Creating a safer online environment

This resource provides general guidance for tertiary leaders about how to establish and maintain a safe online environment within institutions. It can help to frame your institution's approach or assist in identifying actions to create a safer online environment.

Australian Government

eSafety Commissioner

eSafety.gov.au

Tertiary institutions can work toward safer online environments by reviewing, assessing and adopting the following strategies.

Policies and procedures

Tertiary institutions can:

- Adopt a whole-of-institution approach to online safety.

- Include both physical and online safety in your institution's mission and values.

- Specify online safety in relevant policies and procedures, teaching and learning materials and environments, communications materials and through social media.

- Put clear procedures in place so that if an online safety incident is reported, students and staff know what to do and where to access help. These procedures must be clearly communicated to students and staff.

- When writing policies and procedures, consider circumstances that could place students and/or staff at risk of harm if their image or information is shared prior to publishing content online – for example, where there are legal proceedings or a court order relating to sexual assault or domestic and family violence.

- Consider including harmful online behaviours in your institution's relevant health, wellbeing or safety policy (if not currently included).

- Take a victim-centred approach in responding to online incidents and supporting those affected.

- Consider establishing an online safety team that is responsible for, and champions, online safety. This team might include senior leadership, wellbeing and student services staff, academic staff, as well as student leaders.

- Communicate what is considered acceptable use of your institution's name, logo and brand. This includes clubs and societies, or other groups, that may use your name, logo and brand on social media pages or accounts.

- Conduct risk assessments to promote safety, privacy and security prior to using any platform or technology. (**eSafety's Risk assessment for new technologies and online platforms resource** can help in assessing risks and benefits for tertiary workplaces).

- Where possible, use software, online products and collaboration tools with the highest safety, privacy and security standards and settings.

- Consider filtering to help monitor and limit what students access online, noting that no filter is completely effective and should not replace online safety education.

Supporting student safety online

These steps will help you take a holistic and comprehensive approach to supporting community safety and wellbeing online:

- Encourage a culture of help-seeking that supports students and staff to feel safe and comfortable reporting online incidents.

- Encourage respectful behaviour and have a strong 'no bullying' attitude.

- Set, model and communicate expectations and make clear the behaviour that is/is not acceptable for students and staff when engaging online or using digital technologies.

- Support staff and educate students about positive and safe online experiences.

- Ensure staff and students are aware of how to report **online abuse**.

- Provide opportunities for meaningful student participation and engagement.

- Consider using preventative, harm minimisation and incident management strategies to support everyone involved in online incidents.

- Strengthen the effectiveness of incident responses and procedures to restore relationships by having partnerships with local police, external counselling and support services, including your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

- Inform students and staff how to report unauthorised communication and block unknown email addresses.

- Explain that it is unacceptable for students and staff to use the institution's (or any) online platforms, email accounts or social media for image-based abuse, online abuse, sexual extortion, harassment or other types of inappropriate behaviour.