

Introduction

A focus on students who are working from home.

This set of guidelines has been developed in the interests of protecting students and teachers whilst students are learning from home. It is important to note: this is not a policy change and is guide only. It will provide a critical lens to layer over aligned with a school's current practices.

Classroom teachers, are in a position to detect when there are problems. It is critical teachers are aware of the indicators of harm as they move into a new working environment with students and families. Teacher's connections with, and relationship to, students is pivotal to their ongoing wellbeing over the coming months.

You are entering a student's home 'virtually', be mindful but continue to use your observation skills.

Teachers need to be highly respectful and non-judgemental of different family values. When students are engaged in school programs remotely, teachers need to continue to use their observational skills so students who may already be known to be at risk, or become at risk of harm are identified as quickly as possible. Some students may need to be the focus of additional staff observation, (as far as is reasonably possible when being monitored remotely) as they may be at more risk.

Factors that increase risk include:

- Family and peer isolation.
- Previous child protection concerns related to the home environment and parent's capacity to provide care.
- Significant financial duress.

How can teachers determine if a student is vulnerable or at increased risk in a remote setting?

- Recent signs of suicidal ideation or self-harm,
- Recent displays of poor behaviour,
- Gender identity issues,
- They have recently engaged in risk taking behaviour involving drugs and/or alcohol and visible evidence of drug paraphernalia.

Previously known and/or newly observed parent or carer issues and concerns that are particularly relevant:

- Domestic family violence (eg a student harming siblings or parents),
- Carer substance misuse or not well managed mental health concerns.

Life circumstances and individual characteristics may also put some students more at risk such as:

- Unreasonable expectations of parents and/or attempts to discipline.
- Parents experiencing problems in relating to, or managing the student.
- Recent or unresolved grief or loss.

What behaviours should teachers be aware of that may indicate a student needs additional support or may be at risk?

- Young people not wanting to be at home and indicating family conflict.
- Lack of engagement in learning activities, anxiety, worry and concern.
- Secrecy about home, distraction and undue focus on online activity.
- Awkward or particularly negative reactions to a family member.

It is important to note a single indicator may not imply abuse or neglect and needs to be considered in the context of the risk factors, previously provided, as well as other indicators.

Apart from these indicators teachers may witness other family activity distracting the student or their peers, and also pose a risk.

Schools will have already developed protocols to promote behavioural expectations and managing non-compliance. When using live video you need to be familiar with the technology to allow remote control of student cameras and microphones. *Teachers should encourage students to blur their background.*

What else can I do to stay connected to students, to monitor their wellbeing and assess risk?

Consider, asking students to use emoji smiley 😊 /sad faces 😞 or thumbs up/ down 👍 (feelings thermometer), or through polling or sticky notes.

If a student responds with sad faces or thumbs down it may be a sign they are having a 'bad' day. If this behaviour continues do not delay. Follow your school protocols and/or discuss with your supervisor so someone initiates contact with the student (text message, email, SMS) on the same, or at the latest, the following day.

Disclosure can be the most conclusive indicator to tell if a student is at risk.

Disclosures can be verbal or non-verbal, partial or complete. Students may share concerns about a parent that are grossly 'moderated' or disguised.

What can I do if concerned but unable to contact a student, who may have indicated they need support?

Follow your current school protocols for referrals and/or access to the Learning Support Team and/or a referral to the school counselling service.

If the Learning Support Team and/or counsellor believe the student and their family require additional support, the LST can reach out to the Student Care Coordination Team. This team will assist in identifying additional service providers, provide advice and consult with your Learning Support Team. Contact the local School Services team to access this team.

What about students who are not visible when working from home?

Not every home has access to resources that will afford teachers a line of sight of their students. If families are without IT resources teachers will have established a routine for delivering and receiving school work. If work is not returned within this timeframe teachers should:

- Call the student's home, a minimum of twice a week for a check-in.
- Change the attendance records from an F to an A – mark.

On the third consecutive day of unexplained 'absence' the school must contact the Child Wellbeing Unit (CWU) on 9269 9400 for advice.

Parents are encouraged to contact the school to explain any 'absences' caused by sickness, or any work not returned on schedule (allowing for postal or other delays as appropriate).

If a student has not returned work on schedule, the school must make reasonable efforts to contact the student or their parent through other means (telephone call, SMS, email) as frequently as possible and after no more than two days.

Teachers need to continue to use the Mandatory Reporter Guide.

The Mandatory Reporter Guide decision tree outcome may not indicate Educational Neglect, habitual absence, but if your concern relates to the 'third consecutive day of unexplained absence', the school should respond by contacting the Child Wellbeing Unit to report their concerns regarding the wellbeing of the student. Outside these hours teachers should send an eReport to the appropriate agency recommended by the MRG decision.

What are the special child protection and privacy rules teachers need to be aware of when providing learning from home?

Teachers are able to use live video conference with students with cameras enabled, however live recordings are disabled and not permitted. This is for privacy protection of the teacher and student and other household members who may also be within the home at the time of the live video lesson. Once the online session is completed the teacher (host) should wait for all students to exit the meeting so that students do not continue chatting without the teacher present.

Are chat sessions (video or audio) with students permitted in the virtual teaching environment?

Only whole class or group sessions are allowed. One-on-one chat sessions should not occur due to child protection concerns. However, in the rare event that this may need to occur, it is best practice to ensure that there is a parent/carer present and another teacher/SLSO.

Exceptions - situations that need one-on-one contact: *Contact made with the school counselling service. Specific lessons that already occur as one-on-one and where parent consent has been provided.*

If a student requests contact with a staff member other than their teacher e.g. AP, HT Wellbeing, YA and/or DP, you should discuss with school executive (follow school practice) as the request may relate to a potential disclosure.

Are parents allowed into the lesson or chat room?

Parents are asked not to be present during lessons.

Exceptions - situations that need a parent present in the lesson:

Students who rely on a parent to provide assistance (young students, students with a disability/learning need). Your school will have identified processes to support parents assist their child's learning.

How is the privacy of students and teachers protected?

MS teams and Zoom both have the ability to customise backgrounds e.g. load a static picture or blur the background.

Note: All staff should make themselves familiar with the document

Guidelines to Support Schools using Live Video with Students:

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/learning-from-home/delivery-of-learning#Using1>

We understand these are unique and extraordinary times for teachers, students and parents.

Some families are experiencing extreme hardship and stress which will result in more cases for our unit. We must continue to ensure every student is known, valued and cared for and remain agile, as things continue to evolve with COVID-19.