

Severe Issue

There are four issues for which students may use Alongside that are considered severe and trigger safety protocols. These are a) suicidal ideation, b) homicidal ideation, b) abuse/harassment, or c) someone else at risk of harm. Alongside follows slightly different protocols depending on the type of severe issue.

Response Protocols by Issue

(a) Suicidal Ideation

- The chatbot assesses risk by administering a standardized measure (Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale, CSSRS).
- The student is connected with the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
- The student is told that a notification will be sent to their school team during school hours.
- A notification with the student's name, the message that triggered the alert, additional comments from the student, and the results of the screener is sent to a designated school and/or district contact via email and text, timed in accordance with school parameters.
- The chatbot helps the student create a safety plan (based on SAMHSA) that includes identifying warning signs, creating a safe environment, crisis coping strategies, and who to reach out to for additional support.

High Risk Support

In addition to all the procedures above

- Students who are high risk according to the CSSRS are directed to call 988 or 911
 - **Parent contact:** Students are asked to share a parent contact, and parent(s) are sent a text message explaining their child is reporting suicidal ideation and [information](#) on how to support their child

(b) Homicidal Ideation

- The student is connected with the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.
- The student is told that a notification will be sent to their school team during school hours.
- A notification with the student's name, the message that triggered the alert, and additional comments from the student is sent to a designated school and/or district contact via email and text, timed in accordance with school parameters.
- The chatbot helps the student develop a safety plan regarding homicidal urges

(c) Abuse, Bullying, or Harassment

This category includes both fear of harm from an adult or peer and prior or ongoing physical, sexual, or verbal abuse. This also includes bullying that is occurring at school and the student reports prior, current, or fear of physical harm or significant emotional distress.

- The student is led to a crisis hotline (ChildHelp or National Domestic Violence)
- The student is told that a notification will be sent to their school team during school hours.
- A notification with the student's name, the message that triggered the alert, and additional comments from the student is sent to a designated school and/or district contact via email and text, timed in accordance with school parameters.
- The chatbot helps the student develop a safety plan on how to stay physically safe.

(d) Someone Else is Struggling

- The student is encouraged to contact a trusted adult (a teacher, coach, counselor, or parent) and encouraged to contact a crisis hotline for additional support (988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, etc.).
- The student is directed to share a message with their school counselor if they are concerned about someone else at their school.

Notifications

Each school determines its notification preferences. Notifications are provided via text and/or email. Notifications may be sent to different individuals based on the time of day and/or day of the week. Staff who receive notifications can view a dashboard of all alerts when they log into the app via a computer at app.alongside.care

Frequently Asked Questions

Do the students know about the notifications?

Yes, All student users are told we will be notifying their school if they report any of these issues in their first chat. In addition, there is a banner at the top of the chat to remind them. When we do send a notification, the student is given the opportunity to add a message to the notification to share more information.

How many notifications can I expect to receive?

Across the year, on average we see less than 2% of all students in a school reporting a severe issue (leading to a notification). During roll-out days, a large number of students use the app thus it is common to have multiple safety notifications on roll-out days. We therefore recommend counselors are aware and ready to support students on roll-out days.

Can different people receive notifications over the weekend?

Yes, you can have different people receive notifications based on the day of the week and or time of day. You can also turn off notifications for non-school hours.

Can we stop notifications over winter or spring break?

Yes, we can set a holiday schedule and all notifications will be stopped and provided when school is back in session for short breaks. If you would like the students to retain access over summer break we do request that there is at least one person receiving notifications. We typically have significantly decreased notifications over the summer break.

How can I track all my notifications over time? I am worried they will get lost!

You can see all severe issue notifications by logging into app.alongside.care on a laptop. At the bottom click on "Alerts". You will not be able to see it on a tablet, ipad or phone (too much information to show).

Will I get false positive notifications?

We ask students to confirm they are struggling with a severe issue which limits false positives as occasionally we will detect something like "I worked out so hard, I am dying" as a severe issue due to the reference to dying. Anytime a student denies they are struggling with a severe issue a trained mental health clinician (psychologist) reviews what they wrote and ensures they are not actually at risk. Upon clinician review, if the student did write they intend to harm themselves, someone else, or are experiencing abuse we will send you a notification.

What happens if a student writes about a severe issue but then immediately stops using the app?

If a student confirms they are experiencing a severe issue and turns off the app we automatically generate a notification within 30 minutes. You will receive as much information as they complete.

I am worried about students who are being bullied, how do you support them?

If a student talks about bullying we ask them to share more about what is happening. If they disclose it is happening at school and there is current, prior, or fear of physical harm or significant emotional distress, we will send a notification to you.

Why do some notifications have more information than others?

We give the student up to 30 minutes to complete the screener and add a message to the counselor. If they do not complete these within 30 minutes we send you a notification with as much information as we have to ensure you can act on any time-sensitive concerns.

Why am I getting a notification the next day?

- A) Your school may have requested to not send notifications during certain hours or over the weekend. This means that you will receive all notifications from “after hours” at the start of the next “in office” hours block
- B) A trained mental health clinician (psychologist) reviews all chats where a student said they are not experiencing a severe issue within 24 hours. For students who did actually report a severe issue we generate a notification that will note “student denied they were in crisis”. These emails are sent within 24 hours during the week.

Will you ever call me or reach out about notifications in other ways?

We monitor to make sure all safety notifications are opened within 24 hours. If you do not open a safety notification within 24 hours (based on when you want notifications) we will reach out to ensure you received it.

Do you contact parents if students don't share their parents' contact details?

We seek to comply with and integrate into existing district or school protocols which require school personnel to directly report concerns and contact a parent. Additionally, as students are connected to a trained 988 counselor who can assess risk and send emergency services as needed, both our school

advisory board and experts from the Columbia lighthouse project have recommended parental contact via school personnel (over an automated message) is in the best interest of students as school personnel have the proper training and knowledge to support students and families. Finally, this approach encourages student autonomy in a time when many things can feel out of control. If your district or state mandates autonomous parental safety notifications we are happy to discuss how we can integrate into existing notification systems.