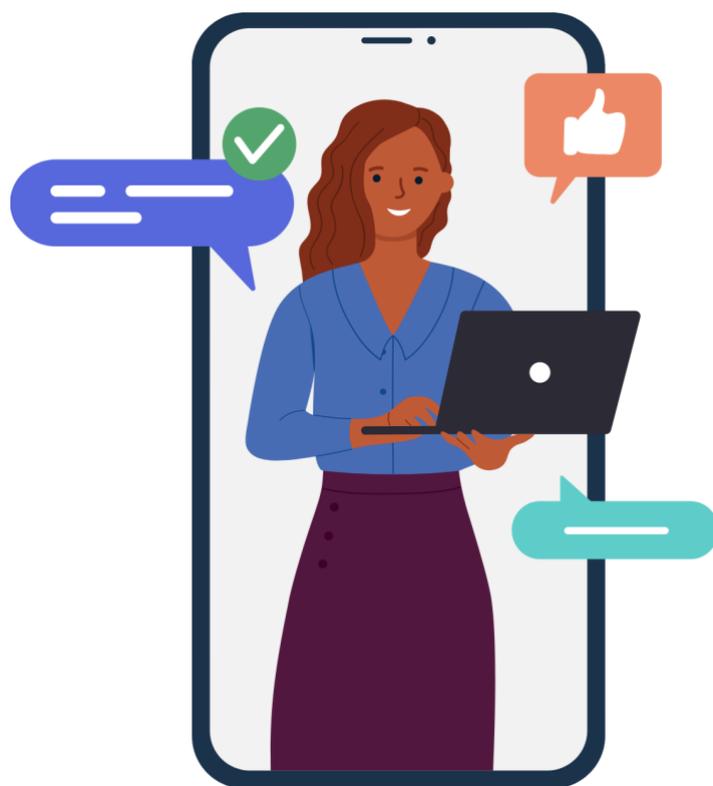




Tips for supporting students involved in an online incident

Creating safer online environments



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Why has this guide been produced?

The guide is designed to support students' rights, safety and wellbeing during an online incident; to encourage a culture of help-seeking and to remove stigma around reporting. It should be read alongside school and/or education sector policies, procedures, and student wellbeing frameworks.

This resource provides practical tips to support the safety and wellbeing of students involved in an online incident. These tips can assist in planning a comprehensive response that involves the student/s, parents/carers, school staff and support services. Support for peers, bystanders/upstanders and siblings may also need to be

Important note

Research indicates a notable overlap between students who are the target of negative online behaviour and those who engage in it. This may be a barrier to some students making a report.

Regardless of the student's role in the incident, they may feel heightened emotions such as anger, fear or shame. It's important to reassure all students involved and encourage them to report incidents, even if they have engaged in negative behaviours, participated in online conflict or abuse, or used age-restricted platforms.

1. Reassure

Remember to remain calm and non-judgemental when talking with a student about an online safety incident. Reassure them that there are steps in process to address the incident and that you will support them through it. Avoid making unrealistic promises. Recognise that for some students it might be difficult to ask for help and let them know that they have done the right thing by coming to you. The tips you have learned in student protection training about responding to student disclosures may help you in cases of online harm as well.

No matter how old your students are, if they have a harmful experience online, they should reach out for support – even if they are under 16 and it happens on an age-restricted social media platform. Depending on what has happened, there are different ways to get support from eSafety and other services. Reassure them that they won't get into trouble.

2. Stay calm and listen

It will be easier to learn the specifics of the incident if you listen and remain calm. You might like to ask what you can do to make the conversation more comfortable. Ask open-ended questions, for example: 'If you're comfortable talking with me, tell me why we are here today and start at the beginning'. Let those involved know who else they can approach for support and advice through the process. Consider informing them that you may have to tell others what has happened. For example, if someone else is at risk of harm (as per [mandatory reporting obligations](#)) or if the incident requires police involvement (see [Respond 3A – Guide to responding to image-based abuse](#), including sexual extortion and [Respond 3B – Guide to responding to image-based abuse using AI deepfakes](#)). Drawing on [trauma-informed approaches](#) may help to provide support during the disclosure process.

3. Ask students how they'd like to resolve the problem

Where appropriate, ask the student/s what steps they would like to see implemented to resolve the problem. While there are procedures to follow when an incident occurs, students have a right to participate in decisions about their life. Being involved in the solution may give them a sense of empowerment in what may feel like a powerless situation.

4. Communicate with students and parents/carers

If appropriate, work closely with the parents/carers of involved students and their support network (for example, siblings and friends). It is important to maintain clear communications with everyone involved. Lack of clarity about actions and time frames can lead to confusion, anxiety, upset and anger. Set a schedule to review actions and make expectations clear to avoid the chance of miscommunication or misinformation.

Part of the process will involve reporting the incident as required by school and/or education sector policies and procedures. If required, and it is appropriate to do so, explain to students why these steps are being taken and what will happen next. Let students know you will keep them informed, where possible and appropriate. Schedule regular follow-ups with all students involved to support their wellbeing and ensure that negative behaviours have stopped.

5. Involve student wellbeing support staff

Consider involving other support people through the process, such as a trusted teacher, school counsellor, chaplain or psychologist. You might like to provide the student/s an opportunity to nominate a support person.

Engage with student wellbeing support staff (counsellors/nurses/pastoral care workers/chaplains) to select resources for students to develop help seeking behaviours and build their resilience. Behaviour and learning support for the student/s who instigated the

online incident should also be considered. Student wellbeing support staff should be able to assist in selecting appropriate social and emotional learning, respectful relationships and conflict management approaches.

Depending on the type of incident and the wellbeing of the students involved, it may be helpful to engage external specialist [support services](#).

6. Support for bystanders/peers/siblings

Staff should be aware of the impact of online incidents on students involved, including bystanders and/or upstanders, and provide support for these students. Students may wish to discuss their experiences with friends, siblings or in the classroom. This is a normal response to a difficult situation. Staff can help to keep the tone of conversations positive, and the focus on help seeking.

Normalising conversations around online safety will help to remove stigma around reporting and support students to develop help-seeking behaviours.

Teach online safety education using a whole-of-school approach to equip all students in the school with knowledge and skills for respectful online behaviour.

School staff can reinforce, model, and promote acceptable use. If the issues continue it is important that the repeated behaviour is addressed proactively with the students involved and across the school.

7. Counselling and support services

The [eSafety website](#) includes a list of counselling and support services that can help anyone involved in an online safety incident. This list can be filtered by audience, the type of support required, issue and state/territory. Your education department or sector may also offer tailored support services.

Additional resources

- [headspace — support following large scale incidents](#)
- [National Office for Child Safety Complaint Handling Guide](#)
- [Blue Knot Foundation — fact sheets for talking about trauma](#)
- [Bullying no way — Responding to bullying](#)