Responding to online digital incidents involving students

A quick reference guide to help schools support affected students.

For advice at any point, call Netsafe 0508 638 723

1. UNDERSTAND

GATHER THE FACTS

Determine nature of behaviour and begin to record incident

Severity:
- What has happened (e.g. bullying, sexual content etc) and how (e.g. messages, videos)?
- What is the nature of the content? **See notes below.**
- Where is this happening (e.g. online/offline; social media)? Is this part of a wider situation?
- Who else is involved or impacted? Target/s; perpetrator/s; bystander/s?
- What actions, if any, have been taken so far?
- Does it involve sending, creating and/or accessing information?

Impact:
- How do those involved feel? Do they have support?
- Who else already knows or has been informed? (e.g. parents, friends, teachers, Police)
- How and when will we involve whānau/family? Consider consent and confidentiality of students.

Frequency:
- When did it start?
- How often has it happened? Is it ongoing?
- Is there a likelihood that content is/will be replicated or shared by others?

Refer to the BullyingFreeNZ assessment matrix

DETERMINE NATURE OF CONTENT

- Is it potentially unlawful conduct? E.g.
  - Threatening, harassing, intimidating behaviour, intimate photos or video, aiding or abetting suicide, online grooming, unauthorised access to an online account. Seek advice from Police.

- Is it objectionable material? E.g.
  - Objectionable material is material which is illegal to view, possess or share. For example, images of child exploitation, acts of torture, or sexual violence. Contact NZ Police if the incident involves objectionable material.

- Is it intended to harm or offend?
- Is there a privacy breach? (See school's own policy and/or Privacy in Schools guide)
- Is surrender of the device an appropriate course of action? (see p. 9 of Guidelines for the Surrender and Retention of Property and Searches)
- Refer to: Criminal offences and civil law in 'Digital Technology: Safe and responsible use in schools'

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Minimise student / staff distress or harm
- Maintain student / staff safety
- Focus on the behaviour - not the technology
- Follow school processes regarding student consent and confidentiality
- The school's usual disciplinary or behaviour management practices apply at all times
- Schools can have responsibility and authority to act even if the incident has taken place outside of school

2. ASSESS

MUST DO

- ☐ **Engage** nominated staff and family/whānau as appropriate.
- ☐ **Clarify** roles and processes – where appropriate, assign two staff members in interview roles
- ☐ **Provide** pastoral care for all those involved
- ☐ **Record** all information, decisions, and actions
- ☐ **Follow** school processes regarding student consent and confidentiality
- ☐ **Assure** the student/s that you will work with them to address the issue and explain what the next steps will be
- ☐ **Suggest** others may need to be involved (e.g. Police, parents/whānau, principal/ lead teacher, Netsafe, Board of Trustees).
- ☐ **Gather evidence:** Only that which is compliant with legislation. URLs, emails and some screenshots (Not objectionable content).
- ☐ **Report or block** online content if this would help the immediate situation – consider if evidence will be needed to on-share with e.g. Police, senior staff, parents/whānau
- ☐ **Refer to:** 'Responding to digital incidents' in Digital Technology: Safe and responsible use guidelines.

SEEK ADVICE

- ☐ **Netsafe** – if support or advice is needed at any stage or if help is needed to report content.
- ☐ **POLICE** – if any aspects of the incident includes unlawful conduct
- ☐ **Regional Ministry of Education office**
- ☐ **Traumatic Incident Response Team (0800 TI TEAM (0800 848 326 anytime)** for advice and support if incident could affect operations of the school/s; affect a large number of students/staff; potentially draw media attention.

DON'T

- **Don't** access personal accounts, or search devices of those involved in the incident. Teachers/authorised staff are not permitted. Refer to Guidelines for the Surrender and Retention of Property and Searches)
- **Don't** store evidence of objectionable material. Ask for URLs/account names that can then be passed on to the Police or Netsafe.

3. RESOLVE

ENGAGE

Who now needs to be informed or involved?
- All Senior Staff
- BOT chairperson
- Guidance Counsellor/ Pastoral Dean
- Parents/whānau
- Third party agencies – e.g: Netsafe; NZSTA; YouthAid; Youth Line; N4L for tech support, Police

COMMUNICATE

- Refer to Communicating with Parents, Students and Media (Traumatic Incident Guidelines)
- Determine how and when to release information to:
  - Staff
  - Students
  - Family/whānau
  - Media (if media attention likely or occurring)
- ☐ **Schedule** meetings to inform staff, students, family/whānau/ media if necessary:
  - Relay only necessary facts, procedures, and key messages appropriate to each group
  - Provide opportunity for students/staff to express concerns/needs in appropriate settings
  - Outline services/key people that they can go to, e.g. Guidance Counselor (note: High Schools' counselors can support Primary/Intermediate schools if needed)
- ☐ **Prepare** responses/scripts for frontline (e.g. office staff) and other staff should the school need to inform the wider school community/ media. Communications should:
  - Acknowledge an incident has occurred
  - Assure all that the safety and wellbeing of those involved are priorities
  - Inform that the school is dealing with the situation
  - Indicate that support and advice is being sought

Example of an initial response:

"At this stage we understand there has been an incident and the school is dealing with this. We are working to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all, and have contacted appropriate support agencies who are assisting us as we move forward".

FINALISE

- ☐ Make sure the incident details and all follow-up actions have been recorded as appropriate.

4. LOOKING AHEAD

TAKE A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO PREVENTING SIMILAR INCIDENTS

The lead team could follow up by:
- checking on students' and whānau wellbeing
- reviewing how the incident was managed
- reviewing how school actively promotes online safety, citizenship and wellbeing.

Contact Netsafe for advice at any time. We can:
- Advise on first steps including how to gather evidence
- Help to take down content (if content breaches sites' Terms and Conditions)
- Provide information about the Harmful Digital Communications Act and advise in relation to the incident
- Support schools in building proactive approaches to online safety and digital citizenship

Please note that this document is intended as a guide and the prioritisation of these actions will depend on your professional judgement and the nature and severity of the incident.

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Useful resources for further references

From Netsafe:

- Harmful Digital Communications advice
- How to gather electronic evidence
- Investigating incidents
- Staying Safe Online: A Quick Reference Guide: a guide to what you need to know to protect your privacy, report incidents, and block unwanted contact.

From the Ministry of Education/Netsafe: 'Digital Technology: Safe and responsible use in schools':

- An overview of prevention and response
- Responding to digital incidents; this includes:
  - The legislation and rules
  - Roles and responsibilities
  - Ownership and digital technology
  - Using online services in teaching and learning
  - Searching for digital information
  - Handling digital technology
  - Removing problematic digital information
  - Preparing for and dealing with emergencies and traumatic incidents

Dealing with communications

- Quick media guide— BullyingFreeNZ
- Traumatic incidents - managing student and staff wellbeing (MoE, pg 13-17)
- A School's Guide to Dealing with the Media — Shaping Education (CPPA/MoE)
- Managing Negative Social Media — Shaping Education (CPPA/MoE)

Social media - how to report content

Social media sites provide information about appropriate use of their site in their Terms and Conditions. They also provide ways to report harmful content/comments. Note: You can report content/comments on many social media sites without being required to have your own account on the platform/site.

How to report on a particular site/platform

If you are unfamiliar with a particular platform/site - use a search engine and insert key words into an online search, E.g: "how to report comments/content on ...."

- Follow the steps outlined in the instructions
- Contact Netsafe 0508 638 7233 if you have any questions or problems with reporting content

Quick Links for reporting to Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Youtube:

- Instagram Help Centre
- Facebook Help Centre
- Twitter Help Centre
- Google+ Help - Report Abuse on Google+
- Youtube Reporting and Enforcement Centre

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