BACK to SCHOOL SAFELY

A Technology Guide for K-12 Tech Directors, Counselors & Student Resources

6 Student Safety Signals Detected in Google Workspace & Microsoft 365

and why they matter

Back-to-School is one of the most exciting yet stressful times of the year. As students return from their long break, they're excited about the months ahead—the opportunities to learn and connect with friends, new and old.

It's also a time of adjustment, as they return to an often more structured life than the previous months provided. Schools need to guide students and re-align them with concepts of being a good citizen—and good digital citizens online. It's a time when classrooms, hallways, and teams are re-forming and norming. As a result, passions and conflict tend to boil over.

Further, student mental health is an important issue in schools and our society today. The impacts of the long pandemic, along with many local, national, and world events, weigh on our children in numerous ways. We all need to do our part to help students cope with the pressures and the environment they are growing up in mentally, psychologically, and emotionally. Together, we can all make a difference in our communities.

This guide attempts to help district leaders understand how they can use technology to detect potential student safety signals that can come up in school Google Workspace and Microsoft 365 apps.

The six signals and examples discussed in this guide are based on true stories from our customers over the years. We won't go into specifics, but they are all based on real-world experiences.

An Important Note On Student Safety & Technology

No technology on this planet is going to do the job of a human being. It is not the intention of this guide (or any information we publish regarding this topic) to imply that our platform—or any platform—can.

Creating safe learning environments for our students, teachers, staff, and communities requires people to look out for one another. Ask questions to make sure someone is OK and involve a trained professional if needed.

Using any student safety technology does not guarantee that bad things won't happen. And it does not take the place of having people in your life to help you out through rough times. In most cases, incidents are discovered because a parent, fellow student, or teacher reports an issue.

It's not always the case that technology will catch a problem before it happens. Often, it is used to investigate the details of the incident during or after the fact.

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Bullying & Discrimination

Research and many heartbreaking real-world stories show that the impacts of bullying can be varying and severe for the victim, the bully, and the community.

Bullying and discrimination are not the same, but they can be found running in the same circles. When a student is being targeted because of a certain aspect of their identity, such as their race, religion, disability, gender, and/or sexual orientation, that is discrimination.

One of the big problems with bullying is how broad of an impact it can have on both the victim and the bully. Being a victim of bullying increases the likelihood of a number of negative outcomes, including, but not limited to, all of the student safety risks that are covered in the rest of this guide.

Additional resources

- [Stopbullying.gov](#)

- [Anti-bullying Laws, Policies & Regulations](#)

- [42 Examples of Cyberbullying](#)

- [FAQs About Cyberbullying and Title IX](#)

- [Teachers' Essential Guide to Cyberbullying Prevention](#)

- [Cyberbullying Detection in School Tech](#)

- [Cyberbullying and School Violence](#)

- [How To Create and Enforce a Cyberbullying School Policy with Cloud Monitoring](#)

- [How To Help Protect Students From Self-Harm, Cyberbullying, & Other Safety Risks](#)

Detecting Bullying & Discrimination Signals in Google & Microsoft

Students commonly use shared documents as chat rooms, and have found interesting ways to avoid detection. These docs often contain cyberbullying and discriminatory language and behavior.

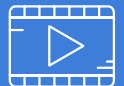Some incidents include sharing nude images or videos of other students, which is a criminal offense.

Cyberbullying content is also sometimes found in emails and chat apps.

Shared Files

Uploaded Images

Uploaded Videos

Chat Apps

Email

K-12 Cloud Safety & Security Made Easy

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Self-Harm & Suicide

Self-harm and suicide are not the same things, but they are considered by most to be closely related. The main difference between the two lies in intent. A student that is engaging in self-harming activity does not intend to end their own life, while one attempting suicide is.

While they are not the same, most experts agree that a student who self-harms is at a higher risk of developing suicidal intent over time. Risk factors include:

- Being bullied or bullying others
- Mental health or behavioral disorders such as depression, body dysmorphia, or impulse control
- In the LGBTQIA+ community
- Traumatic experiences, such as the loss of a family member or friend, experiencing abuse, or the loss of a romantic relationship
- Substance abuse
- Physical or learning disabilities

Additional resources

- AFSP Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center - Schools Toolkit
- The Trevor Project
- Crisis Text Line: How Deal With Self Harm
- How To Help Someone Who Self-Harms
- Understanding Student Self-Harm and Suicide for IT Admins
- 5 Steps to an Effective Self-Harm Student Cyber Safety Monitoring Program
- Self-Harm Monitoring: Why IT is the Newest Ally in Student Suicide Prevention
- 5 Student Suicide Digital Signals to Monitor for in School Technology

Detecting Self-Harm & Suicide Signals in Google & Microsoft

When it comes to using technology to help monitor for potential self-harm and suicide red flags, the two look very similar. This is why we usually talk about them together in context.

Signals often show up in two ways. Students may use apps to talk with each other about their feelings, thoughts, and/or actions. They also often use documents as an online journal, sometimes as a way to cry for help.

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Chat Apps

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Uploaded Videos

Email

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Threats & Acts of Violence

Sadly, violence in schools is now part of our everyday reality. Physical violence in schools takes on many forms and can be directed at students, faculty, and/or staff. Likewise, perpetrators of violence can be students, faculty, staff, family members, or even people not closely related to the current school community.

Detecting violent signals isn't just about thwarting a school shooting before it happens. Many incidents flagged involve student-on-student violence for various reasons after the incident occurred. The types of violent incidents that occur in schools can include:

- Physical altercations not involving weapons
- Sexual violence
- Targeted violence involving a small number of victims with the use of weapons, including guns, knives, and blunt objects
- Mass violence, typically involving guns and sometimes explosives

Additional resources

- [US Secret Service: Averting Targeted School Violence](#)
- [CDC Fast Fact: Preventing School Violence](#)
- [Stop Sexual Assault in Schools](#)
- [5 School Violence Early Warning Signs](#)

- [5 Types of School Violence and How Your IT Team Can Help](#)
- [Cyberbullying and School Violence](#)
- [Social Emotional Learning's Impact on School Violence](#)

Detecting Threats & Acts of Violence Signals in Google & Microsoft

Students use Google/Microsoft apps to discuss violence in a number of contexts. They might be talking about an incident that has already occurred, something they heard might be happening involving other students, or something that they're planning for or expecting in the future.

They may talk about it with others or write about it in a document that they use as a personal journal.

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Chat Apps

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Substance Abuse

Substance abuse in and around campus can have various negative consequences for students and campus culture. Common consequences include lower academic and athletic performance, diminished social and emotional development, more risky behavior, criminal behavior, and legal troubles, and overdose.

It might also indicate that some students who are selling drugs on campus. And it can lead to future violence, for example, if a student has a debt to pay off for buying drugs.

Substance abuse might sometimes be an indication of broader problems for the students involved. It could signify that they have been the victim of bullying, that they are depressed or suicidal, or that they are having problems at home.

Additional resources

- [DEA: Emoji Drug Code Decoded](#)
- [DEA: One Pill Can Kill](#)
- [Cracking the Code: What Emojis Do Teens Use to Talk About Drugs?](#)

- [Top 8 Reasons Why Teens Try Alcohol and Drugs](#)
- [Teen Drug Abuse: Help Your Teen Avoid Drugs](#)

Detecting Substance Abuse Signals in Google & Microsoft

Substance abuse is a tough safety risk to detect with technology. Most commonly, students are seen discussing upcoming or past parties. Sometimes, incidents are flagged where they're discussing finding, buying, and/or selling drugs.

Sometimes, you'll find a student writing in a doc they are using as a personal journal about their use. More commonly, this is within the context of other mental health issues.

Shared Files

Email

Chat Apps

Uploaded Videos

Uploaded Images

Sexual Content

School administrators know that there is sexual content stored and shared in their district's Google/Microsoft 365 apps. Some take a plausible deniability stance on it. Others do something about it.

First, this is a CIPA violation. Further, it's also illegal in the likely scenario that it depicts minors. Federal law prohibits the production, distribution, reception, and possession of child pornography. Child pornography is defined as any visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct involving a minor, including photos, videos, and electronically stored data. The image does not need to depict a child engaging in sexual activity to be considered child pornography.

Most importantly, allowing this to happen is extraordinarily damaging to your students. "Sexting" is usually related to cyberbullying, self-harm, suicide, substance abuse, and violence. It's a problem for all involved from physical, mental, and emotional health standpoints.

Additional resources

- [Sexting: What K-12 Schools Should Know](#)
- [Parents' Guide to Secret Sexting Codes](#)
- [Google Help: Report Inappropriate Content or Behavior Toward Children](#)
- [Is Your School Prepared for Sexting Crisis?](#)

- [You Found the Sext, What to Do Next? How School Psychologists Can Assist](#)
- [Navigating CIPA Compliance in the Cloud](#)
- [Google Chat CIPA Compliance](#)
- [Infographic: 5 CIPA Violations in Your Google/Microsoft](#)

Detecting Sexual Content Signals in Google & Microsoft

Students share sexual content in school-provided technology fairly regularly. Incidents flagged include images and videos uploaded to shared drives, emails, shared docs used as chat rooms, and chat apps.

Often, students are sharing images of themselves. Regularly, they're sharing images of others, whether or not the other student knows a picture or video was taken or expected it to be shared.

Uploaded Images

Shared Files

Email

Uploaded Videos

Chat Apps

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Abusive Relationships

There are many types of abusive relationships that students may experience. It might include a family member or friend, a teacher or coach, another student, a romantic partner, or someone unrelated to the school. There are four types of abuse defined by child psychologists:

- Child neglect
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse

Experiencing an abusive relationship has a wide variety of impacts on students and can be related to the other safety risks discussed in this guide. Students who are in abusive relationships and/or have experienced abuse in the past are more likely to have lower attendance and academic performance, be the victims of bullying, use drugs and alcohol, self-harm, and contemplate or attempt suicide.

Additional resources

- Google: Fighting Child Sexual Abuse Online
- Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect
- Abuse Cases at 2 Schools, with Technology at the Root
- Preventing Teen Dating Violence
- How Can Your School Help Victims of Domestic Abuse?
- Domestic Violence, Child Welfare, and the School System

Detecting Abusive Relationship Signals in Google & Microsoft

Detecting abusive relationships using technology is very difficult, thus does not come up often.

The most common way it is detected is when a student is using a document as their personal journal and they write about it. This is very likely a cry for help.

They may also discuss experiences with their friends in shared docs, chat apps, or via email.

Shared Files

Chat Apps

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Cloud Security & Safety Made Easy(er)

ManagedMethods provides a centralized command center for managing cybersecurity and student safety risks in Google Workspace, Microsoft 365, Zoom, WebEx, Dropbox, and more.

The platform uses deep API integrations to monitor for these risks 24/7/365. It provides automated controls to prevent data security breaches, account takeovers, ransomware and phishing attacks, and detect student safety signals.

Claim your 30-day free trial today to experience why districts trust ManagedMethods to protect over 1.4 million students.

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