Friday, 18 March 2022

Dear Principals and School Leaders

Support available from the eSafety Commissioner for managing critical online safety incidents

As the eSafety Commissioner, my Office (eSafety) was created to offer Australians a safety net when things go wrong online.

I trust you know about eSafety and the range of free advice, resources and tangible support that we can offer your school. If you would like to know more about us, please see our website, esafety.gov.au.

Our role and what we can do

eSafety can help when children are being cyberbullied, or when harmful content about them is not removed after they have reported it to a platform. We can also assist to remove intimate images of young people (known as image-based abuse) that have been shared on platforms without their consent.

We also work with support agencies like Kids Helpline and headspace to make sure there is a coordinated approach in helping schools and young people and law enforcement where necessary.

In 2021, eSafety received 1079 reports about children being cyberbullied in Australia.

Managing critical online safety incidents

I am sure you are aware of how an online safety incident can escalate quickly on social media platforms amongst parents, carers, and students, and within local communities. Limiting the escalation is often outside your control and managing this can be challenging.

To support school leaders, we have produced a Toolkit for Schools that helps schools create safer online environments. These evidenced-based resources support a national approach in how to prevent and respond to online safety issues.

eSafety also provides specific resources for school leaders on how to manage critical incidents that have an online element.
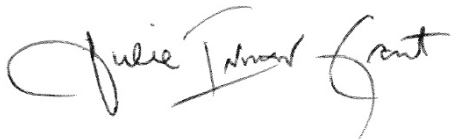
These resources include:

- tips for supporting students involved in an online incident
- tips for parents and carers after an online safety incident
- a guide to responding to the sharing of explicit material
- what to do about online abuse that targets staff, and
- advice on dealing with the media.

A key factor in preventing and responding to online abuse is making sure young people, their teachers and families understand how to report issues to the platform, to eSafety or to the police and how to get more support to deal with critical online incidents.

Technology and society today, fuelled by social media, means that critical incidents, wherever or however they occur, will always have online implications.

eSafety is here to support your school community. For further advice, please visit our website at esafety.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Julie Inman Grant

eSafety Commissioner