

NEIL, CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY APPRENTICE

FOR ALL VET
SECTOR STAFF
EMPLOYERS
HOSTING VET
STUDENTS

Case study 1

CASE DESCRIPTION

Neil (he/him) is a 19-year-old apprentice construction worker who is undertaking his apprenticeship course at your medium-sized private RTO.

He has been found on a building site taking risks on scaffolding and not using safety gear. The supervisor was worried as this was out of character for Neil. He asked Neil if everything was okay. Neil said he was being bullied on site and that this was having a big impact on his mental health. He felt so bad that some days he even thought about suicide.

The supervisor has contacted you with concerns as you are part of the leadership team at the RTO. In checking with classroom staff, you discover Neil has also had difficulties with some of the written tasks for the course and is behind in submitting work. Educators report that he is a quiet student and classroom staff didn't realise he was struggling.

Administration staff also let you know that Neil is behind in course fees, but there was no other reason to think he might be struggling.



BEST PRACTICE: EARLY INTERVENTION

1. Advise Neil about the support services available during enrolment.

As a young male apprentice in a male-dominated industry, Neil is statistically unlikely to reach out for help. However, if the message was conveyed at numerous points that support was available and encouraged, Neil may have felt more comfortable reaching out for help. This could include:

- information in enrolment packs about where to reach out for support
- information in enrolment packs about workplace safety and your policies about bullying and discrimination, and where to go for support
- an activity during orientation to prompt students to think about who supports them e.g. family, friends, professional services, your organisation, and how to access these supports. Reiterating that help is available and encouraged normalises help-seeking
- promoting help-seeking to cohorts with known barriers, such as young men
- working with partner employees to develop policies on bullying and promoting support systems, and informing Neil how to reach out for support with workplace issues.

2. Continue to remind Neil about supports throughout his enrolment with you.

This information should be sent at regular intervals to all students. It can even be included in a signature on staff emails, so students are reminded regularly that support is available and are likely to see it at the time that they need it.

3. Contact Neil for a conversation when he falls behind on fees.

If possible engage with him face-to-face or by phone.

4. Develop policies which identify and respond to potential problems.

If a student falls behind on their fees, have a response embedded in policy. For example, a supportive phone call to enquire how your organisation can help. Be prepared to discuss broader issues which are impacting their capacity to pay.

5. Contact Neil for a conversation when he falls behind with work.

If possible engage with him face-to-face or by phone.

6. Develop plans or processes to identify and respond to potential problems.

If a student falls behind in their coursework, stops attending, or the quality of their work starts to decline, have a response embedded in policy. For example, after two missed classes, educators contact the student to discuss what is happening and ask if they require any support to attend. Again, they need to be prepared to discuss broader issues which may be impacting the student, such as housing problems or mental ill-health.

7. Notice how Neil is in class.

Ensure educators have sufficient training to recognise if a student is struggling with their mental health. For example withdrawing from peers, appearing angry or sad a lot of the time, expressing hopeless thoughts, ceasing participation.

8. When you notice changes in baseline behaviours, have a supportive conversation.

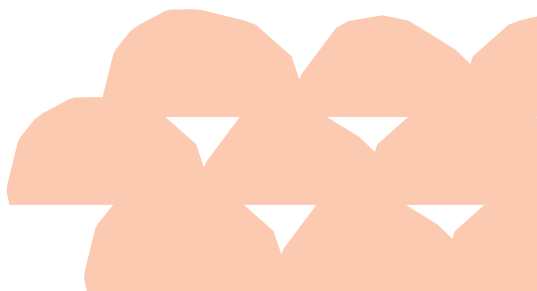
In a place where the student feels comfortable and safe, tell them what you've noticed and why you're worried. Then you can help the student to find appropriate support. Remember, as a young male apprentice in a mainly male industry, Neil is statistically unlikely to reach out for help. However, if offered support in a private, caring conversation, he might be more comfortable accepting support, which would likely prevent the situation from deteriorating.

9. Develop a whole-of-organisation or business approach. Embed these steps in policy and practice.

Also focus on building a supportive culture and raising awareness about mental health.

Actions include:

- schedule annual training days for staff, conducted by an external agency who specialise in early detection and management of mental health issues.
- have support information available such as posters or pamphlets placed on walls or in areas where students can discreetly access.



INTERVENTION AT THE CURRENT POINT: CRISIS RESPONSE

1. Check for imminent risk.

The supervisor who is with Neil must check whether Neil has a plan of how and when to end his life. If he does, the supervisor needs to call 000.

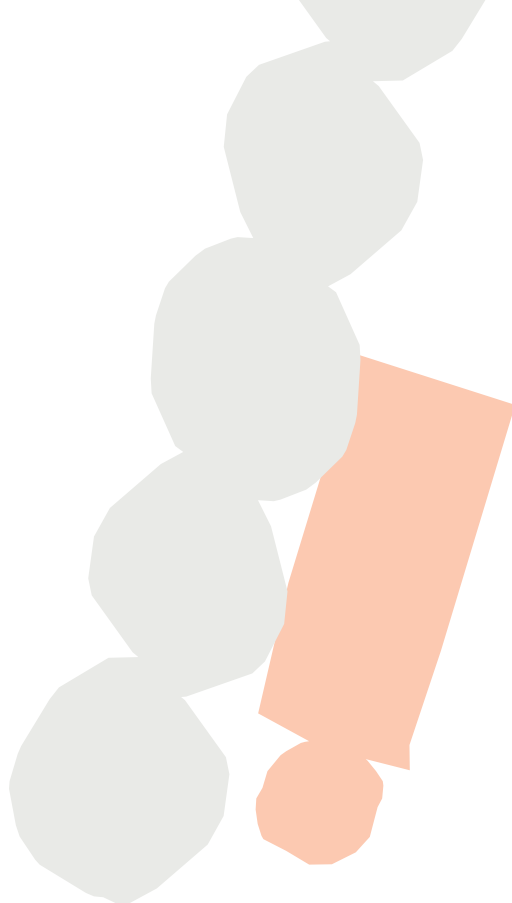
2. Explore supports.

If Neil does not have a plan, the supervisor needs to help Neil find support both for his mental health and to address the bullying on site. The supervisor can:

- Investigate and offer a range of services, whether they're industry-specific, tailored to young men, or other options.
- Explain what these services can offer and how to access them.
- Give choice where you can and come up with a shared plan. The supervisor could say: "Often when people feel like this, it helps to talk to someone about it. We have a few options we can talk through and then you can let me know which you think would be the most helpful right now." For Neil, this might include:
 - MensLine (free help, support, referrals and counselling for men)
 - headspace (support for 12 to 25 year olds)
 - Asking Neil if he has a trusted GP he can see, who can then refer him to professional support services. Don't forget to inform him of funding for psychological treatment through a mental health treatment plan
 - Talking to Neil about his informal supports (family or friends he could contact) and working with him to determine whether and when he could reach out to them, such as during signs of distress. Add numbers or other details to his phone so the information is accessible if he is distressed and not thinking clearly
 - Work with the employer partner to address the bullying, their responsibilities, and how you can work together to support students. Seek Neil's input regarding how he would like to do this. You may want to seek support or look at resources on mental health at work and/or bullying together, such as [WorkSafe Australia](#) and [beyondblue](#).

3. Continue to check in with Neil.

Has the support provided met his needs? If not, what else would support him at this time?



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Disclaimer The 'supporting VET student mental health and wellbeing' resources (the Resources) are designed to assist registered training organisations (RTOs) to understand relevant legislation and policy, as well as the application of that legislation/policy to the provision of vocational education and training to support student mental health and wellbeing.

The information contained in the Resources is intended only as a guide to relevant legislation and policy and does not constitute legal advice, impose additional legal obligations on RTOs or purport to provide binding interpretations of legislative obligations (for example, those under the *2025 Standards for Registered Training Organisation (RTOs) (Commonwealth)*, the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Commonwealth)*, and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Commonwealth)*).

The information contained in the Resources is accurate as at the date of publication. RTOs should seek legal advice specific to their individual circumstances to understand their legal obligations. For any questions about the Resources, please contact the [Department of Employment and Workplace Relations](#).

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