

CHILD SAFETY, REPORTABLE CONDUCT AND DUTY OF CARE IN REMOTE ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Advice for schools

REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

During online school learning, if school staff become aware of an incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable belief that a child has been abused or is at risk of abuse, they must follow all normal procedures for responding to and reporting child abuse, including the [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#).

More information about responding to incidents, disclosures and suspicions of child abuse can be found on the [PROTECT website](#) or at [Child Protection - Reporting Obligations](#).

Mandatory reporting

Mandatory reporters' obligations under law remain the same. Mandatory reporters must make a report to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Child Protection as soon as practicable if, in the course of practising their profession or carrying out their duties, they form reasonable belief that a child or young person is in need of protection, as a result of physical injury or sexual abuse, and the child's parents are unable or unwilling to protect the child from that abuse.

Reportable Conduct Scheme

Principals' obligations under the Reportable Conduct Scheme remain the same. Please see the [PROTECT website](#) or [School Policy Advisory Guide - Reportable Conduct Scheme](#).

CHILD SAFETY IN ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Child Safe Standards

All Victorian schools are required to comply with the Child Safe Standards.

To comply with the Child Safe Standards in an online learning environment, schools should:

- Consider any risks of child abuse that might arise in an online school learning environment, including grooming, and implement strategies to reduce or remove risks where possible
- Remind all staff that they are required to comply with the school's Child Safety Code of Conduct when engaging in their work online
- Remind all staff of the school's procedures for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse
- Ensure that students have access to online safety education, such as:
 - [Bully Stoppers Online Toolkit](#) – supports principals, teachers, students and parents in working together to address cyber safety and cyberbullying.

- [Classroom resources](#) – links to online classroom activities, videos, interactive learning modules, advice sheets and other useful resources to promote the safe and responsible use of digital technology.
- [The eSafety Commissioner](#) – provides a range of tips and resources to help school leaders create safe online learning environments. The Office have also released an [online safety kit](#), which includes evidence-based suggestions and trustworthy links to support parents and carers to stay informed and keep their children safe online.

The [PROTECT website](#) provides guidance and information about complying with the Child Safe Standards.

DUTY OF CARE IN ONLINE ENVIRONMENTS

Where a school is not providing face to face supervision, including where students are learning remotely rather than on school grounds, the school is not responsible for students' general safety at home or elsewhere.

Principals and school staff must still:

1. identify risks which are **reasonably foreseeable** for students who are learning at home
2. take **reasonable steps** which are in the school's control to prevent reasonably foreseeable harm to students.

For example, if a school knows that a student learning remotely is affected by a disability or mental health condition, particularly a condition that might be exacerbated by being alone at home, or has other vulnerabilities (for example family violence or substance abuse), the school must take **reasonable steps** to address those risks, which may include offering additional supports and ensuring students can access their learning outside the home, where appropriate.

Supporting student wellbeing and safety when teaching in a remote online learning environment

Under the Child Safe Standards and as part of their duty of care, teachers should identify and mitigate known or foreseeable risks to student wellbeing and safety.

Reasonable steps to support student safety and wellbeing might include (but are not limited to):

- notifying parents about students moving to remote online learning
- school uses [Department-approved technology](#) to teach remote online learning
- school staff continue to comply with their existing obligations to behave appropriately and professionally online. For example, only using work email addresses to contact students, not revealing personal information like a home address, having appropriate working and learning spaces, professional dress and presentation, contacting students only during school hours, and complying with the acceptable use of technology agreements
- school staff respond to inappropriate student behaviour online (for example, inappropriate language or behaviour in a videolink) in the same way they would if the behaviour occurred on school grounds
- school staff consider any students with disabilities or behaviours of concern that might be the underlying cause of any online behaviour
- school staff follow the school's procedures for responding to/reporting suspected child abuse

- school staff act within [DET's Using Social Media Policy](#)
- school staff develop and update Student Safety Plans and Individual Learning Plan where appropriate
- school staff provide students with advice/details of school staff they can contact if they have any concerns or issues, including about inappropriate online behaviour (by both other students and school staff)
- reminding parents about how young people are impacted by long periods alone and the responsible and safe use of online platforms and the internet
- school staff provide students with details of mental health and wellbeing support available for students to access remotely, including emergency numbers and non-emergency counselling services.

Notifying parents about students moving to remote online learning

Schools do not need parents' permission for students to begin remote online learning. However, before remote online learning commences, schools should notify parents about how schools will engage with students in remote online learning (for example, via videolink, email or phone). Schools should also remind parents of their expectations of student behaviour when engaging in remote online learning.

Schools should ask parents to contact a nominated member of staff if they have any concerns.

Here is advice schools could send to parents to notify them about how the school will be engaging with students during remote online learning.

Dear parents

From <insert date>, our school will be moving to remote online learning. Our school will use the following programs and technology to teach students: [insert technology school will use, for example videolink, email, phone and any specific technology or programs that the school will use].

Our school expects students to continue to abide by the school's policies about student behaviour when learning in an online setting. We will continue to follow the school's student engagement policy [insert details] when responding to inappropriate student behaviour online.

Students must continue to follow the Acceptable Use of Technology Agreements provided or signed at the start of 2020.

Students should contact [insert contact name and number] if they experience inappropriate behaviour online.

We will keep you informed about school matters via email. Please let us know if you would prefer to be kept informed by a different channel.

Please contact [insert contact name and number] if you have any questions or concerns about the move to remote online learning.

[sign off]

Health and wellbeing staff contacting students online or via phone

Where possible, if school or DET health and wellbeing staff need to contact students as part of their work, (for example mental health support) they should get a parent's permission before contacting a student directly, unless the student is an adult or mature minor.

Staff should continue to follow the school's Child Safety Code of Conduct and maintain appropriate boundaries, including only using work phones/email addresses to contact students, maintaining appropriate notes and records, contacting students during school hours and providing community emergency numbers (such as Kids Help Line) to students and families for out of hours support.