

# Student use of mobile phones and personal devices policy

This is a mandated policy under the operational policy framework. Any edits to this policy must follow the process outlined on the [creating, updating and deleting operational policies](#) page.

## Overview

This policy:

- requires students in all government schools to keep their personal devices, including mobile phones, off and away between the start and end of each school day and while attending authorised school activities off-site
- outlines the circumstances where students may be given an exemption to use their personal device during the school day for a specific, agreed purpose
- helps schools to manage student mobile phones and personal devices that are brought to school.

Schools must use the [simplified policy template](#) (staff login required) to document local context information and decisions in line with this policy.

It is recommended that schools also refer to the [supporting information page](#) (staff login required) for further practical guidance in managing student devices and policy exemptions.

## Scope

This policy provides mandatory instructions to principals about managing student use of mobile phones and personal devices:

- at all government schools during school hours
- when students are undertaking authorised school activities, including off-site camps and excursions.

For the purposes of this policy and the linked supporting resources, personal devices include mobile phones and any other digital devices with the capability of connecting to telecommunication and/or internet networks, such as smart watches.

The policy does not apply to any school-owned technologies or learning devices that are approved to be brought to school under a separate local Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy.



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# Detail

With the widespread and increasing ownership of mobile phones and other devices among students it is critical that schools, in partnership with families, provide clear guidance for students to become informed, safe, respectful, and responsible digital citizens.

It is the department's position that access to personal devices during school hours must be managed so that students can be fully present in their learning and in their interactions with their teachers and peers.

The aim of this policy is to help promote:

- safe environments with reduced negative impacts of inappropriate use of devices at school, such as cyberbullying, exposure to harmful content, and critical incidents that involve mobile phones
- classroom environments where teachers can teach, and students can learn, free from distractions caused by personal use of devices
- use of breaks as quality time away from screens, encouraging physical activity and play and meaningful face-to-face connections with peers.

## Bringing personal devices to school

Students are permitted to bring personal devices to school:

- as a measure to ensure their safety while travelling to and from school
- so parents and part-time employers can contact them outside of school hours
- so they can be contacted about their own child or a person under their care
- to be used during school hours in line with an exemption under this policy, if approved by the school.

Schools may encourage students not to bring mobile phones and personal devices to school unless necessary for these purposes.

## Student use of personal devices at school

All students are required to keep their personal devices 'off and away' between the start and end of each school day and while they are attending authorised school activities off-site, such as camps and excursions.

Students may only access their personal devices during these times if they have received an approved [exemption](#) from their school to use the device for a specific, agreed reason.

Access refers to both physical access, including wearing any wearable technology that fits the definition of personal devices in this policy, and remote access, such as connecting other technology to the personal device's hotspot or using headphones that are paired to the personal device.

It is compulsory for all government schools to follow this department-wide policy. There are some special provisions for [adult education and distance learning schools](#).

Students undertaking multi-campus study will follow the relevant local policies and instructions from

teachers while at each school location. Students undertaking off-site Vocational Education and Training or workplace placements will need to follow any expectations of that site or organisation regarding use of personal devices.

The policy provides some flexibility for individual schools to select and use strategies that suit the diverse needs of their community, within the overall policy framework.

## Local policy decisions

In line with this policy, each school will locally decide:

- where students will keep their personal devices during school hours
- whether teachers will be able to approve temporary exemptions for students to use personal devices for a learning activity or other agreed reason - and if so, how
- the consequences for non-compliance with the policy, in line with the school's local behaviour support policy.

This information must be captured in a local policy created using the provided [template](#) (staff login required).

This template outlines the policy information that applies to all schools, with indicated sections that can be customised to the local context. Schools may also include additional information or conditions beyond what is stated in the template, provided that it remains aligned with this department policy.

Important considerations for schools, when making local decisions, include the views and needs of the school community (including staff, students, and families) and the potential impact of any decisions on specific groups of students such as students with disability, students with English as an additional language or dialect, Aboriginal students, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and students who are vulnerable.

There is [further guidance information](#) (staff login required) available to assist schools with making local decisions in line with this policy and promoting community involvement.

The school's local policy needs to be endorsed or ratified by the governing council, which includes representatives of the school's student and parent communities, and state when it will next be reviewed.

Schools' local policies must be easily accessible to all staff, students, and families. It's recommended that the policy be published on the school's website in line with [school website content requirements](#) (staff login required).

## Storage of personal devices

Each school makes a local decision about how and where students' personal devices that are brought to school are stored during school hours. This could include:

- in an individual student locker
- in lockable pouches
- in the student's school bag

- in a secure storage location, such as a locked cupboard in the classroom or front office.

Students are required to turn their devices off or place them in flight mode before storing them in the location given in the school's local policy. This includes taking off any wearable technology that fits the policy's definition of personal devices, such as smart watches.

There is [further guidance information](#) (staff login required) available to assist schools when making local decisions about storage options for students' personal devices, including management of confiscated devices and considerations for storage options where parents may be asked to replace lost or damaged items (such as lockable pouches).

## Liability and damage, loss, or theft

The department does not provide insurance for accidental loss or damage to personal items including mobile phones and personal digital devices brought to schools by students. However, claims may be met under the department's public liability insurance where the loss or damage is attributable to a negligent act or omission on the part of the school.

Any incidents of loss or damage should be reported to the Claims Manager for advice on whether a claim may be met under the department's public liability insurance. Individual schools and staff members will not be held personally liable for these claims.

The department cannot waive liability with respect to mobile phones and personal devices. Therefore, statements suggesting that the school does not accept any responsibility or liability for personal devices that are brought to school should not be included in any information published by the school, such as local policies and user agreements (if in use).

Schools can contact the department's Claims Manager about any incidents of loss or damage via [education.LegalClaims@sa.gov.au](mailto:education.LegalClaims@sa.gov.au), or call (08) 8226 1822 to request urgent assistance, and for more information and specific guidance about how the school is managing mobile phones and personal devices.

## Exemptions from the policy

Students are not permitted to access their personal devices at any time during school hours or while they are attending authorised school activities unless they have received an approved exemption from their school in line with this policy.

Exemption approvals are subject to the student using their personal device appropriately and only for the specific, agreed purpose of their exemption.

There is [further guidance information](#) (staff login required) available to assist schools with managing approved exemptions and making local decisions about exemptions in line with this policy.

## Exceptional circumstances (all schools)

Individual students may have exceptional circumstances that require a longer-term (or indefinite) exemption from the requirements of the policy, including where:

- the device is used to monitor or help manage a health condition

- the device is a negotiated adjustment to a learning program for a student with disability or learning difficulties
- the device is used for translation in the classroom by a student with English as an additional language
- the student has extenuating personal circumstances that require them to have more ready access to their personal device, such as being a parent themselves or a primary carer to younger siblings or an unwell family member.

All requests for exemptions from parents or independent students on the above grounds must be considered by the principal or their delegate on a case-by-case basis.

Approved exemptions for these purposes must be documented in the student's health care plan, learning plan, or student file (as appropriate) and made accessible to their teachers, including temporary relief teachers.

## Teacher-led exemptions (optional)

Each school will determine, in consultation with their community, whether to include provision for any or all the following types of temporary exemptions in their local policy:

- the class teacher may, at their discretion, give permission for students (either on an individual or whole-class basis) to use their personal device in the classroom for a specific, agreed learning purpose
- individual students may negotiate with their class teachers on an ad-hoc basis if they wish to access a personal device for a specified non-educational purpose (such as employment or wellbeing reasons)
- the teacher-in-charge may determine (subject to planning approval from the principal in line with the [camps and excursions procedure \(PDF 447KB\)](#)) to allow students to bring personal devices on a camp or excursion for learning purposes or to facilitate contact with their families at specified and supervised times.

Individual teachers may only grant temporary exemptions to students if their school has adopted this provision, and must also adhere to any additional conditions outlined in the school's local policy – for example, a local decision that certain exemptions will only be made available to senior secondary students, or that a record is kept of each occasion that an exemption is granted.

If the school decides to permit this category of exemptions, teachers using them must also ensure:

- consideration is given to whether the same outcome can be achieved using school-owned resources or approved BYOD devices (which are connected to the school's network and internet) and prioritise the use of these learning devices wherever possible. This is because the school's networks can be managed in a way that protects students from accessing online content that is inappropriate, harmful, or illegal.
- all students have equitable access to learning and will not be disadvantaged if they do not have a personal device available to use at school.

- students are reminded to put their personal devices back 'off and away' at the conclusion of the exempted learning activity or lesson, and they may only be brought to future lessons with explicit teacher permission.

## Safe and responsible use of devices

While this policy is specific to managing student use of personal devices while they are at school, we know that most children and young people are also using digital technologies at home (and by extension, internet-based services including social media and gaming). Therefore, it is essential that schools and families work in partnership to support students to develop the skills needed to live and work in an increasingly digital world safely, responsibly, and respectfully.

This includes recognising how and when it is appropriate to use devices for personal and recreational purposes, and the importance of also going 'offline' each day to participate in physical activity and play, get quality sleep, be fully present in face-to-face social situations, and spend time doing other enjoyable things like reading, creative arts, and being outdoors. [Research](#) (staff login required) shows that balancing screen time with these other important activities is critical to promoting physical and mental health, social and emotional wellbeing, and healthy development for children and young people.

Adults, including school staff and parents, can support students to make positive choices by modelling responsible and respectful use of personal devices and helping children and young people develop the tools to self-manage their behaviour.

The [supporting information](#) (staff login required) includes:

- a range of educative resources for schools, including classroom resources tailored to different year level groups about topics such as online safety, respectful relationships, and using technology appropriately
- links to resources for students and families to learn more about positive and responsible use of devices, including strategies for healthy habits around technology use and advice for parents about popular social media platforms and how to set parental controls on devices.

## Responses to non-compliance

Schools should respond to students using a personal device for a non-exempted purpose, or using it inappropriately, in line with their local behaviour support policy (that is, responding to the behaviour rather than the device).

This could include reminding the student to put their device 'off and away', redirecting them to the appropriate task, consequences for repeated or intentional non-compliance with behaviour expectations, confiscation of the device, escalation to leadership, and contact with parents.

As a last resort, it may be necessary for schools to consider responses to non-compliance in line with the [suspension, exclusion and expulsion of students procedure \(PDF 1.3MB\)](#), including take-homes. Refer to [principles that inform suspension and exclusion decisions](#) (staff login required) for further information.

Schools should indicate in their local policy:

- if confiscation of a personal device is a possible consequence of non-compliance

- how and when the device will be returned to the student or their parent.

The [search and seizure procedure \(PDF 201KB\)](#) (staff login required) sets out that students' personal devices may be kept by school staff for short periods of time for instances of less-serious misuse, such as causing disruption in class. Devices confiscated in these circumstances should be returned to the owner (student or parent) at the end of the same school day, or prior.

Schools cannot keep seized devices for an extended period unless advised by South Australia Police. Schools must contact South Australia Police for advice if a student's personal device has been used to film an unlawful event, such as an assault.

Confiscation must occur with student cooperation. There is no lawful authority for school staff to use force to confiscate a device from a student. Where a student refuses to comply with a staff member's request to hand over their device, this is also managed in line with the school's behaviour support policy and escalating responses.

Further [supporting information](#) (staff login required) is available about recommended ways to ensure that any confiscated devices are securely stored and returned to the correct owner.

## Misuse or illegal use of devices

Incidents of misuse of personal devices may be in relation to:

- bullying and harassment
- transmission of explicit images
- photographing, recording, or uploading inappropriate content.

Where incidents occur during school hours, or in connection with the school, they must be managed and reported in line with departmental policies and procedures including:

- [reporting critical incidents, injuries, hazards and near misses procedure \(PDF 234KB\)](#) (staff login required)
- [behaviour support policy \(PDF 165KB\)](#)
- [suspension, exclusion and expulsion of students procedure \(PDF 1.3MB\)](#)
- [search and seizure procedure \(PDF 201KB\)](#) (staff login required)
- [responding to online safety incidents in South Australian schools guidelines \(PDF 401KB\)](#).

Government schools must refer any suspected illegal online behaviours to South Australia Police.

## Adult education and distance learning schools

A small number of government schools provide a [focus on adult education](#), including SACE completion options for re-entering adult students aged 21 years and over. Open Access College is a distance learning school where teaching and learning is undertaken primarily in an online learning environment, and also provides adult re-entry options.

In consideration of their unique circumstances, schools in this category are still required to have a local



policy on student use of mobile phones and personal devices, but it is not compulsory for them to take the 'off and away all day' approach required in all other schools.

Regardless of age, students are required to comply with any school policies and codes of conduct while they are enrolled at the school. It is a reasonable expectation that students in adult education settings, including SACE students who are aged under 18 years, will use personal devices responsibly and respectfully and in a way that does not disrupt the ability of the teacher to teach and for other students to learn (for example, placing devices on mute/silent and going outside of the classroom to make or receive phone calls where necessary).

Adult education and distance learning schools can [contact](#) the department's policy team for specific advice about developing their local policy under this provision.

## Roles and responsibilities

The following roles and responsibilities are outlined in the simplified policy template. Schools can add more information to this section of their local policy as appropriate to their context and their local decisions.

### Principal

Make sure:

- the school's local policy has been endorsed or ratified by governing council and is clearly communicated and accessible to all students, staff, and families
- there is a process for regular review of the school's local policy
- secure storage is provided for student personal devices that are handed in to school staff and individual lockers or locks that the school provides for students to store their belongings are appropriately secure (if applicable)
- processes are in place for monitoring internet and school network use by all members of the school community.

Enforce the policy and responses to instances of non-compliance.

Consider requests for exemptions from the policy from parents or independent students due to exceptional circumstances on a case-by-case basis. Make sure that approved exemptions in this category are documented and relevant staff, including temporary relief teachers, are informed about students with an exemption.

Model appropriate use of mobile phones and support school staff to do the same. Support families to understand the importance of promoting safe, responsible, and respectful use of mobile phones to their children.

Report and respond to incidents of inappropriate or illegal use of personal devices in line with department policy and procedures and any legal requirements.

## School staff

Deliver learning opportunities and maintain a safe and productive learning environment. Take steps to minimise distractions from the non-educational use of personal devices in the learning environment.

Respond to instances of non-compliance in line with the school's policy.

Report and respond to incidents of inappropriate use of personal devices in line with department policy and procedures and any legal requirements.

Ensure students who are given permission to access their personal device use it appropriately and only for the specified purpose, and store their personal devices away after the exempted activity has concluded.

Where applicable, approve temporary exemptions in line with the requirements of this policy and any additional conditions outlined in the school's local policy.

Make sure that any student personal devices handed in for their care are stored in a secure location and are returned to the student (or their parent) by the end of the same school day.

Model appropriate use of mobile phones and support families to understand the importance of promoting safe, responsible, and respectful use of mobile phones to their children. Use mobile phones for work-related/emergency purposes only when students are under their care.

## Students

Comply with the requirements of this policy and follow all reasonable directions from the principal and school staff.

Switch all personal devices off, or into flight mode, on arrival at school each day and store it away as specified in the school's local policy.

If permitted to use a mobile phone or personal device at school in line with a policy exemption, do so in a safe, responsible, and respectful way and support peers to do the same.

Communicate respectfully with others and do not use a mobile phone or other personal device to bully, harass, or threaten another person.

Respect others' rights to privacy and do not take photos, film, or audio records of other people without their knowledge or permission.

Notify a school staff member as soon as possible if feeling unwell or experiencing any other issues at school. Use the school's sign-out process in all cases where requiring early collection from school.

## Parents

Support the implementation of the school's local policy, including the consequences for non-compliance with the policy.

Encourage their children not to bring a personal device to school unless necessary. Understand that the department does not provide insurance for accidental loss or damage to personal property that is brought onto school grounds. However, claims may be met under the department's public liability insurance where

the loss or damage is attributable to a negligent act or omission on the part of the school.

Use the school's formal communication channels in all instances to communicate with the school or to make contact with their child during school hours (including where a student requires early collection from school). Encourage their child to always report to a school staff member in the first instance if they become unwell or experience an issue at school.

Recognise the important role they play in supporting their child to use their mobile phone (or other personal device) in a safe, responsible, and respectful way.

## Definitions

### mobile phones and personal devices

The devices covered by this policy include:

- mobile phones and smart phones
- smart watches and other wearable devices that can send and/or receive calls and messages and/or connect to an internet network
- laptops, iPads, tablets that are not owned by the school, and were not brought to school by the student under a separate BYOD agreement
- any other digital devices with capability of connecting to a cellular communication network, the internet, or both.

### school

A government school (where primary or secondary education or both is, or is to be, provided), special purpose school, or special school established under the [Education and Children's Services Act 2019](#). This includes preschools situated at a government school.

### parent

For the purposes of this policy, the term parent refers to all persons responsible for the child. A person responsible for the child means a person who is the child's:

- biological parent, adoptive parent or other person recognised as a parent if the child was conceived following a fertilisation procedure or under a surrogacy arrangement
- guardian
- person standing in loco parentis.

This does not include a person who has had their legal custody, guardianship or responsibility for the child removed by a court, Act or law. As an example, a biological parent who has had their custody, guardianship or parental responsibility for the child removed by a parenting order made under Family Law Act 1975 is not a person responsible for the child.

## guardian

A person who has legal guardianship or custody of a child.

## in loco parentis

A person acting in a parental style relationship with a child, where the person has intended to place themselves in the position of a parent toward a child and has assumed the same duty and authority as a parent with respect to the nurturing, control and protection of a child. A person in loco parentis may include a person:

- in a de facto relationship with a child's biological parent where they have assumed responsibility for the child
- who has taken over care of a child after the death of both biological parents, or where there has been a family breakdown and the child is estranged from both biological parents
- In an informal fostering arrangement.

This person does not have to assume any or all financial responsibility for a child to satisfy this definition.

## secure storage

Storage that cannot be readily accessed by those without permission to do so (such as a locked receptacle).

## Supporting information

The following resources relate to mobile phones in schools, e-crime, online bullying, and cyber safety:

[Student use of mobile phones and personal devices at school \(supporting information and resources\)](#) (staff login required)

[Bullying \(including cyberbullying\)](#) (staff login required)

[Bullying Prevention Strategy \(PDF 5.5MB\)](#)

[Cyber safety school resources](#) (staff login required)

[Keeping safe: child protection curriculum](#) (staff login required)

[eSafety Commissioner](#)

[Australian Curriculum](#)

## Related policies

[Local policy template – Student use of mobile phones and personal devices](#) (staff login required)

[Behaviour support policy \(PDF 165KB\)](#)

[ICT acceptable use agreement template](#) (staff login required)

[ICT cyber security standard \(PDF 490KB\)](#)

[Machinery, equipment and electrical safety standard \(PDF 270KB\)](#)

[Reporting critical incidents, injuries, hazards and near misses procedure \(PDF 234KB\)](#) (staff login required)

[Responding to online safety incidents in South Australian schools guidelines \(PDF 401KB\)](#)

[Search and seizure procedure \(PDF 201KB\)](#)

[Social media policy](#)

[Suspension, exclusion and expulsion of students procedure \(PDF 1.3MB\)](#)

## Related legislation

[Disability Discrimination Act 1992 \(Cth\)](#)

[Equal Opportunity Act 1984 \(SA\)](#)

## Record history

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## Approvals

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Policy officer: A/Principal Policy Adviser, Conditions for Learning

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Approved by: Executive Director, Partnerships, Schools and Preschools

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## Revision record

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Amendment(s): Updated policy in line with State Government commitment to ban student access to personal devices across all year levels except where an exemption has been provided. Transfer of guiding advice and recommendations to the supporting information and resources.

Version: 1.1

Approved by: Director, Conditions for Learning

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Version: 1.0

Approved by: Executive Director, Partnerships, Schools and Preschools

Approved date: 12 January 2021

Review date: 12 January 2024

Amendment(s): New policy implemented.

## Contact

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