Online safety incidents — student support

This resource provides advice on how to support students if you suspect or are aware of them experiencing online abuse. It includes information on what to look out for and the actions that should be taken to support students.

Australian Government

eSafety Commissioner

eSafety.gov.au

The wellbeing of students can be affected by the need to balance the demands of online and face-to-face learning with other aspects of their lives including relationships, family, work, health, social or financial matters. On top of this, students can also face the risk of online abuse which may have an impact on their personal lives as well as their learning capacity.

Impacts of online abuse

People can feel:

- confused, anxious and powerless
- angry, depressed and distrustful
- isolated from family and friends
- embarrassed, ashamed or guilty
- like they are watching their back all the time and are unable to have any peace.

Students experiencing online abuse may find it harder to:

- remember things
- get organised
- manage their educational responsibilities
- switch off
- stay connected.

The most important thing to remember when dealing with online abuse is that the abuse is not the fault of the person being targeted. Students need support and guidance to manage their experiences of online abuse.

How to support students

For detailed information about how to deal with online abuse, including advice on how to support students facing this experience, please read **eSafety's Guide for students – dealing with online abuse.**

These are steps you can take straight away:

- Listen and be receptive to the student's issues and concerns.
- Call emergency services on Triple Zero (000) if there is an immediate risk to the student from someone else or through self-harm or suicide. You may need to refer to your institution's safety and wellbeing contacts to address safety concerns regarding a student's mental health, so make sure you always have the list handy.
- Advise the student not to respond or retaliate. Instead, suggest they document the incident by collecting evidence. eSafety has advice on **collecting evidence** which you can share with students.
- Advise the student that they can report abusive content to the service or platform on which it has been posted. **The eSafety Guide** provides information on how to report content to various services and platforms.
- Also refer the student to eSafety's **report online harm** page which provides advice for anyone who experiences serious online abuse.
- For more detailed information, you can share **eSafety's Guide for students – dealing with online abuse.**

These are further steps you can take to support them:

- It is important to follow up on incidents with your students. Check in to see how they are doing and review whether the issue is being resolved.
- Consider what support or assistance you can offer within your capacity. This may include:
  - giving extensions for assignments
  - making alternative assessment arrangements
  - following your internal policies by escalating the issue to appropriate staff, if you have the student's permission
  - referring the student to their institution's counselling or wellbeing services.
- Consider the severity of the issue, including whether it involves other students/staff or is within the context of a relationship. You may need to inform others within your institution. Make sure you have the student's permission before taking things further.

Note: Keep a record of your interaction with the student, including the concerns raised and how you responded. This will help maintain an accurate account of the issue and your interaction.