



See the Signs

Staff Meeting Scenario Pack

An invaluable resource designed to help your team explore what digital distress might look like and how to deploy the right tools to strengthen student support.



Overview

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In today's world, most early warning signs of student distress no longer show up in the playground or classroom — they appear online. That means staff can't rely on "eyes and ears" alone to spot risk.

To intervene early, schools need both human insight and digital visibility.

Technology can now help staff see behind the screen, making hidden patterns and concerns more visible, before they escalate.

This scenario pack is designed to help your team explore what digital distress might look like, and how combining professional judgement with the right tools can strengthen student support.

Scenario 1:

The AI Confidant — Replacing Real Relationships

The situation:

A Year 9 student has become noticeably more withdrawn over the term. They no longer speak openly with friends, have stopped seeking help from staff, and often appear distracted in class. In recent digital submissions, the student references an AI chatbot they “talk to about everything” and claim it “understands me better than any teacher or parent.”

They don’t appear to be violating any school rules, and academically, they’re still performing well, but a pattern of social isolation and emotional reliance on the chatbot is growing. Staff might not notice unless they happen to read between the lines or overhear a comment.

What technology might reveal:

- Late-night use patterns outside healthy boundaries
- Repeated mentions of emotionally charged terms in writing or searches (e.g. “no one listens”, “I’m alone”, “don’t trust adults”)
- Sudden drop in peer interactions or digital engagement with teachers
- Spikes in usage of AI chatbots like Replika, Character.AI, or similar
- Lack of human interaction on school platforms despite being online frequently

Why it matters:

While the chatbot might feel like a safe space for the student, it can reinforce withdrawal from real relationships. AI tools are not capable of true empathy, and they aren’t designed with child wellbeing or nuance in mind. Some may provide

well-meaning but unsafe advice, or facilitate problematic role-play that normalises dependency or unhealthy emotional habits.

Staff discussion prompts:

- What are the digital or behavioural signals that this student may be relying on AI in place of trusted adults or peers?
- How could tools like keyword detection, usage pattern analytics, or wellbeing check-ins have helped staff identify this earlier?
- How might we open a restorative conversation with the student that respects their autonomy but rebuilds trust with real people?
- What coordinated supports (e.g. wellbeing team, year adviser) could help reintegrate them into peer and staff support systems?
- What guidance or boundaries do we need to give students around AI as a tool vs. a “friend”?

Key insight for staff:

This scenario reflects a growing challenge: students turning to AI not just for answers, but for emotional validation. While it may seem harmless, it can mask deeper isolation. Technology can help schools surface these hidden signs — if they know where to look.

Scenario 2:

The Tired Gamer — Sleep and Safety Risks

The situation:

A Year 8 student is consistently tired in class, often arriving late or with red eyes and low energy, and has also started drinking energy drinks like Red Bull. They have missed several homework assignments, and when prompted, mention they've been playing online games through the night. Teachers report increasing irritability, reduced collaboration in group tasks, and avoidance of physical activity.

What technology might reveal:

- Heavy overnight device usage or login records linked to gaming platforms
- Absences or reduced engagement during morning lessons
- Decline in wellbeing survey responses or check-ins
- Changes in sentiment or participation in digital learning platforms

Why it matters:

Disrupted sleep from excessive gaming can affect concentration, mood, and academic performance. More importantly, prolonged fatigue and digital escapism may signal deeper emotional stress, social isolation, or even dependency behaviours that can escalate.

Staff discussion prompts:

- What digital usage patterns might suggest a student is gaming unsafely or excessively?
- How can schools approach this issue collaboratively with families?
- How do we differentiate between casual gaming and signs of digital dependency?
- What routines or expectations can we establish with students to support healthier digital habits?

Key insight for staff:

Gaming isn't inherently harmful, but when it disrupts sleep and learning, it's a red flag. Digital tools can help staff see the invisible signs of fatigue and disengagement that might otherwise be explained away.

Scenario 3:

Trend Trouble — Viral Pressure and Risky Behaviour

The situation:

Multiple Year 10 students begin reenacting a viral TikTok trend involving pranks on teachers and damage to school property. The trend escalates when a student gets hurt, and several others post videos of the incident online, framing it as “just a joke.” Parents are confused, and some students show no awareness of the potential consequences.

What technology might reveal:

- Spikes in TikTok access or specific search terms linked to the trend
- Shared videos circulating via messaging apps, learning devices or private channels
- Peer feedback or incident reports rising in correlation with online content

Why it matters:

Social media algorithms can amplify risky behaviours by rewarding visibility and engagement. Students may be driven by peer validation without fully processing the harm. Technology can help schools monitor emerging trends and act early.

Staff discussion prompts:

- What platform features (e.g. algorithm loops, reaction metrics) may be influencing student behaviour?
- How can we integrate the use of digital tools to detect and respond to trends gaining traction?
- Could student digital leaders be part of the solution?
- How might this incident be used as a learning opportunity for ethical digital engagement?

Key insight for staff:

This scenario highlights the intersection between online culture and offline harm. Digital tools and student voice can be critical in shifting trends from reactive punishment to proactive awareness.

Scenario 4:

Red Flags in Group Chats — Exclusion and Image Abuse

The situation:

A Year 7 student stops participating in class forums and becomes unusually withdrawn. Friends later mention the student was removed from a popular group chat after a manipulated image of them was shared. The student refuses to use their device in school and avoids social spaces.

What technology might reveal:

- A drop in the student's digital activity or sudden silence in previously active channels
- Flagged keywords or reports from peers referencing bullying, exclusion or nude image takedown advice
- An image file shared repeatedly across platforms that breaches student safety protocols

Why it matters:

Group chat dynamics are often hidden from staff but are central to students' social lives. A single image can cause lasting damage to confidence, relationships, and school engagement. Digital tools can reveal these incidents earlier and guide appropriate responses.

Staff discussion prompts:

- How might schools use tools to detect exclusion, image abuse or inappropriate content sharing?
- How can we support bystanders to speak up safely?
- What messages do students need to hear about consent and digital reputation?
- How do we rebuild digital trust with the affected student?

Key insight for staff:

Exclusion often happens in private channels. In addition to staff "eyes and ears," schools need tools to reveal those invisible ruptures and policies that centre empathy, accountability, and inclusion.

Scenario 5:

The High-Achiever in Crisis — Hidden Escalation

The situation:

A usually confident Year 11 student starts missing deadlines, avoids eye contact, and appears increasingly anxious. Staff notice subtle signs: a quiet demeanour, decreased class participation, and vague comments about “being behind on everything.” Background logs show late-night use of Replika and Reddit, and a spike in concerning search terms around stress, burnout, and not sleeping.

What technology might reveal:

- Regular usage of AI chatbot apps for late-night conversation
- Repetitive search patterns related to mental health decline
- Missed digital check-ins or noticeable drop in digital participation
- Reduced collaboration with peers on shared platforms

Why it matters:

High-achieving students often mask distress until it becomes critical. Digital footprints can reveal when they’re silently struggling. AI chats may offer perceived relief but reduce help-seeking from real adults. Schools need to balance academic expectations with pastoral care.

Staff discussion prompts:

- What red flags might digital tools surface in high-performing students?
- How can staff raise concern without adding pressure?
- What internal supports (e.g. school psychologist, academic tutor, wellbeing team) can step in early?

Key insight for staff:

Sometimes the students who seem “perfectly fine” are the most at risk. Technology can help illuminate hidden struggles in students who are reluctant to ask for help.

Scenario 6:

Misogyny in the Making — Subtle but Serious Shifts

The situation:

A Year 10 male student begins making provocative comments in class, echoing misogynistic themes. Friends report feeling uncomfortable, and digital monitoring reveals visits to forums promoting incel culture and repeat views of extreme content on YouTube and Discord.

What technology might reveal:

- Frequent visits to known radicalising websites or echo chambers
- Use of coded or harmful language in forums or group chats
- Changes in sentiment and tone in online interactions

Why it matters:

Unchecked exposure to harmful ideologies can radicalise young people and contribute to a culture of disrespect or even violence. Digital insights provide staff with a chance to intervene early, while the behaviour is still forming.

Staff discussion prompts:

- How can staff intervene when harmful beliefs begin to surface?
- What digital monitoring strategies could detect this early?
- How do we address this with the student without shaming or escalating?
- How can we reinforce healthy masculinity and respect within the peer group?

Key insight for staff:

These behaviours rarely begin overnight. With the right tools and trusted relationships, schools can intervene before these ideologies take deeper root.



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