

Anti-bullying and harmful behaviours in schools interim guidelines

Department of Education and Training

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Read this document with the [Student Wellbeing and Positive Behaviour Policy](#).

1. Introduction

The Department of Education and Training (the department) is committed to creating a safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environment for every student. Our priority is to ensure that all students feel welcome, accepted and continuously engaged in learning.

1.1. National Framework for Addressing Bullying in Australian Schools

In October 2025, the Australian Government released the [National Framework for Addressing Bullying in Australian Schools](#) (National Framework) to establish shared national expectations and actions to strengthen the prevention and management of bullying and other harmful behaviours in schools. The Northern Territory (NT) is committed to the implementation of the framework and recommendations of the [Anti-Bullying Rapid Review](#).

This commitment aligns with the department's [Strategic Plan 2025-2028](#) to improve student wellbeing, as well as the department's [Student wellbeing and positive behaviour policy](#) and [Curriculum, assessment, reporting and certification policy](#) which support schools to create positive, safe and inclusive learning environments.

All schools must implement explicit and dedicated action to build positive and respectful school community cultures, to ensure bullying and other harmful behaviours are not accepted, appropriate and timely action is taken and students' right to education and a safe learning environment is upheld.

This involves implementing and adhering to all the interconnected elements of the National Framework in a way that is appropriate for the unique local school context.

1.1.1. Continuous improvement

In line with the planned 2027 review of the National Framework, the Anti-bullying and harmful behaviours in schools' interim guidelines (the interim guidelines) have been issued. The department encourages and welcomes feedback on these guidelines and resources and implementation of the National Framework in NT Government schools. Please direct any feedback to your manager or school principal for submission to swipolicy.doe@education.nt.gov.au.

1.2. Bullying spectrum

The interim guidelines have been drafted to assist schools in meeting obligations to implement the National Framework and support school staff, students and parents dealing with bullying and harmful behaviours.

The spectrum of bullying and harmful behaviours includes all forms of bullying, cyberbullying and other online harms, antecedent and other harmful behaviours. This includes verbal, social, physical, overt, covert, direct and indirect behaviours.

Schools are expected to address all forms of bullying and harmful behaviours which present a reasonable risk of resulting in physical or psychological harm.

Understanding bullying within this continuum of harmful behaviours embeds a shared understanding and clear expectations that all harmful behaviours warrant appropriate and reasonable action. Focusing foremost on whether harm was caused prioritises the individual experience and embeds a bias towards remedial action, regardless of intent or subjective understanding of bullying. This ensures emphasis remains on maintaining a safe learning environment for all young people.

2. School anti-bullying framework

2.1. Incorporating the National Framework into whole school approaches

All NT government schools are required to have an active, whole-school approach to student wellbeing and positive behaviour that promotes respectful relationships, and clearly communicates behavioural expectations to support safe, inclusive and engaging learning environments for all students.

Whole-school approaches must explicitly reflect the principles in the National Framework to ensure bullying and other harmful behaviours are not accepted, and that appropriate and timely action is taken to uphold students' rights to education and a safe learning environment.

2.1.1. Consultation

When incorporating the National Framework into whole-school approaches, schools should involve the whole school community, including students, parents, school staff and the wider school community, to create a positive and safe learning environment. This includes:

- developing and implementing school-based anti-bullying policies and processes in partnership with students, parents and carers, and school staff, reflecting their local school context
- ensuring the school community has access to information and opportunities to support and contribute to anti-bullying actions
- school leadership driving and embedding anti-bullying and behavioural expectations throughout school operations and culture
- considering and addressing the unique needs of the local school context, including the unique and intersecting needs of diverse student groups and school staff including Aboriginal people, those who identify as LGBTIQ+, people with disability, and other groups experiencing additional risk factors such as women and girls.

2.1.2. School policy and processes

All schools must have a visible and transparent anti-bullying policy and process in place and are accountable for timely and appropriate actions. This includes:

- Anti-bullying policies and processes must be publicly available and accessible and clearly specify processes on how to report a concern or incident; how schools will manage and communicate their actions; what supports are available; and what escalation steps can be taken.
- All schools must make a reasonable effort to initiate a response to any observed or reported harmful behaviour, including bullying, within 2 school days of becoming aware of the behaviour.
- School processes for responding to bullying and harmful behaviour should include strategies for prevention, early intervention and investigation of all reported concerns and incidents that present a reasonable risk of resulting in physical or psychological harm.
- Initial response involves early safety and support planning and action to prevent further harm and initial communication actions, recognising further time may be required to fully address the issue.
- Schools must communicate what actions have been taken, and the reasons for those actions, to those involved or impacted as appropriate. In instances of bullying, schools should communicate to the greatest extent possible while maintaining privacy responsibilities.
- Schools must keep records outlining steps taken against the school's anti-bullying and harmful behaviours policy and procedures.

- In collaboration with the department and the Australian Government, schools must undertake a review of their anti-bullying policies and processes in 2027, and routinely thereafter, to ensure they remain fit for purpose and are having the intended impact.

Schools may choose to incorporate this school anti-bullying policy and procedure [template](#) into the whole school approach, with changes to match their school context. Schools requiring further assistance should contact [Student Wellbeing and Inclusion Programs and Services](#) (SWIPS).

2.1.3. Preventing and responding to bullying and harmful behaviour

Schools approaches to preventing and responding to bullying and harmful behaviours must be appropriate and proportionate. Schools are required to implement an evidence-based continuum of prevention, early proactive intervention and response actions. This includes:

- prioritising primary prevention and proactive early intervention action to stop bullying and other harmful behaviours from occurring and escalating
- ensuring response actions are trauma-informed, relationship-focused, justifiable and tailored to the unique circumstances involved, and have regard to the students:
 - age and developmental stage
 - disability, including mental health, and adverse childhood experiences or trauma
 - physical health and wellbeing of the student
 - relevant cultural or religious considerations
 - home environment, including out of home care, homelessness, or domestic violence
- ensuring all those involved in, or affected by, an incident are supported, including wellbeing supports for students and staff
- supporting students to understand the cause and impact of their behaviour with a view to ending the cycle of bullying and other harmful behaviours
- providing clear and fair escalation pathways where interventions have not effectively resolved a concern raised or an incident reported.

The prevention element of the National Framework is strengthened through the implementation of Respectful Relationships Education (RRE), which supports schools to proactively teach and reinforce respectful relationships, inclusion, empathy and positive behaviours across the school community. Refer to the RRE guidelines for additional guidance [here](#).

To assist schools in developing appropriate and proportionate response actions, the school anti-bullying policy and procedure [template](#) includes a suitable matrix that schools can adapt to their local context. The use of the template is not mandatory, and schools may choose to adopt another suitable response continuum.

2.2. Responses to bullying and harmful behaviour

Within 2 school days of becoming aware of the behaviour, schools must make reasonable efforts to initiate a response to any observed or reported harmful behaviour which presents a reasonable risk of resulting in physical or psychological harm, recognising that it may take further time to fully address the issue. Initial responses should include:

- commencing initial safety and support planning; taking action to prevent further harm; and initial communication action, recognising that further time may be required to fully address the issues, and that there may be other child protection reporting timelines to be considered

- commencing an unbiased investigation, regardless of the level of substantiated evidence. The investigation undertaken should be appropriate to the nature of the complaint and the age and developmental stage of those involved
- providing a dedicated school contact person for all involved, including parents as appropriate
- providing access to supports for all involved, including mental health and wellbeing supports
- implementing appropriate and proportional response actions
- communicating actions, and reasons for the actions, to all involved, to the greatest extent possible within the limitations of privacy responsibilities
- clear escalation pathways for managing severe incidents and for raising concerns about the school's actions. This includes complaint pathways to a relevant person in the school, or independent of the school if a student or parent is not satisfied with the action taken.

Schools can refer to the procedure outlined in the school anti-bullying policy and procedure [template](#).

2.3. Implementing

2.3.1. Professional support and development

Schools must ensure school staff, including principals, educators and non-teaching staff are empowered and equipped to effectively prevent and address bullying and other harmful behaviours and to support a positive and safe learning and working environment. This includes:

- providing trauma-informed professional development on bullying and other harmful behaviours, risk and protective factors, and appropriate prevention and response action
- ensuring school staff are given the time needed to undertake professional development and contribute to bullying and other harmful behaviour prevention and response activities
- ensuring school staff understand the school's policies and processes to follow and have access to resources and guidance to help them be accountable and take appropriate action
- providing support for staff impacted by or responding to bullying and other harmful behaviours.

Schools can refer to the [professional learning resources](#) on the SWIPS eLearn pages to identify suitable available training and refer to the [resources and available programs for Respectful Relationships Education \(RRE\)](#) on eLearn.

2.3.2. Reporting and recording

Schools must keep appropriate records outlining steps taken against the school's anti-bullying policy and procedures and make mandatory reports in line with legislative requirements as explained in the department policy as described below.

2.3.2.1. Recording incidents

Schools should record all reported concerns or known incidents of bullying and other harmful behaviours in the school's behaviour management system. This includes details about the people involved, the type of bullying or harmful behaviour, the views and any evidence presented, actions and communication undertaken by the school, including timeframes.

The record should outline the steps taken in line with the school's anti-bullying policy and procedures, and support the school's ability to identify risks, intervene early and proactively, understand the effectiveness of approaches, and make informed adjustments of policies and practices where needed.

2.3.2.2. Mandatory reporting

When bullying and other harmful behaviours involve serious threats, violence or harm, schools may have a duty to make a [mandatory report](#) to the Department of Children and Families or NT Police. For instance, image-based abuse and the creation and sharing of deepfakes is a serious criminal offence under NT and Commonwealth law.

Schools that need assistance in determining if a mandatory report regarding child harm should be made can call the Department of Children and Families Child Protection Hotline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on 1800 700 250, or refer to the NT Government [CARE Services](#) page.

Principals receiving reports of alleged unlawful or criminal behaviour must refer this information directly to NT Police on 131 444 and in the case of an emergency 000.

2.3.2.3. Reporting harm to the department

All incidents of bullying and harmful behaviour which result in physical and mental harm must be recorded on the department's online [Work Health and Safety \(WHS\) Incident report form](#). Schools need to refer to the [Recording and reporting student injuries guidelines and procedures](#) and response matrix provided in the school anti-bullying policy and procedure [template](#) to understand the threshold for reporting.

Notifiable injuries such as those that result in dangerous incidents, serious injury or death, must be reported to NT WorkSafe as soon as practicable by calling 1800 019115.

2.3.2.4. Newsflash

Principals should refer to the [Newsflash guidelines](#) for information about whether a newsflash is required in response to a report of bullying and harmful behaviour and ensure the relevant Director School Operations has been informed.

2.3.3. Teaching and learning

Schools must take action to address the broader risk and protective factors influencing bullying and other harmful behaviours through planned, evidence-informed teaching and learning programs. This includes:

- respectful relationships, social and emotional learning, digital citizenship and online safety delivered through culturally responsive teaching that is age and developmentally appropriate
- explicit teaching about bullying and other harmful behaviours, including recognising, preventing, responding to and reporting them
- building students' skills in healthy relationships, empathy, resilience, self-regulation, conflict resolution, help-seeking and safe bystander behaviour
- promoting diversity, inclusion, belonging, cultural safety and respect for others as protective factors against bullying and other harmful behaviours
- embedding child safety, wellbeing, respectful behaviour and cyberbullying prevention through inclusive learning programs and across all aspects of school life
- reinforcing behaviour expectations and creating opportunities for students to practise respectful, inclusive and responsible behaviours in a range of settings.

Schools will embed bullying prevention education across the Australian Curriculum, including [Health and Physical Education](#) and the General Capabilities of [Personal and Social Capability](#), [Ethical Understanding](#) and [Intercultural Understanding](#), with explicit teaching of [respectful relationships](#), [wellbeing](#), [inclusion](#) and

Bullying prevention is embedded throughout the RRE teaching and learning resources supported for use by the department including:

- [Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships](#)
- [Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum](#) – Note: explicit training is required to access materials
- [NT Social and Emotional Learning supplementary resources](#).

2.3.4. Regular review and analysis of approaches

Schools are required to undertake regular reviews of their anti-bullying policies and processes to ensure they remain fit for purpose and are having the intended impact.

Commencing in 2027, the department will work with schools and the Australian Government to review the National Framework and its implementation to ensure continual improvement. This will include data collection and analysis, evaluation and research to ensure Australia's anti-bullying actions remain suitably targeted to achieve change and adapt to emerging issues.

3. Duty of care

Schools have an ongoing duty of care for students to take reasonable steps in reducing the risk of reasonably foreseeable harm or injury; however, the standard of care owed to a student will vary according to the circumstances. The department is responsible for supporting its schools and staff by equipping them with the skills and resources reasonably required to fulfil that duty of care.

4. Complaints

Any member of the school community, including parents and students who are not satisfied with the actions or decisions made by the school to a concern or incident reported, may arrange a meeting with the principal to discuss the issue. If the matter is not resolved, they can access online information about the department's [complaint process](#) or provide feedback via the [Department of Education and Training feedback portal](#).

All complaints will be managed in accordance with the department's [Complaint resolution policy](#).

A disability advocate can support people with disability and their families. A list of disability advocacy service providers in the NT can be accessed on the [NTG website](#).

5. Roles and responsibilities

5.1. Principals

Principals must:

- implement these interim guidelines
- ensure the school develops and implements an active, whole-school approach to wellbeing and positive behaviour that clearly communicates the school's expectations for student behaviour
- ensure the school has visible and transparent anti-bullying policies and processes in place and takes timely and appropriate action in response to bullying and harmful behaviours
- lead and embed anti-bullying expectations across all aspects of school operations and culture
- engage the whole school community in developing and embedding the anti-bullying framework within the school's whole-school approach to wellbeing and positive behaviour

- work with the department and the Australian Government to review the school's anti-bullying policies and processes in 2027 and routinely thereafter
- implement an evidence-based continuum of prevention, early, proactive intervention and response strategies
- initiate a response to observed or reported harmful behaviour within 2 school days of becoming aware of the behaviour
- ensure school staff have the knowledge, skills and resources required to effectively prevent and address bullying and other harmful behaviours and maintain a safe, positive learning and working environment
- ensure staff maintain appropriate records that document actions taken in accordance with the school's anti-bullying policies and procedures
- ensure staff report relevant incidents of bullying and harmful behaviour in accordance with the department's [Mandatory Reporting of Harm and Exploitation of Children guidelines](#), [Recording and reporting student injuries guidelines and procedures](#) and [Newsflash guidelines and procedures](#)
- deliver planned, evidence-informed teaching and learning programs that address the broader risk and protective factors associated with bullying and other harmful behaviours
- regularly review the school's anti-bullying policies and processes to ensure they remain fit for purpose and achieve their intended outcomes
- take reasonable steps to protect all students from reasonably foreseeable risk of harm.

5.2. Teachers

Teachers must:

- work collaboratively with the whole school community to prevent bullying and other harmful behaviours, uphold shared expectations, and create a positive learning environment
- prevent and respond effectively to bullying and other harmful behaviours by implementing school policies and procedures that support a safe, positive, and inclusive learning and working

5.3. Senior Directors Education

Senior Directors Education must:

- ensure all schools implement a whole-school approach to wellbeing and positive behaviour that supports a safe, positive learning and working environment
- ensure schools have the capability, resources and support needed to effectively prevent and address bullying and other harmful behaviours and meet their obligations under this interim guideline
- ensure, in collaboration with the department and the Australian Government, NT Government schools undertake regular reviews of their anti-bullying policies and processes to ensure they remain fit for purpose and are having the intended impact.

5.4. Directors School Operations

Directors School Operations must:

- support schools to implement and embed anti-bullying and behaviour expectations across school operations and culture
- support principals in responding to complaints about anti-bullying responses

- where necessary, prepare a newsflash using the information provided by the principal.

5.5. Student Wellbeing and Inclusion Programs and Services

SWIPS must:

- develop guidelines to help ensure bullying and other harmful behaviours are not accepted, and schools take appropriate and timely action to uphold students' rights to education and a safe learning environment
- support schools to adopt a whole-school approach to wellbeing and positive behaviour
- deliver universal programs to support school leaders to implement whole-school approaches to wellbeing and positive behaviour, including Safe, Supportive De-escalation of Behaviour training
- provide support for students who engage in or are impacted by bullying and harmful behaviours
- provide advice to principals responding to students who engaged in or are impacted by bullying and harmful behaviours when those behaviours may be a symptom of disability or trauma
- respond to feedback from schools and department stakeholders in updating anti-bullying guidelines and supporting resources

5.6. Students and parents

Students and parents should:

- work together with their whole school community against bullying and other harmful behaviours, uphold shared expectations and create a positive learning environment
- communicate calmly and respectfully with school staff and families, in person, online and over the phone
- support students' attendance, wellbeing and learning, including safe and responsible technology use
- raise concerns through the appropriate channels in a calm and constructive way
- work in partnership with the school to support students' success.

6. Definitions

Table 1 - Definitions of key terms

Term	Definition
Bullying	Bullying is the ongoing, deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social or psychological harm.
Child	A person under the age of 18 years as defined at Section 5 of the <i>Education Act 2015</i>
Concern	In the context of these guidelines, are issues related to incidents of bullying and harmful behaviour reported to the school and require an initial response within 2 school days of receiving the report, recognising that it may take further time to fully address the issue.
Complaint	In the context of these guidelines a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with the actions or decisions of a school in addressing reported concerns and incidents of bullying and harmful behaviour, made in accordance with the department's complaint resolution procedures.
Harmful behaviours	The range of negative interpersonal behaviours, whether physical or psychosocial, that may threaten a young person's right to a safe learning environment or the rights of the school staff to a safe work environment. This includes bullying, cyberbullying and other online harms, violence and aggression, harassment (including sexual and gender-based harassment, homophobia, transphobia, racism, ableism, misogyny and ageism), discrimination, emotional abuse, conflict, or poor relationships and interactions.
Parent	A child's father, mother or any other person who has parental responsibility for that child, including a person who is regarded as a parent of the child under Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander customary law or tradition. The definition of a parent does not include a person standing in place of the parent on a temporary basis.
School	A Government school established under the <i>Education Act 2015</i>
School representative body	Means one of 3 school bodies established under section 103 of the <i>Education Act 2015</i>. These bodies are: • school council • independent public-school board • joint school representative body.

7. Related legislation, policy and resources

7.1. Legislation

Education Act 2015 – <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/Legislation/EDUCATION-ACT-2015>

Education Regulations 2015 – <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/en/Legislation/EDUCATION-REGULATIONS-2015>

Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011 – <https://legislation.nt.gov.au/api/sitecore/Act/Word?id=12282>

7.2. Policy

Anti-Bullying Rapid Review - <https://www.education.gov.au/antibullying-rapid-review>

Complaints management in school - https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/conduct#complaints_management

Child safety policy <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/child-safety>

Duty of care owed by teachers - https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/conduct#duty_of_care

Mandatory reporting of harm and exploitation of children - <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/health-safety/child-safety#mandatory-reporting-of-harm-and-exploitation-of-children>

National Framework for Addressing Bullying in Australian Schools - <https://www.education.gov.au/antibullying-rapid-review/resources/national-framework-addressing-bullying-australian-schools>

Recording and reporting student injuries - guidelines and procedures - <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/health-safety/child-safety#recording-and-reporting-student-injuries>

Respect and responsibility in schools policy - <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/conduct#headingNine-1397861>

Student wellbeing and positive behaviour policy - <https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/health-safety/behaviour-and-wellbeing-of-students>

7.3. Resources

Alannah and Madeline Foundation eSmart resources - <https://www.alannahandmadeline.org.au/learning-resources/esmart-resources>

Australian Curriculum:

- Learning Area - Health and Physical Education - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/curriculum-information/understand-this-learning-area/health-and-physical-education>
- General capability – Ethical understanding - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/curriculum-information/understand-this-general-capability/ethical-understanding>
- General capability – Intercultural understanding - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/curriculum-information/understand-this-general-capability/intercultural-understanding>
- Curriculum connection – Mental health and wellbeing - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/curriculum-information/understand-this-curriculum-connection/mental-health-and-wellbeing>
- Curriculum connection – Online safety - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/curriculum-information/understand-this-curriculum-connection/online-safety>
- General capability - Personal and Social capability - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/personal-and-social-capability?element=0&sub-element=PSCSEAA>
- Curriculum connection – Respectful relationships - <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/curriculum-information/understand-this-curriculum-connection/respectful-relationships>

Be You - <https://beyou.edu.au/>

Beyond Blue - <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

Bullying No Way:

- <https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/>
- <https://bullyingnoway.gov.au/understanding-bullying/bullying-research>

Child Safety Hub - <https://www.childsafetyhub.com.au/safe-schools-intro/>

Dolly's Dream - <https://dollysdream.org.au/>

eSafety Commissioner - <https://www.esafety.gov.au/>

Friendly Schools - <https://friendlyschoools.com.au/>

Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum - <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/teaching-and-learning/teaching-and-learning-services/respectful-relationships/keeping-safe-child> (explicit training is required to access materials)

Kids Helpline - <https://www.kidshelpline.com.au/>

Let's Stop Bullying - <https://www.letsstopbullying.gov.au/>

Lifeline - <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

National Plan to End Gender Based Violence - <https://www.dss.gov.au/national-plan-end-gender-based-violence>

Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships - <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/resources/resilience-rights-and-respectful-relationships-rrrr>

Social and Emotional Learning Supplementary resources (NT) - <https://elearn.ntschoools.net/teaching-and-learning/teaching-and-learning-services/respectful-relationships/social-and-emotional>

The Stand Up Project | Student Leadership, Voice and Agency Program - <https://www.thestandupproject.com/>

13 YARN - <https://www.13yarn.org.au/>

Acronyms	Full form
Cth	Commonwealth
NT	Northern Territory
TRM	Territory Records Manager

Document title	Anti-bullying and harmful behaviours in schools interim guidelines
Contact details	Student Wellbeing and Inclusion, Programs and Services swipolicy.doe@education.nt.gov.au
Approved by	Executive Director Inclusion and Engagement Services
Date approved	03 September 2026
TRM number	50-D26-81379

Version	Date	Author	Changes made
1	3 September 2027	SWIPS	First version