullying and sexual harassment to reinforce zero tolerance for such behaviour.
- Make it clear to customers and clients that any form of online harassment or bullying of workers will not be tolerated.
- Moderate public content on your platforms. Consider turning off the comments or sharing features if needed.
- Use platform settings to manage staff privacy and report, block, mute or remove abusive content.

## Develop clear reporting pathways

- Consult with workers to develop easy internal systems for reporting and managing complaints about online harassment, bullying and other abusive behaviours – including confidential, formal, informal or anonymous channels.
- Tailor the procedures to address abuse from customers, clients, the public, or other workers.
- Make it clear that blaming a victim for reporting will not be tolerated.
- Encourage supervisors and other staff who are trained to deal with reports of online abuse, to do it promptly and sensitively, ensuring the safety, wellbeing, and privacy of everyone involved.

# Build culture and skills

## Define boundaries

- Make clear statements against using workplace platforms, devices, emails or social media for bullying, harassment or sharing intimate content.
- Detail the consequences for misconduct, including disciplinary measures.
- Remind staff how to report incidents.
- Let them know what resources and support services are available, both inside and outside the workplace.

## Lead and develop a positive workplace culture

- Lead by example - demonstrate the values and behaviours you expect through following policies and procedures.
- Consider establishing an online safety team, including senior leadership, human resources, ICT staff and workers, to oversee online safety efforts.
- Consultation with workers about WHS issues is a must: talk with workers when making decisions about how to control risks, so you create an environment where they feel empowered to speak up against abusive, sexist or discriminatory behaviours.
- Foster diversity and make it clear that online abuse will not be tolerated towards anyone. Ensure this is reflected in human resources processes and be clear about how incidents are managed, reported and investigated.
- Offer training on diversity and inclusion that reinforces zero tolerance for all forms of harassment and violence.



## Provide training and awareness

- Make online safety education part of your induction process.
- Encourage conversations about online safety in team meetings or one-on-one.
- Display online safety information in visible areas and share it in newsletters. Ensure these resources are inclusive and are available in relevant community languages.
- Ensure senior leaders are made aware they must exercise [due diligence](#) to make sure the business meets its duties to protect workers and other persons against harm to health and safety.
- Train supervisors and health and safety representatives to take action to control risks and to handle reports appropriately.
- Discuss with staff and health and safety representatives how and when online abuse might happen, through which channels, and ways to prevent it.
- Explain how workers can [collect evidence](#) of serious online abuse by keeping records and screenshots, and noting the date, time, and URLs of incidents.
- Make sure workers know how to report any online abuse – including in the workplace, to the online services and platforms where the abuse has occurred, and to eSafety if the services and platforms don't help.
- Feedback to staff any changes that have been made because of reports received.
- Use eSafety's free [presentations for business](#) on topics such as tech-based abuse.
- Share links to the [eSafety website](#) for further information and let them know [The eSafety Guide](#) has tips on how to manage privacy settings and report issues on popular workplace platforms (such as Teams and Zoom), social media and other apps.



# Investigate and support

## Deal with abuse sensitively and promptly

Workers may fear reporting abuse, especially if the abuser is a supervisor, manager or client. They may be concerned about the possible consequences of reporting, such as the behaviour getting worse, or their job being threatened. Reassure them that their complaints will be taken seriously and managed confidentially – at least until they are comfortable about having a wider discussion, if necessary.

Here are some actions to take:

- If you suspect an issue, or someone raises concerns, make sure the person feels safe and supported:
  - provide a private place to discuss the situation confidentially
  - ask open-ended questions such as ‘You don’t seem yourself, are you OK?’
  - avoid judgmental language or pressuring them
  - listen, let them know what actions can be taken and ask them what they would like to do.
- Consider turning off or limiting interaction on workplace platforms and devices and help the worker adjust their settings while the issue is being investigated.
- It may be appropriate to offer adjustments to their working conditions while the issue is dealt with, and they recover.
- If the matter can’t be dealt with in the workplace, help the person targeted to report it to the online service or platform, to eSafety or to the police as appropriate.
- Provide them with details for counselling and support services – for example, harassment officers, external services such as [Lifeline](#), or the [counselling and support services](#) listed by eSafety.
- Consult legal or WHS representatives if necessary.
- Determine whether the abuse is a notifiable WHS incident and report it to relevant bodies if required (for example, WHS regulators or the [Australian Human Rights Commission](#)).
- Record details of incidents reported by your workers and actions taken, according to your workplace policies. Review them regularly to check if there’s a wider workplace issue developing.
- Consider publishing a statement of support for the person targeted but **always** consult them first to avoid making the situation worse.
- Monitor and check the abuse has stopped and the person who was targeted is recovering.

## Consider underlying issues

When investigating incidents:

- Encourage open communication, making it easier for workers to raise concerns.
- If online abuse is occurring, assess the causes, frequency, duration, and severity of these risks and identify affected workers.
- Think about how various hazards may interact and trigger online abuse. For example, does online abuse tend to occur during periods of high workloads?
- Review all reports of online abuse, both formal and informal, to identify any systemic issues.
- Think about whether online abuse tends to be between workers (which may indicate an issue with culture and morale) or from clients and customers (which may indicate you need to change the way interactions with them occur).
- Think about whether [domestic and family violence](#) may be impacting any of your workers. For example, is a partner, ex-partner or family member abusing a staff member or contractor through online work platforms, emails, phones or other devices?

## Stay up to date and informed

### Check Safe Work Australia's Model Codes of Practice

- [Managing psychosocial hazards at work](#)
- [Sexual and gender-based harassment](#)

## eSafety

Keep up-to-date about online safety risks by signing up for [eSafety News](#) and joining our [training sessions](#).



# Reporting online harm

Accessing support services.

## Where to report

### [eSafety](#)

#### Report online harm

In addition to referring to your workplace policies and procedures, you can suggest workers take the following steps to report serious online abuse and have harmful content removed:

1. Collect evidence – take screenshots of what has happened and which platform it occurred on.
2. Report it
  - Harmful posts, comments, messages and profiles should be reported to the online platform or service first. If they don't help, and the abuse is very serious, [report it to eSafety](#). This includes [illegal and restricted content](#) such as child sexual exploitation material.
  - Sharing or threatening to share an intimate image or video without consent of the person shown is [image-based abuse](#) – it can be reported to eSafety immediately unless the person is being blackmailed. If blackmail is involved, go to eSafety's advice on [how to deal with sexual extortion](#).
3. Stop contact – tighten [security settings](#) and prevent content from being shared further.
4. Get more support – check eSafety's tips for managing the impacts of [adult cyber abuse](#), [image-based abuse](#) or [child cyberbullying](#).

**Note:** Remember to obtain consent if you are taking any action on behalf of someone else who may be experiencing online abuse.

[esafety.gov.au/report](https://esafety.gov.au/report)   [esafety.gov.au/about-us/contact-us](https://esafety.gov.au/about-us/contact-us)

**WHS Regulators:** State and territory regulators can inspect workplaces, and advise on and enforce WHS laws.

[SafeWork NSW](#)

[SafeWork SA](#)

[NT WorkSafe](#)

[WorkSafe Victoria](#)

[WorkSafe WA](#)

[WorkSafe ACT](#)

[Workplace Health and  
Safety Queensland](#)

[WorkSafe Tasmania](#)

[Comcare](#)

**Australian Human Rights Commission:** Investigates discrimination and human rights complaints, including complaints of sexual harassment under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Commonwealth). The AHRC has the power to enforce compliance by businesses with the positive duty legal obligation.

[humanrights.gov.au](https://humanrights.gov.au)   **Call:** 1300 656 419   **Email:** [infoservice@humanrights.gov.au](mailto:infoservice@humanrights.gov.au)

**Police:** Anyone in immediate danger or at risk of harm can seek help from police. Reports can be made to the Police Assistance Line if there is no immediate danger.

**Triple Zero:** tel:000   **Police Assistance Line:** 131 444

## Support services

### 1800 RESPECT

National domestic family and sexual violence counselling information and support service, including workplace sexual harassment.

[1800respect.org.au](https://1800respect.org.au)

**Call:** 1800 737 732

**Text:** 0458 737 732

### Lifeline

24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.

[lifeline.org.au](https://lifeline.org.au)

**Call:** 13 11 14

### 13YARN

Culturally safe crisis support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

[13yarn.org.au](https://13yarn.org.au)

**Call:** 13 92 76

### MensLine Australia

Confidential counselling and support for men.

[mensline.org.au](https://mensline.org.au)

**Call:** 1300 78 99 78

### QLife

Free counselling and support to LGBTIQ+ people.

[qlife.org.au](https://qlife.org.au)

**Call:** 1800 184 527

### eSafety

Support and counselling services

[eSafety.gov.au](https://eSafety.gov.au)



**Disclaimer:** Please note, this is general information only and should not be regarded as legal advice that is tailored to your business or organisation. For further advice, consult your industry peak bodies, unions or legal professionals specialising in work, health and safety (WHS) matters.