

Online incident assessment tool

eSafety Toolkit for Schools

Creating safer online environments



This online incident assessment tool provides school staff with a way to assess and determine appropriate responses to a range of online safety incidents. It offers a straightforward starting point and can help staff to plan their approach quickly and effectively and is supported by eSafety's [Guide for responding to serious online safety incidents](#).

Schools should note that the online incident assessment tool is a supporting resource and does not replace decisions based on the experiences of schools, or state/territory or sector policies and processes.

This resource can be used to build teacher capacity as part of teacher professional learning. eSafety's [Responding to online safety incidents presentation](#) offers additional support.

We would like to thank [Kids Helpline](#) for their advice and contributions to this resource.

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Important note

This resource is intended as a guide only. It should be adapted for every online safety incident and individual involved. Staff members who are unsure of what to do should seek advice from their school principal, school leadership, wellbeing or online safety staff or a senior/supervising colleague.

Every incident response should be consistent with, and informed by, relevant legislation as well as education department or sector policies and procedures.

Using this resource

All online safety incidents need to be taken seriously and responded to appropriately, in line with the school's duty of care to students and staff. However, online safety incidents can vary in their severity and impact on the target. The following tool is designed to help schools assess the seriousness (mild, moderate, serious, or severe) of an incident and develop a suitable response.

Schools should also base any assessment on their knowledge of the student and the incident.

Remember to consider:

- A student's unique background and circumstances, any vulnerabilities and the relationship between the target and the instigator. The relationships within, and between, these factors may be complex, for example targets and bystanders can also be instigators.
- That students may initially mask or downplay the impact of an incident. Schools should try to understand the circumstances surrounding an incident before assessing its severity.
- Consider the tone, impact and intent of the language, audio or visual content and any sensitivities. This includes where it has been shared and the number of times it has been shared or viewed.

Some incidents may involve unlawful behaviour, child abuse or adult perpetrators. Staff should not investigate these types of incidents independently. In the first instance, the incident and the most appropriate course of action should be discussed with the principal/school leadership team, accounting for students' rights and best interests. The Principal/school leadership team may consult with the child protection/student wellbeing officer in the school and engage local police or a relevant child protection agency.

Instructions

The following online incident assessment tool categorises and rates the severity of a range of online safety issues. It can help staff to determine an overall incident rating, accounting for the frequency and impact of the incident, and types of behaviour displayed. School staff can use this assessment to underpin the school's response.

In using the tool, staff should choose one option from each category that best reflects the incident. If the incident fits two options, pick the option with the highest rating.

Each option has been allocated a rating. Once an option has been chosen from each category, and the rating confirmed, these ratings can be added together to form a combined overall rating. This overall rating has a corresponding recommended course of action. Remember that while the recommended actions support schools to respond to an incident but more targeted actions may be required due to the specific circumstances of the incident.

The overall ratings, and related responses, are:

- **Severe** = Overall rating 8-9
- **Serious** = Overall rating 6-7
- **Moderate** = Overall rating 4-5
- **Mild** = Overall rating 1-3

Important note

- Call Triple 000 if a student is at risk of immediate harm.
- If any individual category has been scored a 3, rate the incident as Serious at a minimum.
- An initial assessment may change (e.g. Moderate to Serious) as new information is received.
- School staff may decide to assess an incident as Serious or Severe for reasons other than those stated.
- When considering the broader circumstances surrounding the issue, remember that student vulnerability may be influenced by factors such as mental health, disability, or lack of social or familial support.



Assessment tool

This tool is intended only as a guide.

It should be adapted to each online safety incident and the individuals involved. Responses may need to be escalated or de-escalated depending on the situation or new information coming to hand.

Behaviour	Description	Rating
Teasing, name calling, put downs	General name calling or swearing. Does not include 'hate speech' or name calling based on discrimination (see hate speech, below).	1
Meme posts	Memes (pictures/videos with accompanying text) that are designed to make fun of someone, usually as a joke.	1
Social exclusion	Deleting students from group chats, excluding students from private groups, photoshopping an individual from images, excluding players from online games.	1
Impersonation and meme accounts	Creating fake social media profiles for someone, using fake accounts to cause friendship or relationship issues, misrepresenting someone online, creating accounts dedicated to sharing hurtful memes.	2
Fighting accounts/ sharing violent images or videos	Accounts that include videos of students fighting or engaging in physical bullying, sharing violent images and videos.	2
Sharing inappropriate sexualised messages	Rating or polling someone's attractiveness, sending explicit text messages.	2
Unwanted or uncomfortable contact	Student contacted by an unknown person, for an unknown reason. The contact tries to persuade the student to participate in risky online behaviours such as scams, gambling or dares/challenges. There are no clear sexual connotations.	2
Hate speech, discrimination and sexual harassment	Targeting someone because of their personal identity/beliefs (e.g. race, ethnicity, sex/ gender, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability) or persistently making sexual advances.	3
Incitement to suicide or self-harm	Encouraging a student to self-harm or consider suicide (e.g. the world would be better without you in it) Note: if you become aware that a student has been posting on social media about suicide or self-harm, refer to your school's duty of care policy and consider seeking advice from local police or support services. Orygen's #chatsafe guidelines provide information about how to respond.	3
Threats of physical harm	Threatening to physically hurt someone — such as written threats, posting fight videos with threats of retaliation or posting photos with images to suggest harm will be inflicted.	3
Non-consensual sharing of intimate images	Sharing intimate (naked/sexual/private) images or videos without the consent of the person in the image. Includes images/videos of people without attire of religious or cultural significance usually worn in public by the person in the image.	3
Online grooming by a sexual predator	A deliberately established emotional connection with a child by someone online in order to lower their inhibitions and make it easier to have sexual contact with them. It may include adults posing as children in chat rooms or on social media sites to 'befriend' a child in order to meet with them in person. Grooming can include obtaining intimate images of young people.	3

Frequency	Rating
<p>Important note</p> <p>The frequency of an incident may not be evident on first appearance. A student may mask that an incident has occurred repeatedly, or over an extended time. Responses may need to be escalated or de-escalated depending on the situation or new information coming to hand.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First time and instigator is likely to stop. • Is a contained incident between two people. 	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has happened occasionally. • Instigator continues after they have been asked to stop. • Has occurred on several platforms/mediums. • Has occurred as part of a friendship group situation. 	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has happened many times before. • Instigator unlikely to stop. • Is part of a wider situation involving a number of students/parents/others. 	3

Impact	Rating
<p>Important note</p> <p>The way that an incident impacts a student may not be static or obvious. Students may initially mask or downplay the impact of an incident. They may feel ok one day but need targeted support the next. Responses may need to be escalated or de-escalated depending on the situation or new information coming to hand.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target appears to be coping well. • Target has a supportive peer group and/or family. • Target can manage with minimal support. 	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target appears to be coping well with intervention/short term support from adults. • Target requires additional school-based wellbeing support (counsellors/nurses/pastoral care workers/chaplains). 	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target has identified vulnerabilities. • Target needs ongoing support from school and/or specialist support. 	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target is at immediate or significant risk of harm (call Triple 000). • Target has previously self-harmed or expressed suicidal ideation. • Target is experiencing significant physical, psychological or emotional impact. • There is significant impact on other students and the wider school community 	3

Based on: [Netsafe - Bullying Prevention and Response Guide](#)

Responding

In responding to incidents, refer to eSafety's [Quick reference guides for online safety incidents](#), and all relevant legislation and sector/school policies and procedures.

eSafety's [Guide to responding to serious online safety incidents](#) and [Guide to dealing with explicit images in school](#) can also help schools identify a suitable response.

Examples of online incident assessments

Important note

The following examples are intended as a guide only. The individual circumstances of online incidents will vary and incidents that appear similar may differ in their impact and seriousness.

Example 1

A student (the instigator) makes a meme about another student (the target) and posts it in a private social media group chat. The targeted student, who has been mocked in the group chat before, told the instigator to delete the meme and reported the incident to a teacher.

Category	Incident type	Rating
Behaviour	Meme post.	1
Frequency	Has happened occasionally as part of a friendship group situation.	2
Impact	Target has indicated that they are coping well with the situation.	0
Total	Mild — the incident can likely be managed by the student. Minimal teacher intervention may be needed to offer support, if the student has already have strategies and can respond appropriately.	3

Example 2

A student (the target) receives a text message from another student (the instigator) that shows a video of someone being punched at a nearby school. The instigator sent the message as a joke, but as the target has been physically bullied in the past, it raises his anxiety and makes him feel threatened and unsafe.

Category	Incident type	Rating
Behaviour	Sharing violent videos.	2
Frequency	First time. Instigator is likely to stop. It is contained between two people.	1
Impact	Significant physical, psychological or emotional impact on target.	3
Total	Serious — the impact is rated as 3, therefore the incident is rated serious at a minimum.	6

Example 3

A student (the target) has received sexually suggestive messages from someone she chats with online. The contact asks her to share nude images of herself which makes her feel uncomfortable. She thought she was chatting with someone she knows at a nearby school, so she confronts them but is met with denial. She wonders if it might be a stranger impersonating another student, but she isn't certain. She feels unsafe and scared.

Category	Incident type	Rating
Behaviour	Online grooming or sharing inappropriate sexualised messages.	3
Frequency	Has happened occasionally and/or has occurred via multiple platforms/mediums.	2
Impact	Target has identified vulnerabilities and the incident is having a significant emotional impact on her.	3
Total	Severe — the behaviour could be classified as sharing inappropriate sexualised messages and/or grooming. In this case, the category with the highest rating should be chosen.	8