

WHAT TO DO IF YOU EXPERIENCE ONLINE HARASSMENT AFTER APPEARING IN ABC CONTENT



By the nature of the work we do, sometimes programs, topics and discussions on the ABC can be controversial. On occasion guests, talent and contributors may receive negative comments online and feedback which has the potential to escalate to harassment and threats.

Online abuse can lead to a fight or flight response, so we've set out some clear tips for steps to take based on research into best practice and bolstering safety and resilience. Ultimately every situation is different and it is important to take the right steps for you.

For all incidents

Prioritise your safety:

- Call 000 if you feel in imminent danger
- Make a list of your social media accounts and complete a privacy check-up and security check-up on each. [esafety.gov.au](https://www.esafety.gov.au) has helpful links for key social media platforms and the privacy and safety tips for each.

Document the harassment:

Keeping evidence of the offending content is important in case the harassment continues, and you need to report it to the eSafety Office or police

- Note the date, time and platform and username(s)
- If you are recording a text or image post or comment, take a screenshot. If you are recording a video, download or screen record the video (you may need to Google how to do this depending on the platform).

Important:

- Do this prior to blocking users as the posts may disappear
- You may like to ask a trusted person to assist with this to reduce further exposure to harm
- If abuse is via email, save the email and do not forward it as this can impact the IP data

Report the harassment:

- Alert your ABC contact
- Report any offending content and users to the platform

- If there is no action after 48 hours [and the content meets eSafety's threshold for harm](#), escalate with [eSafety](#).

Reduce unwanted interactions:

- Utilise block and mute functionalities in social media platforms.
 - Mute/restricting means the user will not know that you cannot see their interactions but they will still be able to see your posts.
 - If you block the user, they may know and in some cases, this may escalate the incident or they may create another account to harass you.
 - If you have a public account, a blocked user can still see your posts if they sign out of their account so it's important not to have a false sense of security if you do block them
- You may like to limit who can tag you, mention you, comment on your posts and DM you
- Responding to online abusers - whether directly or calling out indirectly - can lead to an increase in the intensity and duration of abuse and is not recommended by police. Depending on the size of your audience, it can also further broadcast the individual's opinions. That being said, it is important to do what is empowering for you, with awareness of potential escalations in abuse and your resilience when deciding the best action

Promote your wellbeing

Debrief

Emotional support and debriefing are important following online harassment. Contact your GP for a mental health care plan

Lean into your coping mechanisms

- If you are feeling anxious, immediate ways to reduce anxiety may include box breathing, exercise, and coming back to your senses - what can you see, hear, smell, and taste?
- You may wish to turn off in-app notifications on your phone, set boundaries with people, drop unnecessary tasks
- Plan for positive coping mechanisms. For example: After work today, I will turn off my phone at 5.30 pm and go for a walk/paint/catch-up with mates - whatever it is that reflects your self-care practice
- Consider digital detoxing.
 - Choose certain times of the day to disconnect and recharge.
 - Use in-app time limits
 - Do not look at social media right before bed or when you first wake up. You have no control over what you may see. If you see something negative, it could keep you awake or start your day off in a negative way

For violent threats, online stalking, sexual harassment and hate speech

Prioritise safety

- Call 000 if you feel in imminent danger
- If you haven't already, step through the 'Preparing for the wider audience' document from the ABC (you can ask your contact for this). This steps through your online privacy settings, what information is available about you online and reducing contact via social media platforms. This is important at all times, particularly if you experience this type of contact.
- You may wish to report this to police

Document

- If you are experiencing significant abuse, prioritise by documenting the following:
 - The first post from the user
 - The three most recent posts
 - The most relevant/serious posts

Reduce contact:

- Utilise block and mute functionalities in social media platforms.
 - Mute/restricting means the user will not know that you cannot see their interactions but they will still be able to see your posts.
 - If you block the user, they may know and in some cases, this may escalate the incident or they may create another account to harass you.
 - If you have a public account, a blocked user can still see your posts if they sign out of their account so it's important not to have a false sense of security if you do block them

For pile ons (abuse from many users)

Pile ons are often spurred on by someone with a large social media following (i.e. other media outlets, media personalities, celebrities etc.) posting criticism of an individual or their work. The original poster's followers then direct their own criticism at the target, resulting in a pile on of abuse or negativity. This can be picked up by media organisations which then amplify the attacks.

Reduce exposure to harm:

Stepping away from social media briefly

- It can be easy to keep scrolling to feel in control of a pile on, however, if your wellbeing is impacted one of the best ways to gain control is to step offline or reduce notifications until it is psychologically safe to return.
- You could choose to step offline until the pile on dissipates. If the abuse is on Twitter, prior to stepping offline it is recommended you change your notifications to 'Only people you follow' to reduce exposure to harm upon your return
- Remove apps from your phone temporarily

Staying online

- If the pile on is on Twitter:
 - Enable Twitter safety mode to automatically block users
 - Often pile-ons are incited by one influential user Tweeting about you. Mute Tweets that mention the account that has started a pile on by muting "@(twitter handle)". You will now not be exposed to any Tweets mentioning that handle
 - Disable notifications from people you don't follow
 - You may wish to not see Twitter trends. Change your language in the trending section. Go to Explore → Settings → Untick the location box – 'Explore locations' and choose somewhere with a language you can't read
- Set boundaries with friends and family about updating you on what they see online. You may not wish to know every time someone posts something negative

Document:

Document evidence of harassment, prioritise the following:

- Is there a post that incited the abuse?
- Are there any engaging posts or posts by individuals with a large following?
- The most concerning posts

Contextualise your experience:

It is important to understand that there are complex drivers of a pile on:

- One study found 59% of content shared on Twitter wasn't opened by the sharer
- Attacks can also be bolstered by bot activity, with 10,000 retweets costing as little as \$45. One study found 45% of accounts Tweeting about COVID were likely bots. You can spot bots by the year their account was created and if their profile photo is stock (tip: use a reverse search in TinEye). Social media posts that have a lot of retweets and likes by accounts that have few followers may suggest bot activity.
- Remember: social media isn't reflective of all opinions. Often there are a small number of people who disagree with your work who are most vocal. It can be easy to focus on negative comments. Remember to look for positive ones too.
- It can be helpful to reflect on whether someone you respect has experienced a pile on previously, and whether that has impacted your opinion of them.

If you are doxxed

Doxxing is the intentional online exposure of an individual's identity, private information or personal details without their consent.

Prioritise safety and privacy

If your address has been published:

- Ensure your physical location is safe. You may need to relocate temporarily if your address has been leaked.

- Contact 000 if you feel in immediate danger

For all doxxing incidents:

- Request removal from social media platforms. If there is no action after 48 hours, escalate with eSafety.
- If you haven't already, step through the 'Preparing for the wider audience' document from the ABC (you can ask your contact for this). This steps through your online privacy settings, what information is available about you online and reducing contact via social media platforms. This is important at all times, particularly if you experience this type of contact.
- [You can request Google to remove your public information.](#)

Document:

- Any posts that include your private information
- If there are lots of posts, prioritise posts by individuals with a large following

You may like to ask a trusted person to assist with this to reduce further exposure to harm.

Reduce contact:

- Block any abusive callers. You may wish to ignore calls from unknown numbers and have a trusted person screen your voicemail and note legitimate calls to return
- If your email address has been released, block any abusive email addresses