Handout

Responding to Misinformation, Disinformation and Mal-information

Directions: *Read the tips[1] for how to avoid believing in and sharing misinformation, disinformation and mal-information, then cut them up along the dotted lines and place them into categories.*

Develop Healthy Scepticism

Be aware that you cannot trust everything you read, hear and see, and that, with generative AI, it makes it easier to make false content, including images, videos and audio. Healthy scepticism does not mean doubting everything. Find reputable news and information sources that share content responsibly and that can be fact-checked. Be critical about what your family and friends share – a lot of misinformation is spread through peer-to-peer networks, like social media, because people tend to trust those they know.

Do Not Create or Share Mal-information

Sharing true or exaggerated information with the intent to harm someone is never acceptable. If you have been provoked by someone, rather than seeking revenge, find a constructive way to address the issue, speak to an adult, and, importantly, give yourself time to calm down before taking any action.

Engage with a Range of Views

Read a variety of news sources, comparing how they report on the same events and assessing if/how they are trying to shape your response. For contentious issues, seek out the opinions of experts, scholars and reputable journalists, and evaluate if/how they differ in their perspectives. Be wary of non-experts pushing their opinions and anonymous accounts: not all opinions are of equal worth.

Be Aware of Your Biases

We all have biases that shape how we view others and the world around us. Be aware of the role your biases can play in how you respond to content you consume.

Shape What You Consume

Algorithms respond to how you behave online. Avoid clickbait, shape your social media algorithm through active engagement (likes/follows), and try to avoid being stuck in an echo-chamber by following a diversity of information sources and people with different viewpoints.

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[1] Some of these tips are adapted from the explainer 'How to navigate online disinformation and propaganda and practicing information resilience', Center for Countering Digital Hate, 9 October 2023.

Check Your Emotional Response

Does content provoke outrage, fear, sadness, anger or even smugness in you? If so, try to assess what the source might have to gain from triggering your emotions. If something puts you in an emotional state, then do additional checks before re-sharing it. Be aware that some distressing content is made for the purpose of propaganda and/or to feed into people's underlying fears to manipulate them.

Verify Information Before Sharing

Check the reliability and accuracy of information before you share it. Do fact-checking and research to see if the content is also being shared by multiple and reputable sources, such as trustworthy news outlets, which abide by stricter codes of conduct than social media users. Check that the content is current – images, videos and articles from past events are often re-circulated during times of crisis – and remember that going viral is not an indication of accuracy.

Stay Alert and Check for Accuracy

Research has shown that people are more likely to share and believe misinformation if they are distracted because this means they are not thinking analytically. Limit your time on social media, be a conscious scroller and before you share anything ask yourself 'does this look trustworthy and accurate?'. Accuracy nudges reduce the sharing of misinformation.

Counter Your Negativity Bias

Humans have a negativity bias: they are more likely to be attentive to and remember negative content. From an evolutionary perspective, this is because negative information was more important than positive information for survival. If you notice you are consuming negative information about an individual, group or place, try to seek out positive stories to reduce the impacts of this bias.

Avoid the Lure of Simplicity

Be wary of those who offer simple solutions to complex problems, who use scapegoating as a tool to assign blame, and who push you to think in binary ways. The world is not black and white. Such simplified thinking can stop you addressing and responding to the root causes of problems.

Avoid Engaging with Trolls and Bots

Trolls attack people, ideas and organisations to provoke conflict and discredit them. Engaging with trolls is not only stressful, it can also mean their content reaches more people. Bots can also have malicious intentions, spreading lies and hate – check if an account is a bot by assessing what, when and how often it posts; if it follows lots of people, but has few followers; and what other accounts it interacts with. Block, mute or report trolls and bots that break platform rules, but don't engage.