

Dear Principals

By now, I am sure you are aware of reports about a deeply distressing and harmful video circulating on social media this week. I wanted to let you know that eSafety communicated with your respective education jurisdictions as soon as we were aware of the incident with constructive advice.

We also made immediate contact about the reports with the major social media companies and continue to work closely with them to get the video removed expeditiously and to prevent further uploads and sharing.

Yesterday, the National Suicide Prevention Adviser to the Prime Minister, Christine Morgan and I released a [joint media statement](#) regarding this issue, urging all Australians to avoid viewing or sharing this video. Christine noted ‘content which includes explicit descriptions, images or footage of suicide, especially where methods are shown, have been linked to increases in suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts and suicide deaths.’

While we understand that children can be enterprising and that word of the video may have gone viral in some classrooms and playgrounds, we also want to balance this phenomena with concerns around arousing curiosity to students who may not be aware of such a distressing online incident. This is particularly important with content that relates to suicide and self-harm.

#### **Reporting harmful and disturbing online content**

We urge any members of your community who encounter harmful and disturbing content online, to report it immediately to the social media platform they’ve seen it on first, and then to eSafety at [www.esafety.gov.au/report/illegal-harmful-content](http://www.esafety.gov.au/report/illegal-harmful-content).

#### **Providing support for your school communities**

I am encouraged by the reports we are receiving of how everyone is pulling together to support students. Together, we need to actively look out for students who are more vulnerable and at-risk.

Young people may feel scared, embarrassed, or confused about having seen inappropriate content, so it is important to communicate in an open and supportive manner. They may also fear that adults may not be able to help them or fear reprisals like ‘device denial’ if they do share harmful content they have been exposed to online. In addition to the support services that your school already offers to students, you can also make use of specialist services including [Kids Helpline](#), [headspace](#) and [Beyond Blue](#).

#### **Advice for supporting young people who have been exposed to harmful content**

Young people can respond differently to highly distressing events. Some will seek immediate assistance from their parents, carers or teachers, while others may be less inclined to do so. It is important for young people to know that there is no ‘right’ way to respond to upsetting or disturbing online events.

Young people also need to know that they are not alone, and help is available from trusted adults, friends and professional support services.

Let parents and carers know they can help their children through this experience by providing a safe space where they can talk about their feelings. It is also important for parents and carers to encourage positive connections with friends and extended family through other activities and interests.

**Tips to give parents to help limit young people's exposure to harmful content online:**

- Engage in your child's online activities – ask what apps, sites and games they're using and make sure they're age-appropriate
- Use parental controls on devices to help limit what your child is exposed to
- Help them report and block upsetting content they see on social media sites or apps
- Let them know they can come to you about anything upsetting they see online.

**Prevention and resilience**

We know that the delivery of effective, evidence-based online safety education is one practical way to protect Australian children online.

My previous [open letter](#) at the start of COVID provided a range of resources that we have developed to directly support educators, students, families and communities. I really encourage you to again explore the advice and resources on our national online safety hub, [esafety.gov.au](https://esafety.gov.au).

The state and territory education departments and authorities are working collaboratively with eSafety on these issues and we thank them for their ongoing efforts to minimise online harms. We also acknowledge and thank you for supporting our children, young people and families each and every day.

**Julie Inman Grant**

**eSafety Commissioner**

**10 September 2020**