QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE*

School Digital Incidents

*Full scenario guide available at **education.netsafe.org.nz**

Digital incidents can require a school response, even when they happened outside of school.

Schools have responsibility and authority to act to minimise harm and maintain safety where an issue affects students or the school environment.

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QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

For schools to respond safely, support affected people and reduce further harm.

1. TRIAGE

MAKE PEOPLE SAFE
Check for immediate concerns:

1. Is anyone in immediate danger or at risk of harm?
2. Is harmful content being shared or circulated now?
3. Does a student need immediate wellbeing support?
4. Is a teacher being targeted?

If there is immediate danger:

- ☐ Call 111 and report to Police.
- ☐ Protect those at risk. Supervise or separate people as needed.
- ☐ Alert school leadership immediately.
- ☐ Contact pastoral care. Continue support until the right person takes over.

If harmful content is circulating:

- ☐ Alert school leadership.
- ☐ Use school behaviour processes to reduce circulation.
- ☐ Notify the IT lead if school systems or nearby sharing are involved.

If live online content is increasing immediate harm, report it to the platform. Do not interact with or amplify it.

If someone needs support:

- ☐ Provide a safe space and reassurance.
- ☐ Do not leave a distressed student alone.
- ☐ If a teacher is targeted, alert leadership and use the School Digital Incidents: Scenario Guide's Targeted Teacher Response Pathway.

Thank anyone reporting a concern. Check whether they also need support.

2. GATHER THE FACTS

LISTEN, REASSURE AND FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED

Take disclosures seriously. Explain what happens next and do not promise secrecy where someone may be at risk.

Understand what happened:

- What happened and what content is involved?
- Where did it happen? Is it part of a wider situation?
- Who is involved or affected?
- What action has already been taken?

Understand the impact:

- How are those involved feeling?
- Is anyone distressed or unsafe?
- Who already knows? What support is needed?

Understand the frequency:

- When did it start?
- Is it ongoing, repeated or likely to spread?

Record evidence lawfully:
Record URLs, usernames, platforms, dates, times, report numbers and text-based messages where no objectionable content is visible.

DO NOT:

- Search a student's device or account, or request passwords.
- Ask to see, copy or screenshot potentially objectionable material.
- Require a group of students to hand over devices.

Staff may require a student to reveal a specific digital item only in limited circumstances. The student keeps control of the device. For more details, see the School Digital Incidents: Scenario Guide's Appendix 2: How to record digital evidence.

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3. TAKE ACTION

TAKE ACTION TO REDUCE HARM

Follow the relevant pathway in the full School Digital Incidents: Scenario Guide:

- Intimate image, video or deepfake.
- Digital self-harm or suicide risk.
- Video of an alleged assault.
- Messaging used to organise a fight.
- Other digital incident, including cyberbullying.
- Targeted Teacher Response Pathway.

Support impacted students and staff.

Seek appropriate help:

Police - Call 111: Immediate danger requiring emergency intervention.

Police - Call 105: Non-emergency reporting where indicated by the relevant scenario, including potentially unlawful conduct or serious threats.

Netsafe - Call 0508 638 723: Free, confidential advice and support at any stage, including evidence collection, harmful content reporting, removal options and next steps.

Contain harmful content:

- Do not reply, react, share or amplify.
- Record lawful evidence details.
- Report online content to the platform.
- Notify school IT lead if school-managed systems are involved.
- Consider blocking after appropriate reporting and lawful evidence collection.

Never view, copy or share potentially objectionable material.

4. HANDOVER & FOLLOW-UP

MAKE SURE THE RESPONSE CONTINUES

Teacher responding first:

- Confirm the affected student(s) has appropriate support.
- Complete a warm handover to the senior leader:
  - Share key facts, actions taken and outstanding concerns.
  - Confirm the affected student knows who will support them next.
  - Flag any need for: same-day whānau contact or wellbeing support, behaviour or safeguarding follow-up, Police, Netsafe, IT or privacy follow-up, or wider school communications.

Senior leader - Before the day ends:

- Confirm appropriate supports are in place.
- Plan necessary whānau contact through school processes.
- Assign ownership of urgent actions and referrals.
- Manage surrendered devices lawfully.
- Consider additional agencies or Ministry of Education Traumatic Incident Team support where appropriate.

Senior leader - Following days:

- Finalise incident records and outstanding actions.
- Follow up on student, staff and whānau wellbeing.
- Review the response and strengthen prevention.
- Use Netsafe resources to build school digital capability and support students to confidently - and more safely - participate online.

Please note that this document is intended as a guide to support your professional judgement.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Focus on the behaviour not the technology - Online behaviour doesn't happen in isolation, and isn't necessarily a one-off event.
- Follow school processes and policies: leadership notification, student consent, child protection, privacy, and confidentiality.
- The school's usual disciplinary or behaviour management practices apply at all times.

NETSAFE CAN:

- advise on first steps including how to gather evidence.
- offer guidance on how to have harmful content removed.
- provide information about the Harmful Digital Communications Act and advise in relation to the incident.
- offer referrals to additional support services.
- support schools in building proactive approaches to online safety and digital citizenship.

To ask a question or for free and confidential advice and support at any point, contact Netsafe.

Call 0508 638 723 or

Report online netsafe.org.nz/report

USEFUL REFERENCE RESOURCES

- School Digital Incidents - Scenario Guide (Netsafe)
- How to record digital evidence (Netsafe)
- Traumatic incidents - managing student and staff wellbeing, pg13-17 (MoE)
- School Incidents: What parents can do (Netsafe Digital Guardian Guide)

Visit education.netsafe.org.nz for free school support and resources