# Using digital and online communication

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## About this resource

This resource provides TAFEs with guidance on the use of digital technology to support a whole-of-TAFE approach to preventing violence against women. It also contains guidance on effective online prevention education and key principles for engaging students.

Clear and consistent communications and messaging work alongside policies and programs to effect positive change in people’s expectations, behaviours and norms towards violence and gender equality. Using digital methods and mediums can help you reach and equip as many people as possible with the information and skills they need to promote and support TAFE’s progress towards gender equality. This approach supports TAFEs to broaden their reach across the entire TAFE community – including students, staff and industry partners.

For a more detailed understanding of a whole-of-TAFE approach, see the [*Respect and Equality in TAFE: Building a TAFE environment that promotes gender equality and respect*](http://www.respectandequalityintafe.org.au/).

## Section 1: Evidence review

### What we mean by online and digital technology in prevention practice

Digital and online programming may be thought of as any technological tool or resource used to communicate, create, disseminate, store or manage information. A whole-of-TAFE approach to preventing violence against women asks institutes to consider the virtual environment across a range of platforms, including:

* TAFE websites including internet
* TAFE social media channels
* learning management systems/eLearning modules
* virtual classrooms, digital teaching and learning materials
* Zoom backgrounds and other online meeting software e.g. Microsoft teams
* computer backgrounds/wallpapers
* emails and email signature blocks
* all staff and student emails
* messaging on screens across campus.

### What works in online and digital prevention programming

An effective whole-of-TAFE approach that includes digital and online programming considers the virtual environment across the entire institute, and includes understanding TAFEs as workplaces as well as teaching and learning institutes; recognising them as spaces where people learn, work and socialise, and where partnerships are established with industry and communities. It also acknowledges that there are limitations to the effectiveness of online interventions when implemented as one-off, stand-alone initiatives.

On their own, online mediums are not well placed to be able to deliver the type, duration and intensity of content required to engender the attitudinal, behavioural and cultural change that is needed to prevent violence against women. Using digital technology within a whole-of-TAFE approach to preventing violence against women works best when activities capitalise on the benefits of online mediums (i.e. scale and reach) and avoid attempting to replicate the advantages of delivering prevention content through face-to-face education (i.e. duration and intensity).

Importantly, a population-wide approach to prevention cannot rely on one program or technique to reach everyone. One way to realise the benefits of digital engagement includes thinking beyond the transactional mindset of project initiatives, and instead utilising strategies to drive ongoing conversations across all populations. For TAFEs, this means consideration of initiatives beyond students, instead applying a whole-of-institute approach that works across the entire TAFE population, including all staff, educators, leaders and administration, in addition to their student populations and industry and community partners.

### What about eLearning modules?

On the available evidence, direct participation programs have been shown to deliver more promising results than online interventions in reducing violence against women. However, the ability to distribute prevention messaging to greater numbers of people online cannot be overlooked as an important tool of prevention programming, and in recent years eLearning modules have been used as a method to deliver content to students.

These modules typically rely on a mix of pre-recorded lectures, activities and quizzes, and act as a mechanism to track completion and some measures of engagement. Limitations of eLearning, including a poor user experience, crowded curriculum and static content, suggest that efforts to engage users need to be broader than these kinds of initiatives.

Research shows it is difficult to get students to engage with online modules, and these efforts tend to attract the already motivated student rather than students who the TAFE may really want to target. Making the completion of online modules mandatory can also backfire. Forcing uninterested individuals to undertake training can cause ill will that is detrimental to the gender equality cause. However, eLearning modules may form a part of your approach to primary prevention and can be used to:

* refresh material learned during other prevention training and programs
* reinforce expect TAFE staff and student behaviours and expectations
* encourage already motivated learners to take further action
* collect data for evaluation more easily.

With that in mind, implementation of any online prevention program needs to firstly be clear about the type of change the program is aiming to achieve. Implementation should address the way the program will align with and be reinforced by other prevention activity across the TAFE. The decision to develop and implement online efforts needs to be grounded in an understanding of the limitations of the platform being used, and where it will be necessary to utilise other complementary prevention activities.

## Section 2: Practice principles

### Key principles for developing effective online prevention education programs

Table 1: Key principles, their evidence, dos and don’ts

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Key principle | The evidence | Do | Don’t |
| Online education must keep users engaged for enough time to effect change | In violence prevention, there is an association between program duration, intensity and program impact | Invest in co-design activities to meet the needs of the intended audience[[1]](#endnote-2) | Mandate attendance or completion of online prevention education courses |
| Online education must create opportunities for ongoing learning | While brief, one-session educational programs for students are very common, none have demonstrated lasting effects on risk factors or behaviour | Create links between prevention activities, programs, training or curriculum across the TAFE and plan for active engagement across the year | Invest in one-off programs or rely on online modules for behaviour change |
| Balance the delivery of evidence-based information a focus on user experience | Online interventions are likely to be most engaging when they are well matched to the user’s characteristics, needs, skill level and expectation | Build prevention content into existing online learning material | Build or design bespoke applications and focus effort on driving traffic to these mediums |
| Content delivered online must be personally relevant to the user.[[2]](#endnote-3) | A factor that influences the motivation for attitudinal change is the perceived personal relevance of the message | Put effort into providing follow-up programming, separate to online interventions that are specific to users’ strengths and deficits | Rely on one program to reach all users |

### Practice principles for engaging students in online prevention education

#### Engagement principle 1: Understand your audience

It is worth remembering that student populations are heterogeneous and will respond differently to prevention programming. Some studies recommend focusing certain messages to specific groups, such as those with higher risk of perpetration of violence against women. For TAFE students, consider focusing attention on prevention messaging that links to their expectations regarding attending TAFE, socialising with other students, or their industry or chosen career.

#### Engagement principle 2: Engage in co-design activities with your intended audience

As key stakeholders in gender equality work and prevention of violence against women, students should be provided with ongoing opportunities to engage, provide input and show leadership. Connecting with a range of people with diverse experiences, including LGBTIQ+ people, international students, people with disability, refugees, mature-aged people returning to study, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will help ensure your communications are culturally safe, accessible and inclusive. It’s vital that your approach to engagement and co-design is genuine and built into the process from the outset, rather than adapting content retrospectively. One way that you may think about putting this into practice is by asking students to develop, design and deliver their own online materials.

#### Engagement principle 3: Target your audience through their preferred channels and types of content

The delivery of evidence-based content needs to be balanced with a focus on the user experience, and on delivering prevention content in an engaging way. For example, the inability of users to access information via their mobile phones has presented a major obstacle to the success of many digital efforts. These days, the ability to access information via a smartphone is a non-negotiable requirement, as is the need for content to be dynamic, accessible, relevant and individualised to the target audience. Social media is an obvious avenue to explore, as well as an identified preference for video-based content.

### Key takeaways

1. Utilise all forms of online media, including social media, your TAFE website, email and digital screens on campus to promote prevention work that is occurring across the TAFE.
2. Plan for active engagement with your audience across the years.
3. Build prevention materials into existing online education or required courses for students and staff.
4. Ensure online content has links to support information for students that are triggered by the content or for students what wish to disclose.
5. Use short, contained messaging and link digital interventions to face-to-face opportunities to extend learning opportunities.
6. Ensure that some materials are accessible on mobile devices.
7. Be present in the online spaces where your users already are, rather than developing specific applications or websites.
8. Engage in co-design activities with the intended audience.
9. Monitor and evaluate your prevention activities.

## Section 3: Supporting materials and resources

### Content to include on your TAFE website

The key to any effective primary prevention campaign is to reinforce your message across a range of platforms. As a first step, it is important that there is a webpage that promotes the TAFE’s commitment to preventing violence against women as well as raising awareness of the supports available to people affected by violence.

Prevention programming can increase disclosure, reporting rates and the demand on response services. Students or staff may recognise that what they have experienced is assault or rape. Their awareness may improve, and they may feel confident

to report the harassment or other violence they have experienced, or are experiencing. Further, trends in cyberbullying, losses in privacy and security, and stories of perpetrators targeting victims through social media sites must be kept in mind when considering the use of technology in education on the prevention of violence against women.

The goal of any webpage is simply to raise awareness and provide links about where to access support, and it may also include references to prevention activities occurring on campus. Try not to crowd the space with educational content or focus on changing behaviours through these types of mediums.

### Resources

* [*#BecauseWhy*](https://becausewhy.org.au/) (Our Watch website)
* [Be a Better Human](https://fusa.edu.au/babh/) (Flinders University Student Association webpage)
* [*Doing Nothing Does Harm*](https://doingnothingdoesharm.org.au/) (Our Watch website)
* [*Framing gender equality: Message guide*](https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/Mental-health/Framing-gender-equality---Message-guide.pdf?la=en&hash=AF111835871BFA3092C1F9DD98B3C8AA0E493295) (VicHealth resource)
* [*Guide to implementing a university-wide bystander email campaign*](https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/Bystander/Bystander-Email-Campaign-Tool.pdf?la=en&hash=F3352E7C7B2DBD31A2A47E5D932064D182A19C24&hash=F3352E7C7B2DBD31A2A47E5D932064D182A19C24) (VicHealth resource)
* [*No Excuse for Abuse*](https://noexcuseforabuse.org.au/) (Our Watch website)
* [Respect and Equality in TAFE](http://www.respectandequalityintafe.org.au) (Our Watch website)

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2. Note: Prevention of family violence activities is known to lead to increases in disclosure. Supports for students and staff who may disclose should be built into an online prevention education program. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)