



Principles for dealing with online incidents



This resource provides high-level principles to help frame policies and procedures for dealing with online incidents in a tertiary education environment. It also offers guidance on appropriate actions and helps clarify responsibilities. It should be read alongside the [Guide for dealing with online abuse of tertiary staff](#).

Tertiary institutions can play an important role in promoting student and staff safety and wellbeing, including when they engage online. It is important to have comprehensive policies and procedures in place, providing swift and appropriate responses to online safety incidents.

Spotting risks early makes it easier to prevent them escalating to harmful levels. Additionally, knowing what support to provide when harm does occur minimises the impacts.

Using the following principles can help with online safety planning and responses.



Principles

1. Ensure online safety is part of the mission and values of the institution and is incorporated in the institution's policy framework.
2. Ensure staff and students are aware that using online platforms or services, email accounts or social media to harm someone mentally or physically is unacceptable and, in many cases, illegal. This includes **threats of violence** and other types of inappropriate behaviour, such as **coercive control** and **sexual extortion**.
3. Ensure staff and students are familiar with their legal and ethical responsibilities for online safety and **how to report incidents to the relevant platforms, services and eSafety**.
4. Recognise that online safety incidents are factors which can affect a student's ability to learn, and staff's ability to do their work effectively.
5. Recognise the important role tertiary institutions can play in raising awareness of eSafety, its resources and reporting services to their communities.
6. Ensure people targeted by online abuse are supported and provided with strategies that assist them to resolve the issue and maintain their wellbeing. Supports include:
 - o removing content on platforms managed by the institution
 - o assisting with referrals to external reporting or support agencies
 - o facilitating access to support services
 - o raising awareness of relevant policies, procedures and codes of conduct.

7. Regardless of when, where or what type of incident has occurred, the safety and wellbeing of the person targeted needs to be at the centre of the response. It is important to ensure that they are comfortable with any proposed actions.

8. Where circumstances surrounding an incident are not clear, staff should seek advice on next steps from their institution's leadership team or specialist service area (such as student services, student wellbeing or IT teams). If an online incident is reported, it is important to investigate further to get a full understanding of the situation – a seemingly small, once-off incident may be part of a larger, ongoing issue.

