An internet we trust
Exploring reliability in the online world

Safer Internet Day 2021 | UK Safer Internet Centre

What to trust online? A Parents and Carers Guide

This sheet aims to give you the confidence and understanding to discuss this year's Safer Internet Day theme, '**An internet we trust: exploring reliability in an online world**' with your child.

Some young people will know false and misleading content exists online but some may be new to the idea that you can't trust everything you see on the internet. Regular discussion can help them to develop the habit of questioning and evaluating what they see online.

How are children and young people experiencing false or misleading content online?

Some examples are below, but the best expert on this is your child themselves! Ask your child what they like to do online and where they go to find things out to help start this conversation.

What are the risks of false or misleading online content?

These vary depending on the motive and the context. Risks posed by false or misleading content online might include:

- Creating fear/anger/panic
- Spending money on products sold under false pretences
- Public opinion affected by inaccurate information
- Personal harm or injury e.g. fake weight loss claims
- Physical damage e.g. inaccurate instructions to fix a broken phone screen
- Negative impact on well-being e.g. feeling targeted or powerless

How do you fact-check online content?

If you see something confusing, suspicious, alarming, or even too good to be true online, the tips below can help you decide whether you can trust it or not.

Consider the source	Where/who has this information come from and do we have reason to trust it? (E.g. An advert will always want to make the product being sold sound good to convince us to buy it!)
Consider the motive	Why is this information online? Is someone getting paid to post it, or trying to influence public opinion? (E.g. A political campaign will always want to make it sound like their candidate is the best choice!)
Consider your own knowledge	What do you know about this already? Does what you see online say the same or something different? Do you know enough to decide whether to trust it? If not, then more research is needed.
Check several sources	Check another website, watch another video or read a different article. The more sources that say the same thing, and the more reliable those sources, the more likely it is that the information can be trusted.
What are other people saying?	Reach out to friends or family members to get a second opinion. What are others are saying online in comments, reviews, or ratings? Remember, there is a chance these could be influenced by financial or personal gain too.
Use a fact-check website	There are independent organisations out there who find, uncover and counter any false or misleading claims going around online. In the UK, this is fullfact.org.
Take action	The last thing we want to do is spread inaccurate information further. Consider reporting it, or letting friends and family know it can't be trusted. Maybe leave a comment, but don't share it on!

How can I support my child in recognising false or misleading content?

Talk together
Talk regularly with your child about how they use technology and where they go for information online. Discuss who they follow, what types of adverts they see and what stories they find surprising or suspicious. Listening to your child will give you the best possible idea of how you can support them. Not sure where to begin? Have a look at our suggested 'Conversation starters' for parents and carers.

Set an example
If you come across a fake news story, or get sent a phishing email, discuss with your child how you spotted it and what you did. Why not ask them for a second opinion? Your child may have already heard about it or seen something similar, and if not, it's a learning opportunity for both of you. Seeing a parent actively question and evaluate online content teaches young people the importance of doing the same.

Think before you share
It can be tempting to share surprising or attention-grabbing online content with your child or your family group chats, but make sure to fact-check these links before you do. As it's come from a parent, some children may believe it without questioning it, and older children may find it difficult or awkward to point out if it is false or misleading. This is another chance to set a good example in how to share information responsibly online.

Check in with your child
False and misleading content online can be upsetting and confusing, e.g. harmful claims that target specific groups, or unhealthy lifestyle tips. Young people may feel powerless when faced with the amount of unreliable content they see. Regularly check-in with your child about their online life and ask them how what they see makes them feel. This is an issue that affects all of us. Reassure your child that you are there to talk about things that upset them and to support them with how they feel.

Seek help and support
Just as we ask young people to talk about what they are unsure of, make sure you do too! Chances are that you'll find other parents or carers who are trying to figure out how to help their family avoid false information and get the most out of the internet.

Find out how to get more support by visiting Childnet's 'Need Help?' page. You can take steps to support your child online by using features such as making a report on a range of apps, games and services, and using privacy settings on social media.

For more advice, visit Childnet's key advice for parents and carers here:
childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/critical-thinking

Glossary

Clickbait	Text or images designed to catch the attention of the viewer and encourage them to click it. Owners of pages with clickbait get paid from advertisers based on the number of clicks/views.
Conspiracy theories	Often spread unofficially through social media channels or online discussion forums, popular conspiracy theories often suggest powerful people and organisations are involved in secret plots supposedly behind real-world events.
Disinformation	Inaccurate information shared on purpose to confuse, mislead or influence.
Edited images and videos	When photos and videos are changed using online software (e.g. to make them look more 'impressive', to create a more finished product, or even to change their meaning).
Fake news	A form of news involving inaccurate information that might be shared on purpose or by mistake. This term is now used by many people in lots of different ways, for anything online thought to be false, misleading, or inaccurate.
Influencer	Someone who recommends or promotes items or services on their social media accounts to their (usually) large number of followers.
Misinformation	Inaccurate information shared by accident that could confuse, mislead or influence.
'Perfect' profiles and lifestyles	When online users present their lives online in a way that could be highly desirable by others. This may or may not be an accurate representation of their true lives.
Scams and phishing	Attempts to steal login or bank details using fake emails or messages that appear official, e.g. an email that looks as if it is from your bank asking you to submit your account details for verification.
Sponsored content	Online content which an advertiser has paid to appear. Often designed to look 'natural' or 'real'. Usually associated with social media influencers.
Targeted advertising	Advertising that is aimed at you based on both your online activity and your identity (e.g. gender, age, location, ethnicity, etc.)