Safe Connections

Empowering young minds online.

MISINFORMATION, MALINFORMATION, DISINFORMATION, AND FAKE NEWS

While these terms may sound similar and all relate to the spread of inaccurate news, information, and/or imagery which can cause tremendous harm, there are significant differences between them-primarily in terms of their intent.

- Misinformation is false information that spreads, regardless of intent, to mislead others.

- Disinformation is content deliberately created to harm, manipulate or mislead.

- Not all misinformation is disinformation, but all disinformation is misinformation.

- Malinformation is content based on fact, but purposely taken out of context to mislead, harm, or manipulate.

- Fake News is sometimes intended for satirical purposes; research has shown this type of news actually travels faster and influences more people than real news.

Social media has considerably amplified each of these bad online behaviors. One way this happens is their promotion through "echo chambers," which connect, bind together, and isolate online communities and groups with similar views. This phenomenon easily facilitates the contagion effect of falsehoods and fake news, while impeding awareness to factual corrections. Meanwhile, it has been suggested that a "well-crafted lie" will receive more engagements than authentic content, which only exacerbates and accelerates their distribution.[1]

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO TALK ABOUT THE NEWS WITH TODAY'S YOUNG PEOPLE?

Misinformation, Malinformation, Disinformation, and Fake News can generate confusion, prejudice, fear, and mistrust. They can also significantly influence people's well-being and anxiety levels. One in five children and young people report believing everything they read online is true.[2] By talking with children and young people about the news, you will help them learn to question it and work out for themselves if they trust it. Although you can safely assume children will discuss what they see with their peers, they are also most likely to talk about the news with their family and trusted adults. Engaging them in conversations, using scenarios and tools to help "test" whether a story is true or fake, and educating youth of how to identify untrue content are strongly recommended. Here are some simple steps to help you with these conversations:

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH YOUTH ABOUT MISINFORMATION, MALINFORMATION, DISINFORMATION, AND FAKE NEWS

- **BEGIN WITH THE DEFINITION/AN EXPLANATION OF THE NEWS:** When we see, hear, or read new information about a range of topics – whether it's about celebrities, music, politics, world events, and sports – this is news. It can be local, national, or global. We get our news from TV, radio, newspapers, websites, magazines and social media. The rise of social media also means we can share the news easily with our friends and family. We can even create it ourselves.

- **INTRODUCE AND DISCUSS THE CONCEPTS OF FAKE NEWS:** Fake news is news that simply is not true because it's either completely fabricated or the facts of the story have been altered. Some fake news stories are created for fun and entertainment. Other stories are created and published by bad actors and groups to purposely change people's opinions with a malevolent goal. Sometimes, fake news can be delivered in the form advertisements or images that have been enhanced, changed, or even completely created by artificial intelligence with the sole purpose of manipulating people. Bait clicks with salacious "headlines," offers, or "ledes" are also often used as a cunning lure to promote and spread fake news and even cyber scams.
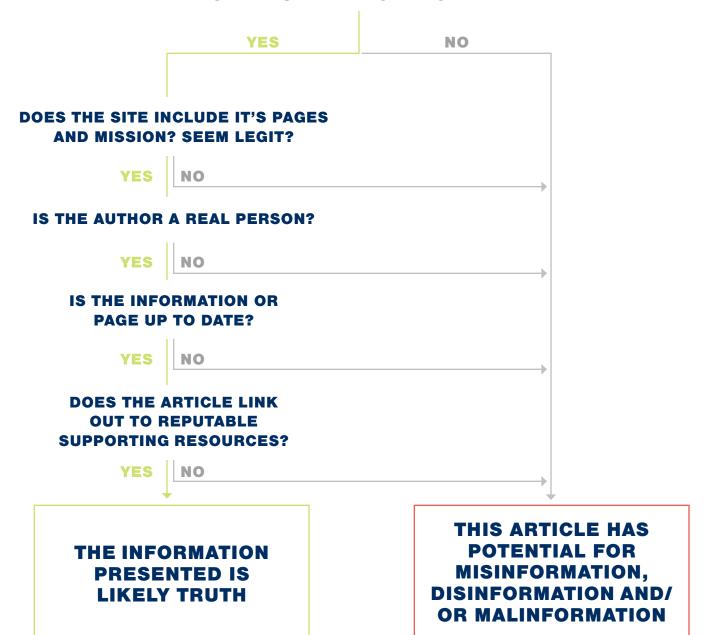
- **RECOMMEND FOLLOWING THESE FOUR STEPS WHEN CONSIDERING NEWS STORIES:**

  - **STOP:** Have you heard a news story you're not sure about? Before you decide to believe it, or share it with anyone, take a minute to stop and think about it.

  - **QUESTION:** How does the story make you feel? Why? What do you think the journalist wants you to believe?

  - **CHECK THE SOURCE:** Who wrote or created the news story or image? Do you recognize the news company who published it? Is the story reported by any other news companies? Does it quote experts or use official sources of information? If you're not sure if the facts in a news story are true, you can use websites such as fullfact.org to check it out.

  - **PAUSE AND DECIDE:** If you've checked and you think it looks like a true story, decide whether you want to share it. If you do, how will you share it and with whom?[2]

Here is a quick flowchart to help prevent the adoption and sharing of misinformation:[3]

HOW TO SPOT MISINFORMATION

IS THE URL A LEGIT DOMAIN?

YES   NO

DOES THE SITE INCLUDE IT'S PAGES AND MISSION? SEEM LEGIT?

YES   NO

IS THE AUTHOR A REAL PERSON?

YES   NO

IS THE INFORMATION OR PAGE UP TO DATE?

YES   NO

DOES THE ARTICLE LINK OUT TO REPUTABLE SUPPORTING RESOURCES?

YES   NO

THE INFORMATION PRESENTED IS LIKELY TRUTH

THIS ARTICLE HAS POTENTIAL FOR MISINFORMATION, DISINFORMATION AND/OR MALINFORMATION

REFERENCES:

1 (Ofcom, 2016) and only 2% were able to identify all news stories correctly as either real or fake in a survey (National Literacy Trust, 2018).

2 *Top tips for talking with your child about the news*; The National Literacy Trust

3 Allen, J. (2024, May 15). *Misinformation amplification analysis and tracking dashboard.* Integrity Institute. https://integrityinstitute.org/blog/misinformation-amplification-tracking-dashboard

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