The DIY Guide for Developing User Agreements

REVIEWING OR CREATING YOUR STUDENT USER AGREEMENTS

Many of the major benefits of user agreements can be derived from the activity that occurs before they are implemented.

This document steps you through a process that will engage school leadership, staff, students, and the parent/whānau community. It will help inform those groups about online safety and digital citizenship, and ultimately create an agreement that is a best fit for each school's unique context.

The process below details steps schools including kura can follow when customising the standard templates provided in the Kit or creating their own bespoke agreements.

Today's User Agreements

Student user agreements have been a cornerstone of online safety in schools including kura since the early 2000's. Early agreements reflected approaches the prohibited and protective approaches of the time to online safety. Current programmes focus more on preparation and participation and it is important for user agreements to reflect this change as well as encouraging responsibility and accountability.

Netsafe provides standard agreements in the kit. As schools including kura are unique there is no "one size fits all" agreement, we highly recommend that templates are adapted to suit the specific needs of their school and community.

The benefits of customisation

Reviewing, adapting or creating student user agreements has three main benefits.

1. Specific school and kura values can be embedded in the final document. It is an opportunity to relate school values and desired behaviours to what we do in online and offline spaces and set clear expectations.
2. Staff, students, and community members who are involved in co-constructing the agreement are more likely to be invested in achieving its outcomes.

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3. The development process creates opportunities for discussion and learning about online safety and digital citizenship concepts. This increases the value and effectiveness of the user agreement and provides a platform for further online safety and digital citizenship initiatives.

STEP BY STEP: CREATING EACH PART

User agreements are based on a simple five-part structure. For each part of the agreement we have provided:
1. A simple description of **what** the purpose of the section is.
2. An explanation of **why** it's worth investing the time in reviewing or developing that section.
3. Information about **who** would ideally be involved; and
4. A recommendation for a process for **how** you might go about customising each section.

Part 1: Linking the overview to existing school values

What

The first section of the agreement introduces the objective of the agreement. It outlines that the school is committed to online safety and digital citizenship, and that students' commitment is integral.

Why

The standard user agreement uses terms like "digital citizenship" and "safe, responsible, and ethical use". This section can be customised using the school's own values, vision or motto. The alignment of values in both online and offline spaces provides benefits in terms of educating, encouraging, and reinforcing those values.

Who

School leadership should be involved in customising this section. It sets the tone for the processes used throughout a review or creation of the user agreement.

How

The ideal time to engage school leadership in this conversation would be during a wider review and planning of online safety and digital citizenship initiatives. The introduction of the *Netsafe Schools* programme provides a timely opportunity to begin this process.

As school leadership create the School Online Safety Policy, existing school values can be linked into the introduction section of both the Policy and Student User Agreements.

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Part 2: Making school's commitments more specific

What

This is the part of the user agreement where the school shows commitment to creating a safe and positive environment. This section balances the agreement as in that it identifies that the school also has (and accepts) responsibilities.

This section lists the specific commitment the school makes to creating a safe online environment. By default, it includes a commitment to providing online safety education, as well as monitoring and managing ICT systems, and managing incidents. The standard agreement also records the school's commitment to protecting students' rights online.

Why

The content listed in this section are the required components of the *Netsafe Schools* programme. Clear and specific statements around the school's obligations and commitment will help ensure the school is aware of and is able to meet these obligations. It is important to add or remove particular detail to more accurately reflect your school's commitment and capability.

There is one line in this section related to the school upholding student rights online. Schools might wish to strengthen and expand on this – especially for older students. A truly skilled digital citizen is able to manage themselves independently and balance competing rights and responsibilities, and schools can endorse that here.

Who

Ideally, those people responsible for ensuring the delivery of these commitments should be the ones to agree and define them. It is beneficial to engage all staff, but it can be limited to key personnel if that is not practical.

How

We recommend offering a short workshop where staff have the opportunity to discuss, understand, and participate in creating the components of an effective online safety programme.

A workshop could be structured around the standard people, processes, and systems change management model:

- What do we commit ourselves to doing? (People)
- What processes are established (or will be established) to keep students safe? (Process)
- What technology and systems do we use to manage safety? (Systems)

Further workshops for staff are provided in the Netsafe Kit. These focus on a range of themes, including the Harmful Digital Communications Act, what digital citizenship is, and challenges young people may experience online. These may help staff to identify key content for this section of the agreement.

Part 3: Co-creating responsibilities for greater commitment

What

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This section of the agreement sets out the expectations for technology use that students must follow. It is the section of the agreement that may need to be enforced in the event that students misuse technology.

Why

A co-constructed approach to developing or reviewing agreements helps develop shared understandings on the appropriate use of digital technology and expected behaviours in online environments.

Students and community members who have an opportunity to co-construct the agreements are more invested in achieving its outcomes. They have a better understanding of how the agreement translates into rights and responsibilities. This approach reduces the strength of the common defence used after serious breaches, specifically, "I didn't realise that is what you meant".

The co-creation process creates an important platform for developing a culture of online safety and is hugely valuable if enforcement is required.

Who

The co-creation process can involve both students and the parent/whānau community.

The benefits of co-creation are felt most keenly in the student population. This is especially so for older students who have a greater expectation of responsibility. They're actively contributing to something that affects them directly.

Schools including kura, whose parent/whānau community support their online safety approaches see benefit from consistent messaging to students and reduced resistance when expectations need to be enforced.

How

The starting point for this process could be a parent/whānau presentation using a joint presentation and engagement approach. Under this model, the staff present their commitments and the students present theirs as drafts – followed by an opportunity for the parent community to provide feedback. Alternatively, gathering feedback from a survey for parents/whānau in response to student and staff commitments, may provide 'in-time' information.

Information for engaging students so that they can prepare their draft is outlined in the Engagement section of the Netsafe Kit. The process of gathering student input is most effective at a class level and it can then be combined through student leadership groups with staff assistance as required.

Part Four: Defining processes for managing incidents and supporting students

What

Students need to know where they can seek help and the pathways available for them if they face challenges online, including mechanisms to report anonymously.

Why

This section defines:

- how issues are reported and handled internally

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- who are the identified contact people within the school that they can talk to
- the procedures and processes in place to support students to resolve online issues

Different schools including kura have differing processes and levels of capability in terms of online incident management and student support. Schools who can provide more specific guidance and detail in this section of the agreement make it easier for students to engage with support processes.

Who

Staff in charge of incident management and pastoral care should update the details and processes in this section.

How

There are no specific recommendations for the process of updating this section. It can be incorporated into the processes for updating Part 2 and 3.

Part Five: To sign, or not to sign. That is the question.

What

Student and parent/whānau signatures can be sought as an expression of acceptance of the terms of the agreement. Agreements have traditionally included a space for students and parents to sign to indicate that they have read and understood the agreement.

Why

Signing a document creates a clear record that students were presented with the agreement and had an opportunity to read and understand it. Genuine understanding is the critical desired outcome and a signature doesn't prove that in and of itself.

The main defence students use for breaches of an agreement is that they didn't relate the behaviour / actions they took with the expectations specified in the user agreement. Having a signed agreement doesn't strengthen the school's position against these claims. Evidence that the school took the time to ensure students understood the content of the agreement strengthens the school's position.

However, this doesn't present a case for not seeking signatures. The signing process can benefit the online safety programme and we have a suggestion for how to ensure that below.

Who

School leadership should decide if student signatures will be sought.

How

The main failing of the signing process is in the way it is typically applied. Agreements are presented to students as part of an enrolment or arrival pack, and usually don't know enough at that stage to make informed decisions.

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Schools can develop this understanding and awareness by spending time co-constructing agreements with students, allowing students to engage in the process and enabling them to make an informed decision around adding their signature.

Schools concerned about having no agreement in place while agreements are being developed can use previous versions or the Netsafe standard agreement as placeholders.

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