

# Supporting students who are at-risk of disengagement, and those who are disengaged

During times of disruption, such as COVID-19, students who are disengaged, or those showing signs of becoming disengaged, may require additional assistance. Extended periods of non-attendance due to COVID-19 are likely to make it harder for some young people to return to school. It is therefore vital that schools consider how they can continue to connect with students during this time, and support their successful transition back to school.

## How to identify a student who may be at increased risk of disengagement

Teachers and school staff are in a unique position to identify students who may need extra care and connection during an isolation period. This may include students who experience the below factors:

- Students who are vulnerable due to family and community factors such as poverty, parental unemployment/and or low educational attainment, homelessness, transience, history of domestic and family violence.
- Individual student factors including physical or mental health issues, history of behavioural issues, offending behaviour, substance misuse.
- Negative school-related factors including poor relationships with teachers or peers, history of bullying, or lack of engagement with the school curriculum.

To assist prioritising students for outreach and connection, consider students who prior to the isolation period demonstrated:

- erratic or no attendance
- low literacy or numeracy/poor attainment
- lack of interest in school and/or stated intention to leave
- negative interactions with peers
- behavioural issues including aggression, violence, or social withdrawal
- significant change in behaviour, attitude or performance.

During a time of remote learning, it's likely that these factors will be compounded by the physical absence of school – particularly in cases where schooling is a protective factor for vulnerable students. Families will also be under acute stress, with increased employment instability, heightened risk of domestic and family violence incidents, and the impact of other stressors on family and household dynamics e.g. containment measures.



### What does connection look like?

Teachers know their students and their vulnerabilities, and are in a position to leverage their existing student and parent relationships to reach out and provide a point of connection during an isolation period. There may also be other staff across your school in a position to reach out to students and maintain connection e.g. guidance officers, youth workers.

Maintaining contact with students will assist their re-engagement with the school once an isolation period ceases. When supporting students remotely, this contact can be achieved through:

- phone calls
- text messages
- e-mail
- skype, FaceTime
- other options in line with the student's preferences and accessibility considerations.

### How to identify if a student is disconnecting when supporting them remotely

When supporting a student remotely, it may be difficult to see the signs and patterns of disengagement. As the usual daily contacts and visual cues aren't present, staff supporting students will need to be in tune with other indicators of disengagement.

#### This may include:

- ▶ unresponsive to contact requests
- ▶ repeatedly not attending agreed contact times
- ▶ passive reactions and responses
- ▶ expressing feelings of disinterest, loss of hope or value in education etc.

### Working with other agencies

Where other agencies are already working with students, it is suggested that you liaise closely with these agencies during this period. If you are a key contact for a student, it may be necessary to coordinate with other key agencies and services that already support the student, or make referrals to other services if it becomes evident that the student or family requires this assistance.

There may also be opportunities for those agencies that continue to work face-to-face with highly vulnerable clients to physically check-in with students, and support your ongoing case management.

### How to support students to transition back to school

Careful planning will be required to support students to make a successful re-integration to school. Have conversations with the student to establish how they feel about going back to school. Do they have any anxiety or nervousness? They may need practical reminders about their school routine, for example confirm their transport arrangements for getting to and from school. Establishing a plan to regularly check-in with the student once school has resumed will help them to know that someone cares about them, they are valued within the school, and it will establish expectations for their learning and success at school.

### Take special care

As you are aware, young people, parents, and your own staff may be experiencing heightened stress at this time. Pay special attention to mental health warning signs, and reach out to Headspace, Beyond Blue and other services for support where appropriate. The Employee Assistance Service is also available for all staff, and their immediate family.

## CHECKLIST FOR CONNECTING WITH STUDENTS REMOTELY

The below is provided as guidance to support your planning and approach to maintain engagement with students who are at increased risk of becoming disengaged.

Action	Considerations	Nominated Lead
<b>Compile a list of students who are at-risk of disengagement</b>	To support student identification, consider reviewing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student level data including A to E behaviour, attendance, SDA, attainment</li> <li>• History of student relationships and connection to the school and community (using professional assessment and understanding of student needs and context)</li> </ul>	e.g. Support staff team member in collaboration with Classroom Teacher
<b>Establish a team to monitor the engagement and wellbeing of this student group</b>	Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the needs of the student cohort, and multi-disciplinary skill set required of the team?</li> <li>• Are there non-teaching staff in a position to support and connect with these students?</li> <li>• Are there other agencies that require involvement?</li> </ul>	
<b>Work as a team to monitor the engagement of these students</b>	Determine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequency and mode of contact amongst the team</li> <li>• Escalation points if/when a student's disengagement increases, or other concerns arise that require escalation</li> </ul>	
<b>Assign a team member to every student, making them responsible for maintaining contact with the student and supporting their ongoing engagement</b>	Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there school-based staff who have an existing relationship and connection with the student?</li> <li>• What is the required skillset and expertise for connecting with individual students? (e.g. would a Guidance Officer be more appropriate to respond to a particular student's complex needs?)</li> </ul>	
<b>Team members undertake contact with students</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consider the most appropriate modality for contact.</li> <li>2. Agree contact terms with the student including frequency, platform for contact.</li> <li>3. Consider strategies for maintaining engagement, this may include combining contact with positive peer groups to continue sense of connection to school community, being mindful of small group dynamics.</li> </ol>	
<b>Maintain records of engagement of these students and their progress</b>	Determine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the best mechanism for maintaining these records (e.g. record contact in OneSchool, secure file notes that can be uploaded at an appropriate time to the school system)?</li> </ul>	
<b>Enlist other stakeholders to support student if it is identified that the student is disengaged</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Contact the Regional Youth Engagement Hub if it is identified that the student has disengaged from the school.</li> <li>2. Provide detail of attempts at contact, detail of the interactions where these were undertaken that indicate that the student is disengaged.</li> </ol>	
<b>Plan for re-connection to school</b>	Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At a time when it is identified that school will resume as per 'usual', work with the student to support their transition back to school.</li> <li>• The student may need reminders of the routine of school e.g. uniform, books, transport arrangements.</li> <li>• Check-in with student wellbeing, how are they feeling about connecting with their peers face-to-face, what support is needed to reassure students?</li> </ul>	
<b>Monitor students transition</b>	Monitor the student's re-integration to school: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any indicators that engagement is at-risk? Consider attendance, SDA, behavioural engagement etc.</li> </ul>	