BE INTERNET CITIZENS

Community Toolkit

YouTube

ISD | Powering new generations against extremism
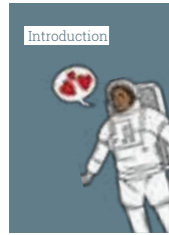
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Introduction

An overview of the programme, the toolkit objectives, guidance on how to use this toolkit, safe practice delivery approaches, important ground rules and suggestions for wider support networks for young people.

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- Session 1 - Fact vs Fiction
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- Handout resources and theme certificate
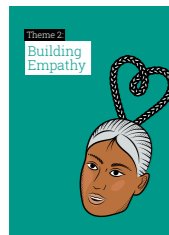
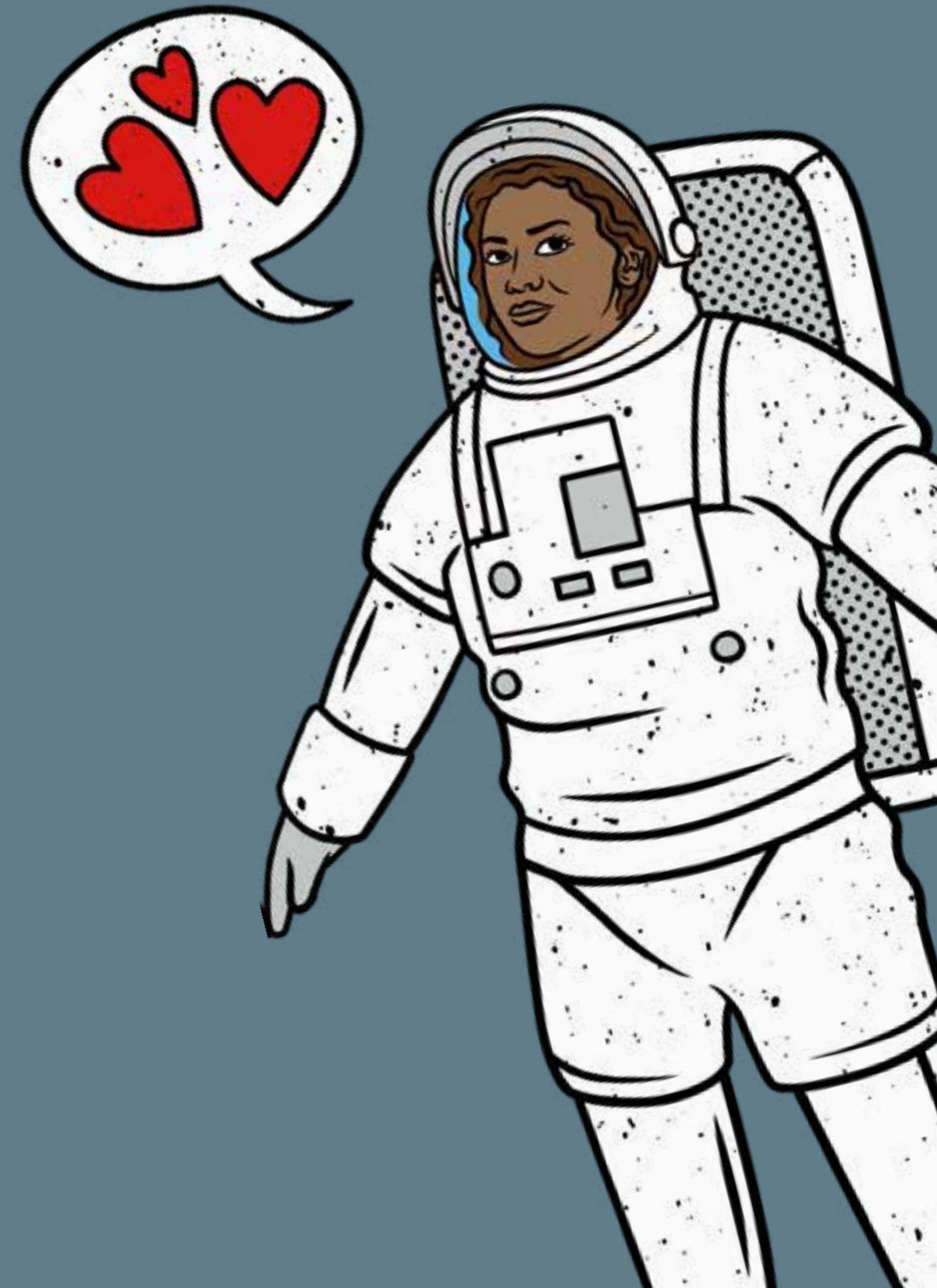### Theme 2: Building Empathy

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Introduction

Contents

Be Internet Citizens programme

OVERVIEW

Our aim is to build a safe yet inspiring online space where young people can be empowered to learn, share, be creative, express themselves and experience a sense of belonging as digital citizens. While most young people today have grown up as digital natives, they may still lack the critical thinking and media literacy skills which are key to practicing positive digital citizenship. In light of this, the Be Internet Citizens programme was designed in a collaboration between Google, YouTube and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) to teach young people media skills in a way that is relevant and engaging, both within formal education and their extra-curricular lives.

The sessions have been designed for delivery to 13+ year olds living in the UK.

OBJECTIVES

This toolkit consists of three themes, each covering a key area of digital citizenship. The sessions within **Theme 1** focus on building young people's media literacy skills, introducing them to the concepts of dis- and misinformation online, the difference between these two phenomena, how the sharing of inaccurate information can lead to real harm, and what internet users can do to effectively respond. The sessions also explore the different features of biased writing, particularly where it is encountered in traditional and social media, and how this can be a powerful tool for shaping people's opinions and perspectives. Finally, the theme introduces the filter bubble phenomenon, examining how the content we are served online can narrow our understanding of the world around us.

Theme 2 looks to build young people's empathy and encourage more positive interactions between online users. One session examines how people's biases, both conscious and unconscious, can lead them to stereotype others, and considers the potential negative consequences for individuals and society. As part of this discussion, the session covers how divisive 'us vs them' thinking can polarize society and lead to people communicating in echo chambers. Other sessions in this theme explore what freedom of speech means according to UK law, the responsibilities associated with it, and how to respond to abuse, bullying, or hate speech online.

The final theme contains one session, which offers young people the chance to demonstrate their understanding of digital citizenship and to put their skills into practice in a creative and collaborative way.

Throughout this toolkit, young people will enhance their understanding of certain online challenges faced in everyday life. In doing so, it should help them to benefit from all the amazing things the internet has to offer, while avoiding major pitfalls and staying an informed and respectful citizen online. By the end of these sessions, young people will be able to:

- Use critical thinking skills to assess how credible and trustworthy the information they see online is

- Recognise the impact of bias in how opinions and worldviews are developed, and interrogate the reasons behind their own initial reactions to online content

- Analyse some of the factors that drive divisions between groups on- and offline, and how these can be countered

- Explain how to exercise free speech responsibly online, and use a range of methods to respond effectively to hate and abuse

How to use this resource

To most effectively build young people's digital citizenship knowledge and skills, we recommend delivering themes 1-3, and the sessions within them, in the order they are presented here. The creative and collaborative final session is an extension which we encourage facilitators to deliver where time and resources permit.

Please note the following

- Throughout the session activity plans, youth workers and facilitators will be referred to as **F**, and young people as **YP**.
- All session timings are recommendations based upon the estimated time needed to deliver them. You are encouraged to extend the sessions as long as necessary, depending on the depth of your discussions with the young people .
- Additional activities, talking points, and debate motions have been included to support these extended learning opportunities.

▶ Every theme contains the following:
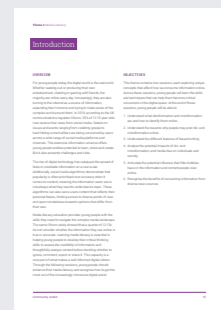
THEME INTRODUCTION

Provides an overview and discusses the importance of the included topics to young people; it also describes the learning objectives across the sessions and offers a brief description of each.

SESSION SUMMARY

Includes specific session objectives and outcomes, timing recommendations, equipment outline, and key concept definitions and explanations. The latter offer detailed explanations of each concept that you can read ahead of session delivery to help you facilitate discussions.
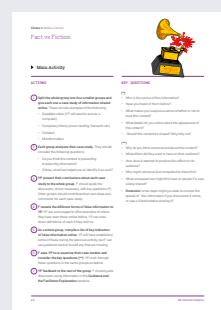
SESSION ACTIVITIES PLAN

A breakdown of the activities in each session (i.e. introductory activity, main activity, closing discussion/reflection), including:

ACTIONS

Step-by-step guidance to support delivery of the introductory, main and closing activities, including references to the relevant PPT slides.

KEY QUESTIONS

A series of key questions that accompany the discussion component of each activity, clearly indicated by symbols (*), (**) and (***).

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE:

Support in facilitating conversations with young people on sensitive and often complex topics, and in ensuring key learning points are covered in each activity. These sections also provide additional information on the resources that you will need to deliver the activities.

HANDOUTS

Additional resources can be found at the end of each theme's session plans. It is recommended that, where necessary, these are printed, photocopied and distributed to young people in order to aid session delivery.

CERTIFICATES

Each theme has an accompanying certificate that can be presented to young people who have completed the relevant sessions.

PRESENTATION SLIDES
Download here

These have been designed to support the delivery of all sessions. Slides display information that both you and participants will require to understand the key concepts, and clearly explain how each activity should run.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is important to note that some of the activities in this toolkit require you to source your own images and video clips online. For each of these activities, we have described recommended content that can be easily found through an online search to achieve the learning objectives in a safe manner. We recommend that, where necessary, you use real and relevant images and video clips, in addition to names of people or groups that young people can readily recognise and identify with. In cases where the names of individuals or organisations have been referenced, please note that this does not equal an endorsement from Google or YouTube; they have been included as indicative examples by ISD.

When choosing images and video clips we strongly recommend material that balances the risk of undue shock, distress or offense caused to young people, as this is likely to prevent the desired learning and may be harmful to those present.

Finally, please note that all headlines used in activities throughout the toolkit have been fabricated in order to help young people achieve the learning objectives by demonstrating a new concept to them.

Facilitating the sessions

This section provides guidance on how best to deliver the sessions and how to handle sensitive topics.
The toolkit centres on a number of basic principles designed to make the sessions engaging, enjoyable and memorable.

1. DISCUSSION-BASED

The content of these sessions is not designed for a lecture format, but rather through discussions which bring to life each topic and activity. All activities are accompanied by a series of questions which should be explored by the group wherever possible. It is important that young people are given the space to explore, understand and challenge assumptions about their own and others' values and behaviours, so long as arguments are made respectfully.

2. INTERACTIVE AND INCLUSIVE

Involving everyone in the session, including those who might be reluctant to participate, is vital to creating a positive and inclusive atmosphere. Given the potentially sensitive nature of some topics, sessions have been designed to adapt to diverse learning styles, and to ensure that young people of any ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or gender can engage and benefit without concerns about discrimination.

3. A RESPECTFUL, SAFE SPACE

By discussing and agreeing ground rules before a group starts the BIC journey, you can create a respectful space in which to conduct the sessions. Clear ground rules help young people to feel safe expressing their ideas while also ensuring sensitivity to others, and can support you in challenging unacceptable behaviours or attitudes, which is particularly important for more controversial or emotive issues.

You may want to display the ground rules visually and revisit them whenever necessary throughout the sessions.
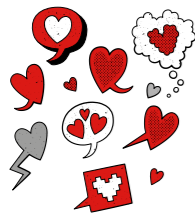
Ground rules

You may want to include the following when discussing ground rules with your group:

OPENNESS

We will be open and honest, but will not directly discuss our own or others' personal/private lives. We will discuss general situations as examples but will not use names or descriptions which could identify anyone without their consent.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION IN THE ROOM

We feel safe discussing issues and we know that our facilitator will not repeat what is said in the room unless they are concerned we are at risk, in which case they will follow the youth centre's safeguarding policy.

NON-JUDGMENTAL APPROACH

It is acceptable for us to disagree with another person's point of view but we will not judge, make fun of, or dismiss anyone from the discussion. We can 'challenge the opinion, not the person'.

RIGHT TO PASS

Taking part is important. However, we have the right to pass on answering a question or participating in an activity, and we will not put anyone 'on the spot'.

MAKE NO ASSUMPTIONS

We will not make assumptions about people's values, attitudes, behaviours, life experiences or feelings.

LISTEN TO OTHERS

We will listen to other people's point of view respectfully and can expect the same in return. Even when we disagree, it is important to let people articulate their ideas fully so we can respond.

USING LANGUAGE

We will use the correct terms for things being discussed rather than slang terms which might be offensive. If we are not sure what the correct term is, we will ask the facilitator.

ASKING QUESTIONS

We are encouraged to ask questions, but never to deliberately expose or embarrass someone. Where useful, facilitators can provide an anonymous question box for more sensitive topics, or those which people feel uncomfortable raising in the wider group.

SEEKING HELP AND ADVICE

We know how and where to seek help or advice confidentially, both in the organisation and the community. We will encourage friends to seek help if we think they need it.

Constructive discussions

Be Internet Citizens works most effectively when young people feel free to express their opinions, even when their comments may be controversial or not yet fully formed.

Because of the sensitive subject matter, a number of difficult conversations might arise in the course of these sessions. If a young person makes a comment that contravenes the established ground rules and/or the youth centre's behaviour policy (for example an explicitly and purposefully racist statement) then facilitators must act accordingly. On the other hand, if comments are judged to be acceptable and/or simply show a gap in the young person's knowledge – for example, if they ask why a particular statement is discriminatory – this can be treated as an opportunity for learning, and you are encouraged to follow up with a question.

For example, you could ask:

- **Why might someone be offended by this?**
- **Do you think you can judge a group as a whole rather than as individuals?**
- **How would you feel in that situation?**

Questions such as these can help to build a constructive, judgement-free dialogue from the young person's comment. If the conversation remains unhelpful after challenging their statement, you can choose to move on or speak to them separately later. While transforming a young person's attitude in the course of a session is unlikely, there is still an opportunity to both challenge and perhaps redirect their thinking, something which may lead to longer-term reflection on their attitudes and behaviours.

We advise against disclosures of a personal nature in a public setting. Instead, you can encourage young people to ask for help by seeking out an appropriate adult they trust such as a parent or carer. Always ensure that any pastoral support you offer to young people is framed in reference to your organisation's specific child protection and safeguarding policy.

Support networks

We also recommend that, at the end of each session, you display the final presentation slide which provides young people with the following national and regional support networks:

Childline

Offers advice to young people under 19 on a range of issues including online safety.
www.childline.org.uk

The Mix

A multi-channel service offering support to people under 25, enabling them to make informed choices about their wellbeing.
www.themix.org.uk

UK Safer Internet Centre

A partnership of leading online safety organisations who produce resources and run a helpline for young people.
www.saferinternet.org.uk

Relate

The UK's largest support provider in helping people strengthen their relationships.
www.relate.org.uk (Help for children and young people section)

Samaritans

24-hour helpline providing emotional support to those who are struggling to cope, with proactive outreach to high-risk groups.
www.samaritans.org (England, Scotland, Wales)

Thinkuknow

Seeks to empower young people, offering them advice and a reporting service.
www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Media Literacy

Contents

Introduction

Session 1
Fact vs Fiction

⏱ 60 – 90 minutes

An introduction to disinformation and misinformation, why people share false information online, how to identify it, and how to stop its spread.

Session 2
Three Sides to Every Story

⏱ 60 – 90 minutes

Covers the different features of biased writing, why media content may be biased, how to guard against sensationalist content, and understanding the filter bubble phenomenon.

Introduction

OVERVIEW

For young people today, the digital world *is* the real world. Whether seeking out or producing their own entertainment, chatting or gaming with friends, the majority are online every day. Increasingly, they are also turning to the internet as a source of information, expanding their horizons and trying to make sense of the complex world around them. In 2019, according to the UK communications regulator Ofcom, 55% of 12-15-year-olds now receive their news from social media. Details on issues and events ranging from celebrity gossip to hard-hitting current affairs are being consumed by users across a wide range of social media platforms and channels. This extensive information universe offers young people endless potential to learn, share and create. But it also presents challenges and risks.

The rise of digital technology has catalysed the spread of false or unreliable information on a new scale. Additionally, social media algorithms demonstrate that popularity is often prioritised over accuracy when it comes to content, meaning the information users see is not always what they need to understand a topic. These algorithms can also serve users content that reflects their personal biases, limiting access to diverse points of view and open-mindedness towards opinions that differ from their own.

Media literacy education provides young people with the skills they need to navigate the complex media landscape. The same Ofcom study showed that a quarter of 12-15s do not consider whether the information they see online is true or accurate. Learning media literacy is essential in helping young people to develop their critical thinking skills to assess the credibility of information and thoughtfully analyse content before deciding whether to ignore, comment, report or share it. This capacity is a core part of what makes a well-informed digital citizen. Through the following sessions, young people should enhance their media literacy and recognise how to get the most out of the increasingly immersive digital world.

OBJECTIVES

This theme contains two sessions, each exploring unique concepts that affect how we consume information online. Across these sessions, young people will learn the skills and techniques that can help them become critical consumers in the digital space. At the end of these sessions, young people will be able to:

1. Understand what disinformation and misinformation are and how to identify them online.

2. Understand the reasons why people may post dis- and misinformation online.

3. Understand the different features of biased writing.

4. Analyse the potential impacts of dis- and misinformation, and media bias on individuals and society.

5. Articulate the potential influence that filter bubbles have on the information and content people view online.

6. Recognise the benefits of consuming information from diverse news sources.

Session 1 Summary

Fact vs Fiction 🕐 60 – 90 minutes

Fact vs Fiction

▶ Key Concepts

Disinformation

SESSION OBJECTIVE

To understand what the terms 'disinformation' and 'misinformation' mean, the consequences they have on people, and how to slow their spread online.

EQUIPMENT

- Access to a computer with PPT presentation software to display accompanying slides
- A project and screen, or interactive whiteboard

### HANDOUTS

Handout 1

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Young People (YP) can:

1. Identify common traits of mis/disinformation (e.g. website format, URLs, Twitter profiles).

2. Explain potential motives for posting inaccurate information online and describe how it impacts on individuals and society.

3. List effective responses to dis/misinformation when encountered online (e.g. fact-checking and reporting).
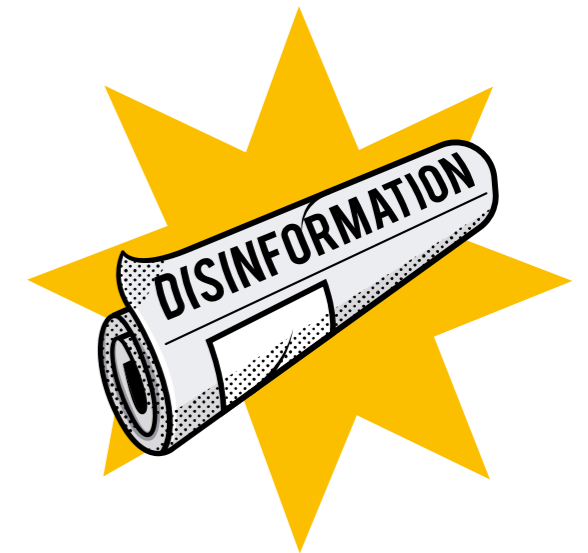
DEFINITION

Disinformation refers to any information that has been **deliberately created to deceive people or give them an inaccurate understanding of an issue**. It is often presented as being fact-based but in reality is intentionally false.

FACILITATOR EXPLANATION

People create disinformation for many reasons, for example:

- **Financial incentives:** e.g. the hope of earning advertising revenue which sensationalist stories often generate. We often see these in the form of online articles with headlines that start with: "You won't believe what happened when…" or "5 simple steps to….". Others may use disinformation to scam people online by requesting payment in exchange for a non-existent product or service;

- **Political goals:** a desire to influence opinion for or against a group in society, a political party or candidate. Disinformation can be a powerful tool used to spread hate online, which then translates into social divisions or even violence offline. In the UK, there have been wide-spread examples of fake social media posts or news headlines from political party leaders and journalists respectively, intending to stir up hatred towards them or a particular group in society;

- **Personal reasons:** a desire to spread mischief (e.g. 'trolling'), make a satirical joke, or promote a conspiracy theory or personal agenda.

Disinformation is often designed to seem legitimate, adopting the look of mainstream news sources. It might appear in the form of social media posts or memes, but can also be fronted through website pages or other so-called 'official' sources. A single piece of disinformation can be shared in multiple formats or from different accounts – this makes it even harder to differentiate truthful stories from fake ones, let alone detect and moderate harmful content.

Fact vs Fiction

▶ Key Concepts

Disinformation cont.

Once disinformation has been published online, people generally begin to engage with it through reactions (e.g. likes), commenting or sharing (including across platforms). Even if responses are trying to disprove or fact-check the original post, the engagement still increases visibility for that content. This means that more people are likely to see the false information, until gradually it has gained mass exposure and interest from the general public or specific communities. Such a process is sometimes called the **'Trumpet of Amplification'** or 'giving oxygen' to disinformation, as content which starts on the fringes gains visibility through social media and (in some cases) is then reported on by mainstream outlets. In addition, individuals who have engaged are likely to be served content from the same or similar publishers in the future, which may also be unreliable – this is due to the technologies (e.g. algorithms) that run social media sites, and recommend content based on your previous habits or interaction (to be explored in the next session).

Although disinformation can be difficult to spot, there are various features which may indicate a news story is fake:

• A suspicious URL with an unusual ending (e.g. .biz.org)

• Highly emotional or exaggerated language (e.g. clickbait headlines): "You won't believe what happens when man and bear get into wrestling match…"

• A less well-known, or unknown, publication name and logo. (**NB:** There are a number of valid sources of news and information that are less well-known. Where a young person encounters these publications, they should take extra care to establish the credibility of contributing journalists, and to fact-check information they read by cross-referencing with well-established publications.)

• Blurred or altered logos of well-known news organisations (e.g. the BBC)

• Edited photos or images: spreaders of false information often use digital tools to manipulate images to support their 'story'. If a story seems suspicious, look closely at the images to see if there are signs they have been doctored (e.g. there may be strange shadows present, or jagged edges around a figure). Alternatively, real images from a former, credible story, may be repurposed for this new, false story. This can easily be checked using the **'Reverse Image Search'** function on Google, which will show where that image has appeared previously on the internet (i.e. if it really relates to this story/event, or has been false attributed).

Fact vs Fiction
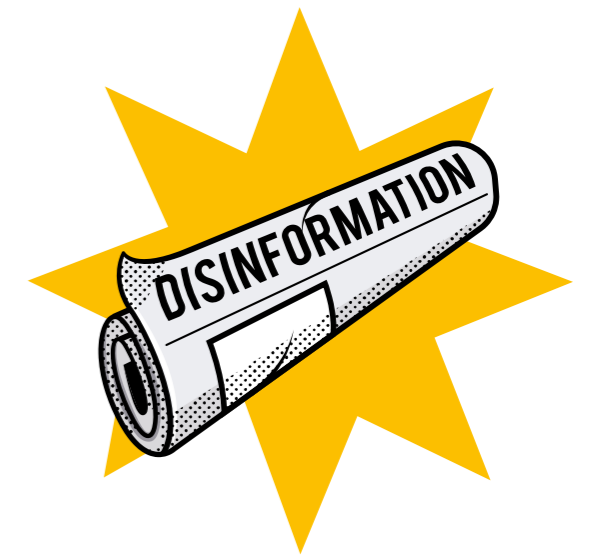
• Statistics or images with no stated source, citation or footnote

• Articles with no stated author or editorial team

• Websites where every story seems to induce outrage or expose a 'scandal'

• Websites with suspicious or inappropriate advertising (e.g. for firearms)

• Links to other unlikely sounding stories

• Frequent spelling and punctuation errors

Individuals can help reduce the spread and impact of disinformation by paying attention to what they consume and their own responses to content.

For example:

• Where possible, flag suspicious content to the platform administrator

• If content is explicitly violent or threatening, report to the police, a victim helpline or trusted adult (e.g. youth worker, teacher, parent)

• Block the person or group publishing disinformation

• Ignore the story or remove it from your newsfeed

• Avoid sharing the disinformation, even if you are doing so in outrage, to alert others to it. (If you did want to raise awareness, you could screenshot and share the post, rather than sharing a link to it, which could increase the publishers ad revenue.)

• Comment on the fake story in order to alert others of its inaccuracy

• Share a link to a news story on the same topic from a credible publication

YOU CAN REFER TO THE FACILITATOR GUIDANCE SECTIONS THROUGHOUT THIS SESSION PLAN FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON DISINFORMATION.

▶ Key Concepts

Misinformation

DEFINITION

Misinformation refers to the **accidental sharing of false information**. While there is no intention to harm, the negative consequences can be just as powerful. It can mislead friends and colleagues, increase confusion around a topic, create divisions between groups or communities, and in extreme cases put people in danger.

FACILITATOR EXPLANATION

Although most people share information with the best of intentions, if that content is false we are unintentionally spreading 'misinformation'. This can have similar impacts on individuals and communities as people who deliberately share disinformation. For example, healthcare advice that hopes to improve people's quality of life can cause serious harm if it is not based on factual information and scientific evidence. Given how quickly information can spread across the internet, this inaccurate advice may cause damage on a large scale in a short space of time. Similarly, if an individual is misled by harmful disinformation online, such as a conspiracy theory, they may share it with their own online communities thinking it is valuable or factual information.

We live in an age of online influencers and digital content creators, many of whom have large subscriber or fan bases that accept what they say as fact. It is all the more important these individuals exercise good judgement and

responsibility when posting online – especially if they are commenting on an issue on which they are not experts – given the extensive reach their messaging has. There have been incidents of influencers unwittingly spreading conspiracy theories to their audiences of millions of users. It is therefore essential that all users demonstrate critical thinking skills when browsing online. This includes asking ourselves questions such as:

- How do I know this information is based on fact?

- What is the source of the information shared?

- Am I more likely to believe this person because I like them, have common interests or know them personally? Is this a good reason not to check the facts myself?

You can refer to the **Facilitator Guidance** sections throughout this session plan for additional information on key concepts.

> YOU CAN REFER TO THE FACILITATOR GUIDANCE SECTIONS THROUGHOUT
> THIS SESSION PLAN FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON MISINFORMATION.

FURTHER INFORMATION ON DISINFORMATION AND MISINFORMATION:

RESOURCE	SUMMARY	AGE-GROUP SUITABILITY
BBC Bitesize Fact vs Fake initiative	A range of articles, session plans, and standalone activities on 'fake news'.	All ages
BBC Young Reporter resources	An initiative providing young people with the skills to create and understand media today.	All ages
Poynter's Mediawise Project	US-based digital literacy project with resources focused on navigating online information in a robust, critical way.	All ages
Full Fact	Independent fact-checking organisation, establishing and publishing facts on topical issues.	All ages
PC Mag UK 'How to Spot Fake News'	List of plug-ins to help internet users establish media bias on webpages, and identify 'fake news'.	All ages
First Draft	Toolkits, guides, plug-ins and research on dis- and misinformation.	A resource for facilitators
Fake News: A True Story	Brief clip taken from a BBC documentary, which demonstrates a way in which deepfake videos can be produced.	A resource for facilitators. Please note there is a single use of the S-word from 1:45, and so should not be shown to young people.

Fact vs Fiction

Session Activities Plan

▶ **Introduction**

ACTIONS

(1) **In pairs, YP begin to brainstorm ideas to key questions (*).**

(2) **F displays 3x news stories on PPT**. One is fact-based news, one is disinformation, and one is misinformation.

(3) **In pairs, YP should discuss which they think are accurate stories and which provide false information**. YP should list reasons to justify their answers.

(4) **YP feedback their answers to the whole group**. F reveals the correct answers and discusses any reasons that YP did not cover.

(5) **F leads discussion on different types of 'fake news', using key questions (**)**. Finally, present the definitions of dis- and misinformation on PPT.

N.B. If you have sourced further examples of disinformation and misinformation, these can be used for additional rounds of this activity.

KEY QUESTIONS

(*)
• Where do you go online to get information about a story/event/issue?

• Do you ever consider how reliable this information is?

• How easy do you find it to tell the difference between trustworthy and unreliable information?

(**)
• What is the difference between the two types of inaccurate news stories here?

• Why might the term 'fake news' be unhelpful?

• Can you think of examples of dis- and misinformation you have seen, on and offline?

Fact vs Fiction

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

This introduction allows you to take a baseline of young people's understanding of so-called 'fake news' online, as well as testing their critical thinking skills straight away.

While young people will likely have heard of 'fake news', this activity, and the session generally, should encourage them to see the limitations of the term. 'Fake news' is too often used as a catch-all term to describe issues online, but loses important nuance on the motivation (innocent or deliberate) behind the spread of false information. News doesn't need to be entirely 'fake' to cause harm; it can also skew facts to promote a specific response, or selectively choose information to bias people's opinion. 'Fake news' also reduces our individual responsibility to be careful online, implying the entire problem stems from a small group of shadowy villains and bad actors. ' Fake news' is also used increasingly to describe factual information that someone doesn't like or agree with, making it less useful as a term for Media and Digital Literacy.

As such, young people should become familiar with the terms disinformation and misinformation, and understand the distinction between the two.

Facilitators can find additional examples of disinformation from websites including **Full Fact**, **BBC Reality Check**, **FactCheckNI**, **The Ferret** and **Snopes**.

Resources:
Disinformation – **Article falsely claiming that major celebrities have died in a car crash**

Misinformation – Influencer promoting medicinal misinformation: "Celery Juice: The Most Powerful Medicine of our Time, Healing Millions Worldwide". This misinformation was reported on **here**.

Fact-based – **BBC article on major celebrity appearing on the rich list**.

Fact vs Fiction

▶ **Main Activity**

ACTIONS

1. **Split the whole group into four smaller groups and give each one a case study of information shared online.** These include examples of the following:
   - Deepfake video (YP will need to access a computer)
   - Conspiracy theory (moon landing, flat earth etc)
   - Clickbait
   - Misinformation

2. **Each group analyses their case study.** They should consider the following questions:
   - Do you think this content is presenting trustworthy information?
   - If false, what has helped you to identify it as such?

3. **YP present their conclusions about each case study to the whole group.** F should guide the discussion, where necessary, with key questions (*). Other groups should contribute their own ideas and comments for each case study.

4. **F reveals the different forms of false information to YP.** YP are encouraged to offer examples of where they have seen these online before. YP can note down definitions of each if they wish to.

5. **As a whole group, compile a list of key indicators of false information online**. YP will have established some of these during the previous activity, but F can use guidance section to add any that are missing.

6. **F asks YP to re-examine their case studies and consider the key questions (**)**. YP work through these questions in the same groups as before.

7. **YP feedback to the rest of the group**. F should guide discussion using information in the **Guidance and the Facilitator Explanation** sections.

KEY QUESTIONS

(*)
- Who is the source of this information?
- Have you heard of them before?
- What makes you suspicious about whether or not to trust this content?
- What details do you notice about the appearance of this content?
- Should this content be shared? Why/why not?

(**)
- Why do you think someone produced this content?
- What effect did they want to have on their audience?
- How does it attempt to produce this effect on its audience?
- Why might someone feel compelled to share this?
- What consequences might this have on people if it was widely shared?
- **Extension:** what steps might you take to counter the spread of this information if you discovered it online, or saw a friend/relative sharing it?

Fact vs Fiction

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

This activity shows young people a range of disinformation and misinformation examples, helping them recognise that false information can come in various forms online. These include:

Deepfake: computer-generated videos of real people doing or saying things that never happened in reality. These can be used for comedic purposes or to make someone look silly, but can also spread fear or erode trust towards people (especially public figures and celebrities). More information can be found at **https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/jan/13/what-are-deepfakes-and-how-can-you-spot-them.** Some good examples of deepfake videos can be found **here** and **here**. Deepfakes can be produced in a variety of ways. These examples show real-life footage, in which the image has been manipulated to move the subject's mouth, while the audio has been dubbed by professional actors. Other videos – such as the BBC example in the 'Further Information' section – use a software to learn someone's facial structure and movements, and superimpose that face over that of someone else who has been filmed (similar to motion capture in cinema).

Conspiracy Theories: invented explanations for events that are wrongly linked to groups or individuals, often those in power (e.g. governments, major companies, wealthy individuals) or those who are already marginalised (e.g. ethnic and religious minorities, refugees and migrants). Conspiracy theories can be willfully used to stir up abuse or violence towards others. A recent example is the conspiracy around 5G mobile networks contributing to the spread of coronavirus, which prompted small groups of people to vandalise 5G pylons, attack and abuse telecomms workers, and scapegoat Asian communities (since 5G is linked to Huawei/the Chinese State). The theory was quickly **debunked by scientists**, but the story has already spread and gained followings across the globe.

An alternative conspiracy theory you could highlight is that proposed by 'flat earthers', who reject the evidence that proves the earth is round, and deeply mistrust institutions that provide this evidence. Details of this movement can be found **here**.

Clickbait: where a publisher posts an intentionally exaggerated or misleading headline, social media post, or image, prompting people to click through to their webpage. The more people that view their page, the more money the publisher can make through adverts posted on the site, and the more social media algorithms will promote their content to others (e.g. on newsfeeds). Headlines will often entice people with phrases such as "You won't believe what.." or "See what happens when..", followed by something outrageous or unbelievable. Clickbait can be harmless (e.g. to promote showbiz gossip) but also causes people to lose trust in the quality of information online, until they are unsure what to believe. Some good examples can be found **here**.

Differentiation: young people with lower literacy levels may benefit from being asked to analyse more visual examples, such as the deepfake video.

To ensure you use relevant examples of disinformation moving forwards, we suggest following the work of journalists including:

Brandy Zadrozny (NBC News)
Jane Lytvynenko (Buzzfeed)
Kevin Roose (New York Times)
Marianna Spring (BBC)
Mark Scott (Politico)
Rowland Manthorpe (Wired UK and Sky News)
Shayan Sardarizadeh (BBC)

Fact vs Fiction

▶ Main Activity
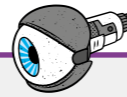
FACILITATOR GUIDANCE (CONTINUED)

The risk with each of these examples is that content will be widely shared and believed before either the platform they are published on, or independent fact-checkers, can demonstrate they are false. Sometimes dis- and misinformation will look no different to news from credible sources, meaning it is easily believed and mistaken as factual. In other examples, where highly emotive or sensationalist language is used, people may forget to think critically about the content of information, believing what they read purely because it provokes an emotional response or confirms their existing opinions about a person/situation/society.

Any list of indicators to help identify whether a news story is fake should include:

- A suspicious URL with an unusual ending, e.g. .biz.org
- Highly emotional or exaggerated language making unrealistic claims
- No clear, reliable source of the information being commented on (citations, footnotes)
- A less well-known company name and logo
- Presents breaking 'news' that has not been reported by other credible news outlets
- Edited/misattributed photos or images
- Links to other unlikely sounding stories
- Frequent spelling and punctuation errors

Young people should be encouraged to think critically about information they see online. **This does not mean being skeptical about all information**, but rather pausing to consider whether something is reliable, interrogating their own response, and doing more research if in any doubt. This is sometimes referred to as 'friction', i.e. slowing down the time between a user viewing content and reacting – if you can increase friction, you leave more space to deliberate, question and mitigate those gut responses that cause us to make mistakes.

Young people can take the following steps to verify information online:

- Fact-check information by seeing what well-established, credible reporters say about the story. Good sites include fullfact.org, snopes.com, BBC Reality Check, and PolitiFact.
- Research the author or source of the information to see if they have shared false information in the past.
- Use the **'reverse image search function'** to verify if images are trustworthy or have been falsely linked to the story in question.
- Check the dates of content – often old articles/images resurface, and are circulated falsely in relation to current events.
- Make sure it's not satire! Many sites are consciously mocking the news or 'public scandals', but people mistake them as fact. **https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/nov/17/facebook-fake-news-satire**

Fact vs Fiction

▶ End of Session

ACTIONS

1. **Set YP the following brief:** list three pieces of advice you would give to a friend or family member to help them tackle false information online.

2. **F takes feedback from YP and captures their responses for use in Session 2.**

3. **If there is time, YP should complete the first questions in their reflective journal (see Handout 1).**

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

The end of the session provides young people with the opportunity to reflect on what they have learnt about dis- and misinformation, why it exists, and what they can do to reduce its negative impact on individuals and society. Some preventative actions might include:

- Blocking the person or group publishing the false information
- Using specific platform features to flag content as false
- Ignoring the story or removing it from your newsfeed

- Commenting on the story in order to alert others that it is false
- Sharing a link to a real news story on the same topic
- Educating others about mis- and disinformation.

Differentiation: some young people may benefit from being given the above actions and having to note why they agree with them.

Fact vs Fiction

▶ Additional activity ideas

- Real-time investigation: ask the group to use their smartphones – either at the end of the session or in their own time between sessions – to explore their social media homepages or newsfeeds and identify examples of dis- and misinformation. Young people should establish which type of false information it represents, consider the consequences of it being shared, and take appropriate action to stop its spread. They can then present these case studies to the group.

- The **Factitious game** enables young people to deepen their understanding of why disinformation spreads online and the consequences it can have, while also honing their ability to identify examples.

- Current affairs round-up: young people could choose a topical news item, summarise how it is being reported by credible journalists, then highlight dis- and misinformation that has been spread on the same issue. The whole class could then discuss the potential consequences of the story being inaccurately reported.

- Group debates on the following motions:
  - › *"False information should always be removed from social media regardless of the topic."*
  - › *"People should be punished for sharing false information, even if by accident."*
  - › *"People have a duty to fact-check information they see online before sharing it."*
  - › *"You shouldn't trust any news you find on social media."*

3 Sides to Every Story

⏱ 60 – 90 minutes

SESSION OBJECTIVE

To learn about different forms of biased writing, and how online filter bubbles can shape our own biases and opinions

EQUIPMENT

- Access to a computer with PPT presentation software to display accompanying slides
- A project and screen, or interactive whiteboard

HANDOUTS

Handouts 1 and 2

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Young People (YP) can:

- Explain what biased writing is and why writers employ bias in their work;
- Analyse the effects of media bias on individuals and society;
- Define what a filter bubbles is, and explain its impact on individuals/society;
- Explain the benefits of getting information from diverse sources.

---

3 Sides to Every Story

▶ Key Concepts

Biased Writing

DEFINITION

Biased writing occurs **when an author shows favouritism or prejudice towards a particular opinion, instead of being fair and balanced**. It is often used to drive people towards certain viewpoints or actions, and can appeal to the reader's emotions rather than encouraging them to think critically.

FACILITATOR EXPLANATION

Bias in writing isn't new. It disguises opinion as fact, hoping to sway the reader's understanding of, or stance on, a topic without their knowledge. Mixing fact and opinion in the media has real impact on public discussion, preventing individuals from establishing their own opinion, or considering different aspects of a specific issue/event.

Biased content can also lead people to misunderstand important issues or ignore opposing viewpoints. When you can neither recognise nor understand alternative views, it becomes harder to solve difficult problems as a society. Separating fact from opinion can help us navigate current events, construct our own ideas from a range of sources, and understand views different from our own.

Dis- and misinformation are distinct from biased writing and being able to differentiate between them is an important skill. Biased writing is based on a real story or topic, but includes coverage which is strongly opinionated to the extent it lacks nuance, or fails to represent the breadth of a topic. At a broad level, some of the different ways in which writing can be biased are:

- Positive bias = exaggerated praise for the subject being written about
- Negative bias = attacking the subject matter and exaggerating criticisms
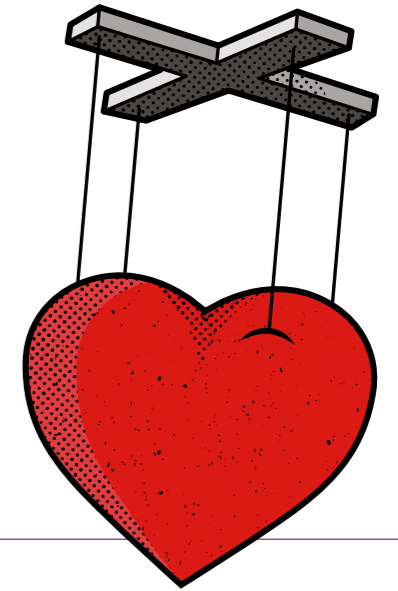
Both positive and negative bias can use a 'black-and-white' framing, i.e. stories that rely on overstated heroes and villains. To use a cultural parallel, it might be interesting to discuss how the comic book universe has changed, from more traditional Superman/ Wonder Woman models in the 1950s (flawless superheroes) to characters like Deadpool, Iron Man, Batman or John Wick (flawed heroes or 'anti-heroes'). The latter type is more common now, and reflects the fact that people are rarely 'all good' or 'all bad' – this is a good attitude to use when reading the news.

Balanced or neutral perspective = the opposite of biased, this type of writing doesn't have an explicit 'opinion' or agenda but merely reports the facts/details of a situation. Impartiality is a **core principle** of most reputable news outlets and journalist training schemes.

Consider the difference between Breaking News and Opinion features in a major newspaper – one outlining immediate events and data, another analysing its possible meaning and consequences. Both can be valid types of journalism, but they serve a different purpose and should be approached differently by the reader.

You can also read the **Facilitator Guidance** sections throughout the session plan for additional information on biased writing.

▶ Key Concepts

Filter Bubble

DEFINITION

Filter bubbles occur when users are suggested content based on previous internet search history and interactions. Over time they can isolate users from any viewpoints or interests different to their own. Long-term, this can limit people's understanding of complex topics or events and reduce empathy and dialogue between different groups.

FACILITATOR EXPLANATION

Filter bubbles are a part of our everyday experience online, but can prevent us from being exposed to new and different viewpoints. They are a product of algorithms and other technology, which work to create the most personalised experiences for internet users on social media. This includes suggesting content which reflects the users' interests and opinions, often based on their previous search and watch history (e.g. information which suggests the user's age, gender, ethnicity, geography, education level, religion, sexuality or political views, and therefore what content they will enjoy).

This hyper-tailored experience has a business incentive: it increases the likelihood that a person will keep browsing and engage with the platform, or even purchase a certain product or service. There are clear upsides to personalisation, not least that it makes social media seem designed for our needs, including content that is most resonant with our day-to-day experiences and that has

been consumed by like minded people. However, these individual bubbles can blind us to a world where people have vastly different views and beliefs. A key consequence is that people may develop a one-sided or overly simplified understanding of issues and events, in a way which does not reflect on-the-ground reality. As online users, it is our responsibility to consider the different sides of a story and establish a well-informed basis before (re)acting.

Filter bubbles can isolate users in political, social, cultural or ideological groups, a phenomenon which is closely related to echo chambers (explored in the next session). They can push people towards more extreme positions and reduce their empathy for people who think differently.

> YOU CAN REFER TO THE FACILITATOR GUIDANCE SECTIONS THROUGHOUT
> THIS SESSION PLAN FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON FILTER BUBBLES.

FURTHER INFORMATION ON BIASED WRITING AND FILTER BUBBLES:

RESOURCE	SUMMARY	AGE-GROUP SUITABILITY
BBC Bitesize on bias	KS3-targeted educational resource on bias and reliability in the media.	All ages
BBC Bitesize on filter bubbles	Short resource, including educational video, describing the filter bubble phenomena.	All ages
PC Mag UK 'How to Spot Fake News'	List of plug-ins to help internet users establish media bias on webpages, and identify 'fake news'.	All ages
Fair.org	Detailed list of indicators of media bias and questions to ask yourself to help detect it.	For facilitators

3 Sides to Every Story

Session Activities Plan

▶ **Introduction**

ACTIONS

1. **F displays a biased headline on PPT:** *"Grime is the best music on earth", says world-famous grime artist*. F asks question: "Is this an example of disinformation? Why/why not?"

2. **YP work in pairs or groups to decide whether or not this is an example of dis/misinformation.**

3. **YP feedback and justify their answers to the group.**

4. **F leads discussion using key questions (*).**

5. **YP mind-map what they think biased writing is.**

5. **F takes feedback on biased writing, and then displays a definition of the term.** YP discusses the term with the group using key questions (**).

KEY QUESTIONS

(*)
- What is the difference between a fact and an opinion?
- Does the writer of this headline try to present it as a fact or an opinion?
- Can opinions ever be examples of dis- or misinformation?
- What is another term for this type of opinionated writing?

(**)
- Where have you seen biased writing before?
- Can you give an example of a biased opinion?
- Are there different types of bias?
- What impact can bias have on people?
- How can both fact and opinion contribute to public knowledge on a subject?
- Is biased writing always bad? What purpose can it serve?

3 Sides to Every Story

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

This introductory activity will help introduce one of the session's key concepts: biased writing. In particular, young people will consider how it differs from disinformation, where false information is often presented as fact-based reporting. You could compare this biased headline with one of the disinformation headlines used in Session 1.

Young people should understand that along with factual reporting on issues and events, 'opinion pieces' are a key component of journalism today. These offer writers the opportunity to comment on a specific issue or topic from their own perspective: they may still cite facts and evidence to support their point of view, but the objective of this journalism is to argue their perspective to their readers.

Young people should use their learning from the previous session to recall that disinformation is entirely invented/false, while biased writing is based on a real story or topic but is strongly opinionated, to the extent that it can lack nuance or fail to represent key elements.

When mind-mapping biased writing, young people might highlight:

- The type of **language used** (e.g. sensationalist and exaggerated), often intended to persuade
- A greater emphasis on **opinion over fact**
- A **preference or dislike stated** for one thing above another (and therefore a **lack of balance**)

Use the **Facilitator Explanation** guide to introduce the topic of biased writing and its possible consequences.

3 Sides to Every Story

▶ **Main Activity 1**

ACTIONS

(1) **F splits the whole group into smaller groups.** Each group is given an example of biased writing from Handout 2.

(2) **YP analyse their biased writing example using key questions (*) to guide them.**

(3) **Each small group feeds back to the other YP.** YP are encouraged to comment on each other's examples of bias.

(4) **F shows PPT slide displaying all headlines used in the session so far.** F asks YP to consider: which stories are people more likely to share online and why?

(5) **F leads discussion with the whole group, using key questions (**) to guide.**

(6) **F displays PPT slide which shows question to segue to next part of the session:**

"What can happen online when people react to, comment on, or share content on social media?"

KEY QUESTIONS

(*)
- To what extent is this writing biased?
- What marks this out as biased or not?
- What does the author want the reader to think when reading this?
- Could the author have tried to make this piece more balanced? How might they have done this?
- As a reader, how could you use the information in this article, and what might you need to get a fuller picture?

(**)
- What makes these stories more likely to be shared online (via social media or private groups)?
- What are some possible consequences of emotionally manipulative language?
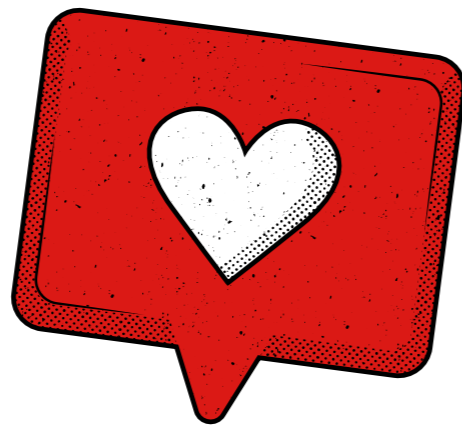
FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Through their analysis and comparison of the biased writing examples, young people should recognise on a basic level that writing can be skewed in various ways. This includes:

Positive bias **(as in Example #1)** = exaggerated praise for the subject being written about

Negative bias **(as in Example #2)** = attacking the subject matter and overstating the reasons why it is bad

Balanced or neutral perspective **(as in Example #3)** = this is the opposite of biased writing, i.e. it doesn't include an opinion but instead presents facts without analysis or 'spin'

To develop a more detailed understanding of how media bias works, young people should consider the following:

Bias by omission: in which media outlets choose not to cover certain stories or leave out information that would support a different viewpoint/interpretation of events.

Bias by selection of sources: when the writer includes more sources that support one view (their own) than another. This is especially important in scientific discussions, where a few outlier 'experts' are used against the overwhelming consensus of the field (e.g. in climate change denial).

Political bias: most publications have, to varying extents, a certain political slant, most likely towards left or right wing politics, although also along other divisions such as Remain or Leave. Where these slants are found, reporting or opinion pieces may lean favourably towards a political party or rep representative, or a viewpoint that is aligned with a particular brand of politics.

Statements presented as facts: when the writer tries to blur the line between fact and opinion to make their argument more convincing. E.g. "The latest controversy is evidence that she has not changed her ways".

Emotionally manipulative language/sensationalism: when information is presented to shock, cause outrage or make a lasting and emotive impression. Such content can distract us from thinking clearly about the point being made and the detail of a story. This technique can be used for both good (e.g. to convince people to sign up to charities) or bad (e.g. to stir up anger and resentment towards groups or individuals).

3 Sides to Every Story

▶ Main Activity 1

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE (CONTINUED)

For example:

"Queen fury as Meghan and Harry say: We Quit!"

"SHAME: English football team fails a nation."

"Don't join the army. Don't become a better you."

"The Arctic is hurting. How dare you turn away."

"Meat is murder. Try vegan."

This final point is key – **emotive or sensationalist content often receives higher engagement online**, in part because it captures our attention and preys on elements of intrigue, scandal, gossip, controversy and drama. Engagement could mean people liking, reacting to, commenting on, sharing or copying the content in question through other formats . In line with the technology that underpins social media, this can lead platforms to populate your Newsfeed with similar viewpoints from identical or parallel sources. When this happens, people experience the effects of a 'filter bubble'.

The next theme will look in more detail at our own biases and how they affect our view of the world. Nonetheless, this activity should encourage young people to pause and reflect when they see an example of biased and/or sensationalist content online:

- What emotions am I experiencing while I read this?
- What is making me feel these emotions?
- Do I have enough information to justify me feeling this way?
- How can I get more information on this story or topic before forming an opinion?
- Should I share this with others, and will it have positive or negative effects on my community?

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3 Sides to Every Story

▶ Main Activity 2

ACTIONS

1. F introduces the concept of 'filter bubbles' to YP.

2. YP work in pairs or groups to produce a list of:
   - 2x possible negative consequences of filter bubbles
   - 2x possible benefits of filter bubbles
   - Use key questions (*) to support S where necessary.

3. YP present their ideas to the rest of the group and discuss.

KEY QUESTIONS

(*)

Negatives:

What might happen if we only get our information from sources that all have the same opinion on a topic? *(e.g. warped perception of what is happening in the world or what 'most people' believe, forming beliefs based on peer pressure as opposed to research and debate, become alienated from people who think differently about a topic or event).*

What might happen if we only look at content that is targeted towards us on social media? What skills might we be limiting? *(e.g. missing out on new experiences and opportunities, becoming more susceptible to advertising and marketers, easier to target with scams).*

Positives:

When might it be useful to have content targeted at you personally? *(e.g. adverts for products, notifications of music and sporting events, news about your favourite show or celebrity).*

What positives might come from being directed towards people with similar interests to you online? *(e.g. forming communities and friendships around common interests, greater sense of belonging and support, people who understand your viewpoint).*

MAIN ACTIVITY GUIDANCE ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

3 Sides to Every Story

▶ **Main Activity 2**

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Use your **Facilitator Explanation** to support your explanation of the filter bubble concept.

Possible Negatives

Where they exist, filter bubbles can repetitively feed us similar information, which in turn may **limit or narrow our understanding of what we read online**, be it a news story or influencer's messages (for example). This occurs by presenting users with similar, one-sided or even inaccurate content, and therefore **not exposing them to diverse information or opinions**.

Possible Benefits

Seeing personalised content online can be useful: filter bubbles **can recommend products (e.g. trainers) or services (e.g. a mental health helpline)** that we have been trying to find. Similarly, filter bubbles may **connect us to other like-minded individuals** online, which can in turn lead to people forming friendships or becoming part of new communities.

Regardless of whether a filter bubble is limiting the information we see online or not, we should always think critically and ask ourselves:

• *Do I feel like I am often getting the same information from the same place?*

• *Are these sources of information trustworthy? Why should I believe them?*

• *What are the benefits of getting information from different, credible sources?*

Differentiation: if young people struggle to list positives and negatives, the points listed above could be jumbled into one list. Young people could then identify which is which, and have to write a brief justification for their choice.

---

3 Sides to Every Story

▶ **End of Session**

ACTIONS

① **Group checklist:** as a group, YP produce a series of questions and/or actions they can use to assess the quality of information, and the ways they approach online content.

② **YP can fill out the relevant questions in their reflective journal (see Handout 1).**

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

This closing activity is an opportunity to reflect on and combine the key learnings from Sessions 1 and 2. The checklist produced can be printed and displayed in the youth centre to remind young people how to responsibly engage with information they see online. It could include (but is not limited to):

• **Establish the source** of information and whether it is reliable.

• **Fact-check suspicious information** by using sites such as fullfact.org or by looking at other, trusted websites.

• **Use common-sense** to consider how likely the information is to be true. Does it sound ridiculous and unbelievable? If so, even a brief Google search could expose it as false.

• **Use functions such as reverse image search** to identify the source of suspicious looking or controversial images.

• **Analyse the headline** to gauge how realistic a news story might be. Read on to check the story matches the headline. Top rule: never share an article without reading it yourself, even if the headline seems exciting/relevant to your friends or relatives!

• **Consider the motivations of the writer**: who are they trying to convince, and why might this be?

• **Question how balanced or biased the information is**: does it take a range of views into account, or are the sources one-sided?

• **Before reacting online, consider your own response to the information**: has it made you feel a certain way, and if so why? *Do you feel you have enough information to form a view? If so, is it responsible to share what you have read or seen with others?*

3 Sides to Every Story

> ▶ Additional activity ideas

1) Real-time investigation: young people can use their phones during the sessions – if your organisation's policy allows it – to examine their various social media homepages/newsfeeds/'explore' sections. They should try to identify filter bubbles in action, establishing whether the content or information they are fed tends to stem from the same or similar sources, or clusters around a small number of themes, issues or events. They can then present these instances to the group, discuss how the filter bubble may limit their understanding of the relevant issue, and plan actions to counteract its effects. This does not have to relate to current affairs or politics – in fact, it is useful to consider filter bubbles in other aspects of life, such as sport, gaming, music or culture.

2) Subjective to objective translation: this activity asks young people to turn subjective statements into objective ones – either choose examples found online, or get young people to write opinions on slips of paper and place them in a box. Each young person then selects a statement, circles any words which are personal/subjective and tries to reform the phrase as something more 'neutral'. (e.g. *'XXX has again shown her bad attitude and unkindness '* might become *'some are saying that this is not the first time she has displayed unkind behaviour, though other sources say this is an unfair judgement of her character, and that she has been misunderstood'*).

3) Group debate on the following motion:

   a) *"It's impossible to persuade people without using bias."*

   b) *"The point of social media is to recommend things I already know and like."*

   c) *"Bias always has the potential to be dangerous"*

Handouts

Handout 1 – A reflective journal posing questions for young people to answer across all sessions

Handout 2 – Three examples of reporting on the same event, demonstrating different forms of bias

Media Literacy Certificate

Be Internet Citizens: Reflective Journal - Part 1

Following the relevant activity, take some time to reflect on the questions below. These are for your own personal development as a digital citizen, and do not need to be shared with others unless you are comfortable doing so.

▶ **Fact vs Fiction**

What is your main takeaway from this session about the dangers of dis/misinformation? Why do you think it is important to stop it from spreading online?

▶ **Three Sides to Every Story**

Consider your own experiences using the internet, and social media in particular: where have you seen filter bubbles personalising the content you see? How do you feel about this kind of 'personalised web'?

▶ **Us vs Them**

How might people stereotype you, and why would this be inaccurate? What adjectives do you wish they would use instead?

How might people stereotype you, and why would this be inaccurate? What adjectives do you wish they would use instead?

How has this lesson changed how you feel about yours and other's identity?

Be Internet Citizens: Reflective Journal - Part 2

▶ **Speaking Up, Speaking Out**

Consider whether you have ever posted something hurtful online. Without going into details of the original post, how would you act differently if presented with this situation again?

Consider a time when someone else posted hurtful or offensive content online (e.g. a close friend, a relative, an influencer, a stranger in a comment thread). How might you have engaged this person to constructively resolve the situation, or take alternative action? Equally, how might you support the victim of an attack online?

Please insert the name of a female celebrity – relevant to the young people you work with – into the spaces below.
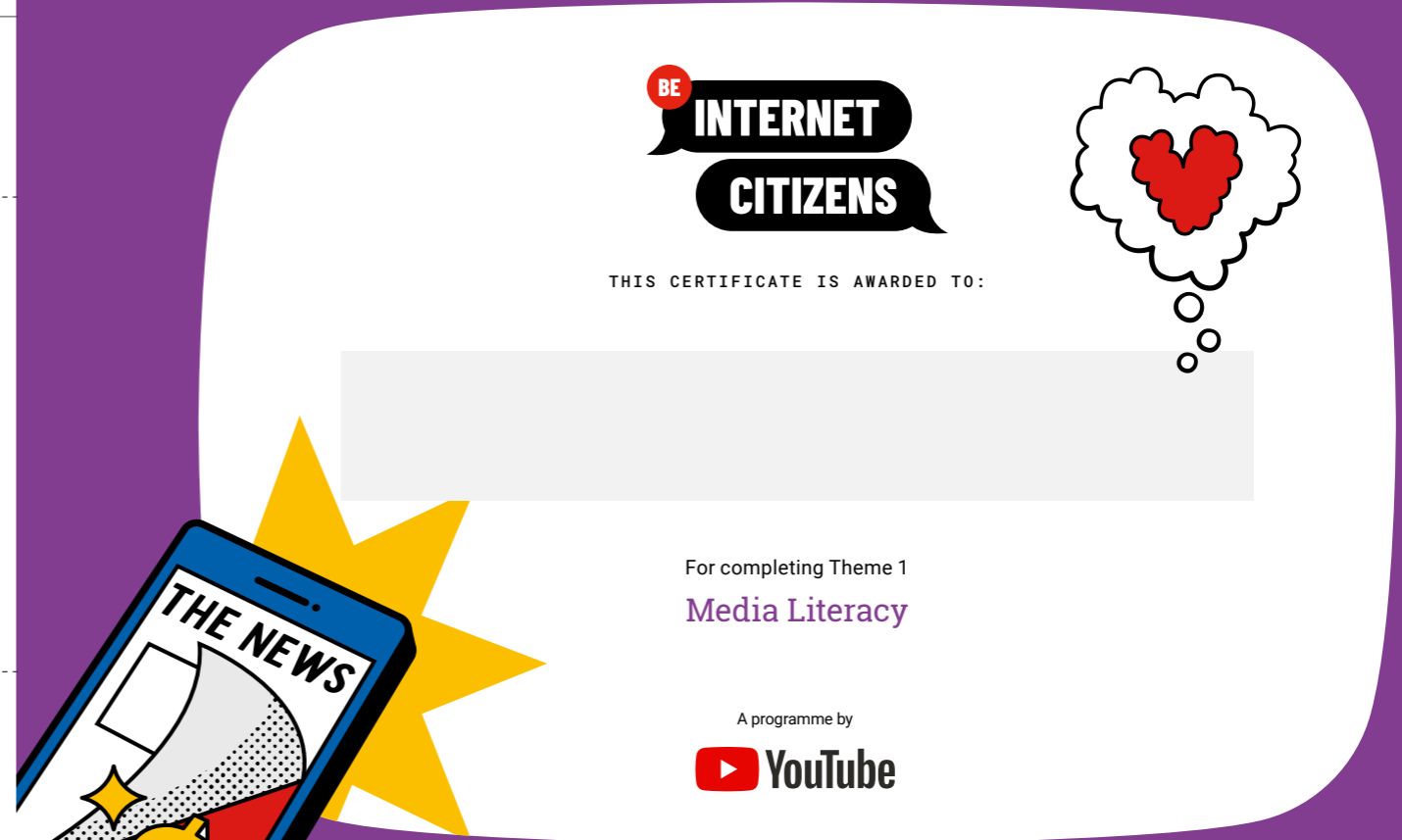
EXAMPLE #1 – POSITIVE BIAS:

Inspirational _____ **calls out horrifying social media ad for promoting fat-shaming**. _____ displayed a heroic attitude by taking on the major company in public, criticising its bullying attitude towards people who may be vulnerable and insecure over their weight. Fan-site welove_____.com spoke out on the issue saying: "this is another demonstration that _____ really cares about people and is happy to put her neck on the line in order to stand up for them."

EXAMPLE #2 – NEGATIVE BIAS:

Emotionally stunted _____ **should solve her own issues before going after other people**. The selfish celebrity has found another opportunity to promote herself by jumping onto a big issue. _____ only seems to care when she is directly affected, and this instance proved to be no different. One source close to the star told us how: "it's clear that _____ has a keen eye for opportunities to boost her profile and has taken full advantage of this at a time when her news coverage has been low". Yet again, we see a sad case of a celebrity who just cannot keep themselves out of the headlines.

EXAMPLE #3 – BALANCED OR NEUTRAL PERSPECTIVE:

_____ **and social media company end spat over advert - company issues an apology**. A dispute between _____ and a major social media company is resolved after the company issued an apology last night. _____ said she was "appreciative of the company's understanding on this matter" and hoped they would continue to remove fat-shaming content from their platform. A spokesman for the company said that it "understood how the advert could upset others" and recognised a mistake had been made.
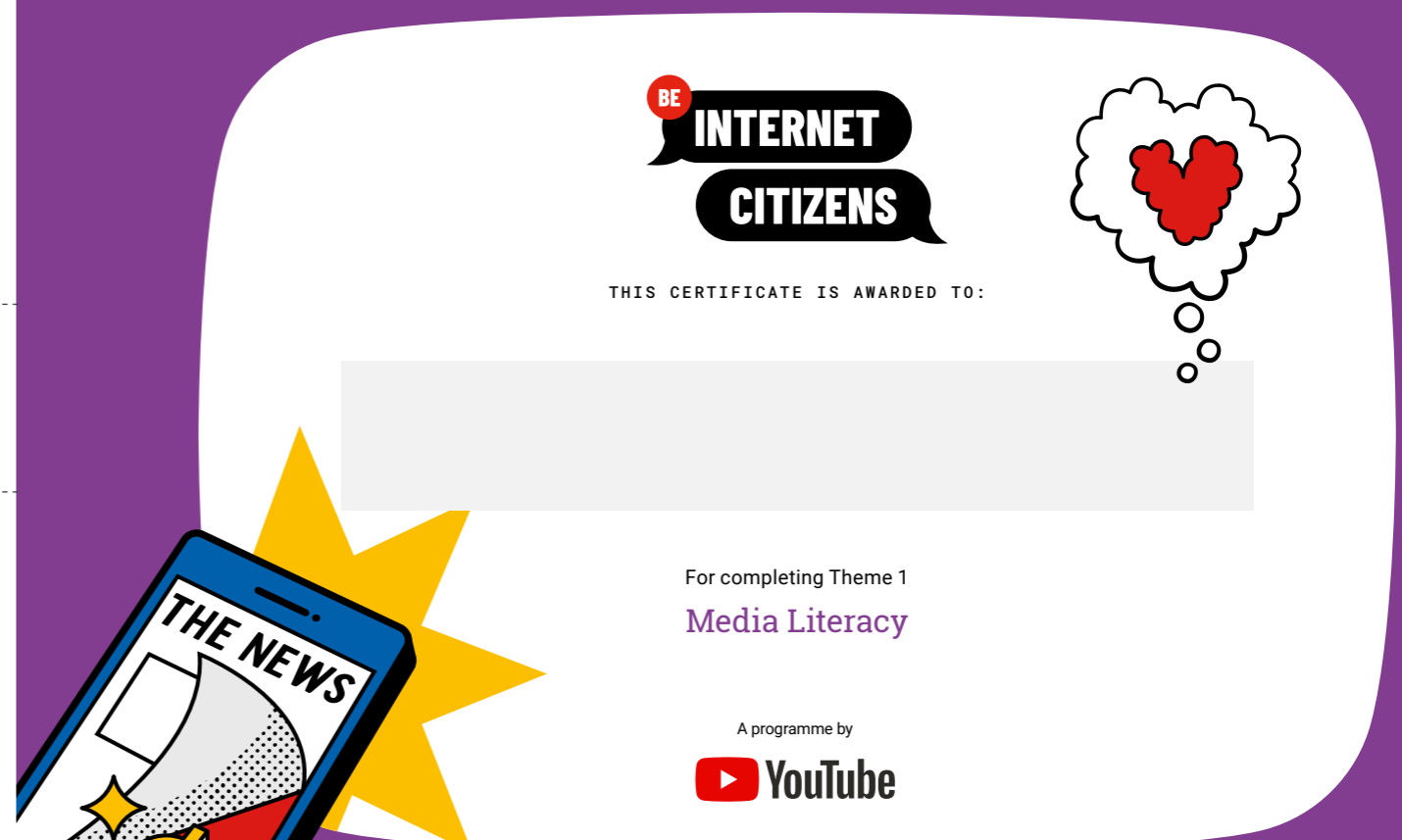
BE **INTERNET CITIZENS**

THIS CERTIFICATE IS AWARDED TO:

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Building Empathy

Contents

Introduction

Session 1
Us vs Them

🕐 60 – 90 minutes

Discussion-based session that introduces the ideas of unconscious bias and stereotyping. This is followed by a role-play activity that helps participants understand the 'us vs them' mentality and reflect on how it can divide society.

Session 2
Speaking Up, Speaking Out

🕐 60 – 90 minutes

An introduction to the concepts of free speech and hate speech. Young people will learn the difference between the two concepts, and examine a range of effective responses to online hate and abuse.

Session 3
Manifesto for a Better Web

🕐 50 – 60 minutes

An opportunity for participants to identify and debate their personal beliefs on appropriate online behaviour. The session ends by creating a common vision of the 'Good Web' including how they can each help improve the social media landscape.

Introduction

OVERVIEW

In the UK, young people increasingly live out their social, cultural and political lives online, with 70% of 12-15-year-olds having a social media account, according to Ofcom. The array of online platforms means we are more interconnected than ever, with formats to capture, document and share every opinion or feeling if we wish to.

Beyond individual interactions, these platforms have clear potential to forge and grow harmonious communities. They have been used to facilitate global youth-led movements, remarkable feats of fundraising, and provide extensive support networks for people struggling with complex issues. At the same time, the internet can fuel or exacerbate divisions between individuals and groups. In some instances, filter bubbles feed content to deepen users' existing biases, both conscious and unconscious, and in doing so push people further into problematic echo chambers. As groups become more isolated or one-dimensional, common ground is too easily found through stereotyping those perceived to be different, whether that relates to cultural and political interests (e.g. music tastes, gaming collectives, sports teams, party affiliation) or protected characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation).

This 'us vs them' mentality often leads to the coordinated spread of hatred online. Some bad actors and groups have exploited the vast and rapid access to online audiences to promote divisive viewpoints or ideologies, as well as abuse those most vulnerable to discrimination (e.g. minorities). Often, but not always, under the protection of anonymity, users can harass, intimidate, and threaten others until it is unsustainable for them to remain active on platforms. Young people experience these harms, but are often ill-equipped to respond. In 2019, Ofcom, reported that 81% of 12-15-year-olds said they'd had a potentially harmful experience online in the past year, and the majority (58%) of teens chose to ignore online hate when they encountered it.

To a great extent, social media is the sum of its parts: platforms can be an unrivalled force for good, fostering debate and curiosity, or a weapon used to stoke prejudice and division. Every user plays a role in tilting our experience of the internet in one direction or the other, based on their behaviour and sense of responsibility for others. The sessions in this theme encourage young people to demonstrate inclusivity and empathy in the digital space, mirroring the features of effective communication offline and helping to make the internet a safer space for all.

OBJECTIVES:

This theme contains three sessions, all covering digital citizenship topics that can help young people build and demonstrate empathy online. At the end of these sessions, they will be able to:

1. Understand what unconscious and conscious bias is and how they can lead to stereotyping.
2. Understand how 'us vs them' thinking creates division in society.
3. Understand what echo chambers are and how they can contribute to polarised societies.
4. Understand free speech and hate speech.
5. Consider why people post hateful content online.
6. Recognise what positive interactions online look like.
7. Identify a range of effective responses to hateful online content.
8. Understand how to use their voice positively online.

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Session 1 Summary

Us vs Them

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SESSION OBJECTIVE

- To understand what stereotyping is and how it leads to 'us vs them' thinking.
- To reflect on individual biases and how they affect our opinions and worldview.

EQUIPMENT

- Access to a computer with PPT presentation software to display accompanying slides
- A project and screen, or interactive whiteboard

HANDOUTS

Handout 1 and 3

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Young People (YP) can:

- Articulate examples of conscious and unconscious biases.
- Explain what stereotyping is and the consequences it can have on individuals and groups in society.
- Identify instances of 'us vs them' thinking in individuals' lives and wider society.
- Explain what an echo chamber is and understand the positive and negative consequences associated with them.

Us vs Them

▶ Key Concepts

Stereotyping

DEFINITION

Steteotyping occurs **when we categorise or make assumptions about people based on basic characteristics**, for example their age, gender identity, skin colour, physical ability, sexuality, religion or even location. A stereotype presumes that everyone who shares these characteristics is the same, or that superficial aspects about a person can reveal their deeper likes, abilities, preferences and habits.

FACILITATOR EXPLANATION

When we stereotype, we place someone in a group based on assumed things about their appearance or their personal background. While this is a natural process that can help us make quick decisions, it can also become an overly fixed and narrow way of viewing others. Grouping people is often harmful, as it causes us to pre-judge them based on just a few examples or casual observations. It suggests that everyone who shares a superficial trait or interest is the same, when this is clearly not the case. Such a process oversimplifies our understanding of individuals and their identities, and can begin to harden in our brain as 'fact' even when we see evidence to the contrary. This in turn limits our willingness and ability to understand people as individuals or empathise with their personal experience. For example, people often

stereotype young children from an early age, assuming that boys will like football, tools and the colour blue, while girls will prefer playing with dolls and the colour pink. In this instance, we have assumed what they like based on gender, without ever asking their opinion – this can have real-world impact, such as the number of women who pursue engineering and science in later life, or the number of men who consider nursing and early years teaching.

> YOU CAN REFER TO THE FACILITATOR GUIDANCE SECTIONS THROUGHOUT THIS SESSION PLAN FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON STEREOTYPING.

▶ Key Concepts

'Us vs Them'

DEFINITION

An 'us vs them' mentality **divides the world into negatively viewed or stereotyped out-groups (them), and positively viewed or victim in-groups (us)**. Divisions can be based on a wide range of characteristics such as race, religion, gender, class, nationality, and political views. It can even relate to culture, for example which sports team a person supports or what music they listen to.

FACILITATOR EXPLANATION

In 'us vs them' mentalities, the out-group is generally stereotyped as being or behaving in one defined way, and can therefore be blamed for the problems experienced by the in-group.

The division of groups into 'us' and 'them' exists throughout society, present in sports (fan rivalries between teams) , politics (political party or affiliation), culture (hostility between different 'stan' fanbases) and even where you live (e.g. gang disputes based on which street someone grew up on). On its own, identifying with specific 'tribes' is not always problematic and can even play a positive role in people's lives, providing a sense of belonging and mutual interest However, it can also generate hate and division by turning people against each other based on perceived difference.

Online forums are another place where the 'us vs them' dynamic can play out, with new groups forming and gaining thousands of followers at the click of a button. As these communities expand a group mentality may emerge, where individuals feel emboldened to blame, harass or intimidate those belonging to different groups.
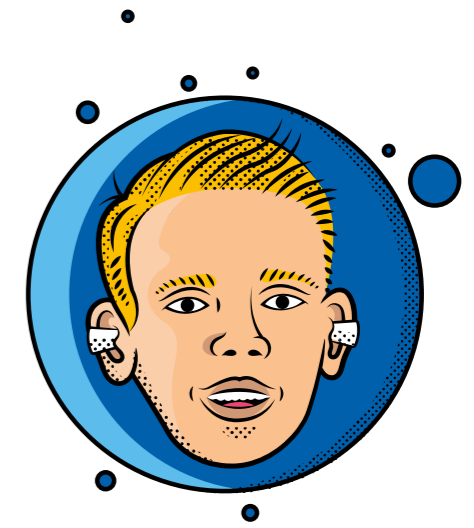

YOU CAN REFER TO THE FACILITATOR GUIDANCE SECTIONS THROUGHOUT THIS SESSION PLAN FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON 'US VS THEM'.

▶ Key Concepts

Echo Chamber

DEFINITION

Echo chambers are social spaces in which ideas, opinions and beliefs are reinforced by repetition within a closed group.

FACILITATOR EXPLANATION

Within echo chambers, opposing views are either not expressed or represented, or actively dismissed and removed. Most people have had first-hand experience with echo chambers – they can be found in everything from discussions conducted on news sites to private threads between friends.

Echo chambers can be comfortable, since it is generally easier to agree with people in a discussion than disagree. However they can also be harmful, reducing opportunities to interact with people who hold opposing views or come from different backgrounds, and in turn reinforcing social division. Echo chambers can reduce individuals' understanding of different opinions and, by extension, limit empathy for those who hold them.

While the echo chamber phenomenon is similar to filter bubbles, there are some key differences. For example, echo chambers can be found both on- and offline, whereas filter bubbles are generally a digital phenomenon, driven by algorithms. It can also be helpful to think of echo chambers as a product of filter bubbles; if the latter filters out information we might not be interested in or disagree with, an echo chamber is what we are left with, where we become overexposed to one type of information.


YOU CAN REFER TO THE FACILITATOR GUIDANCE SECTIONS THROUGHOUT THIS SESSION PLAN FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON ECHO CHAMBERS.

Us vs Them

FURTHER INFORMATION ON STEREOTYPES AND 'US VS THEM':

RESOURCE	SUMMARY	AGE-GROUP SUITABILITY
BBC Bitesize 'Shattering Stereotypes'	Testimonials from young people discussing their experiences of stereotyping.	All ages
'Us vs Them' in the gaming world: Taylor Lorenz (journalist)	A documented example of (unaggressive) 'us vs them' taking place on a video game, spilling into social media and the real world.	Suitable for young people aged 15+
Equality and Human Rights Commission – Lesson Guide on Prejudice and Stereotyping	Includes activities for learning through drama (role-play), as well as videos relating to disability-related bullying, racism and gender discrimination.	For facilitators

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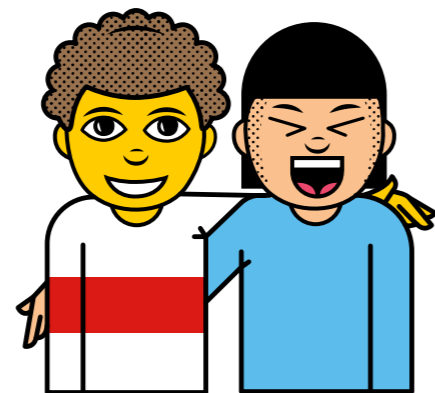
Us vs Them

Session Activities Plan

▶ **Introduction**

ACTIONS

① **On their own, YP examine a series of images. They should mind-map any words that come to mind when they look at each image (adjectives, nouns etc.).** F should encourage them not to filter their thoughts, but to write down exactly what they think (without using bad language and staying within the agreed ground rules).

② **F takes feedback from volunteering YP, listening to the words they noted down for each image.** F should ask YP to justify why they chose their words. Use key questions (*) to prompt YP to privately reflect on their word choices.

③ **F introduces the idea that everyone has their own set of conscious and unconscious biases, using key questions (**) to guide discussion.**

④ **F introduces the concept of 'stereotyping' and asks YP to consider its consequences for individuals and communities.**

KEY QUESTIONS

(*)
- Did this word instinctively pop into your head?
- Why do you think that was?
- Do you think anything influenced your opinion on this person?
- Were you surprised by any of the words you chose?

(**)
- Can the media we consume – on and offline – ever make us more biased towards a person or group of people? Can you think of examples of this type of media?
- What are we doing when we group people together based on a set of biases? (e.g. what is it called if we put someone into a category or make an assumption about them because they are, for example, a man, woman, white person, black person, religious person?)
- What effect do you think this has on society? (e.g. young people choosing careers, discrimination, self-confidence, racism and violence)

MAIN ACTIVITY GUIDANCE ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

Us vs Them

▶ Introduction

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

While the previous theme focused on media bias, this session asks young people to reflect on their own biases, and how these might affect their understanding of and interaction with other people.

The introductory activity asks young people to play word association with a series of images, in order to demonstrate how easy it is to stereotype based on a set of assumptions (both collective and individual). You should source a range of generic images that young people will likely have an opinion on, for example:

- A celebrity or influencer
- A politician
- A male athlete
- A female athlete
- A homeless person
- A businessman or woman
- A convict
- A rapper
- A person wearing a specific clothing brand

When reviewing the words that young people associated with each image, ask volunteers to justify or explain their choice. You might want to note down these answers, particularly where they recur multiple times. For example, young people may point to online information which comments on a particular celebrity (whether they are a musician, actor, influencer, sports player) or homeless people generally, that has influenced their perception. Similarly, many young people may fail to provide a reason, even when

pushed, or be uncomfortable with the question itself. Both answers expose something interesting about how opinions are formed, often without our knowing.

These responses are key for the subsequent discussion. Young people should recognise that everyone has their own set of biases that shape how they relate to people and interpret the world around them. Some of these biases we are aware of, for example favouring a family member or friend over someone else, or supporting one sports team above another. Other biases are unconscious, often shaped by our upbringing, family, friends, experiences, education and the content we consume. These can be even more powerful, in part because we are not aware they affect our ideas and decision-making, so do not consider or challenge them in our day-to-day life. Such biases can result in stereotyping individuals or groups of people, based on a set of assumptions about their identity.

As a way of demonstrating unconscious bias you could ask young people the following: "**is Dr Pepper (name of popular fizzy drink) a man or a woman?",** or **"if your bike suddenly got a flat tyre, would you ask a man or woman to help you change it?"** If the majority of young people put their hand up for man, you could probe further and ask why. Some may say that they typically see male Drs represented in the media, or they may say they don't know as they have never considered this, they just assumed it was the case. This is an example of unconscious bias in action, possibly based on more frequent representations of men in these roles than women.
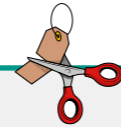
Us vs Them

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE (CONTINUED)

Once you have introduced the term 'stereotyping' and discussed the ideas above in further detail, ask young people to consider the possible consequences (this will feed into the next activity). Negative impacts could include:

- Causing people to feel judged, threatened or in danger on the basis of inaccurate information;
- Causing harm to people's mental health by fuelling insecurities and self-consciousness based on a particular stereotype (e.g. wearing religious clothing/symbols, having a 'foreign sounding' name, pursuing certain hobbies, liking a particular sports team or musician);
- Causing people to abuse or scapegoat others on the basis of a particular characteristic (e.g. skin colour, gender, religion);
- Limiting our understanding of people who appear different to us in certain (often superficial) ways;
- Strengthening unfair biases towards others, which in turn affects our behaviour and interaction with those groups.

Us vs Them

▶ Main Activity

ACTIONS

① F explains to YP that they are going to play *Mission to Mars*. Divide YP into two teams, Rover and Discover (see Handout 3). Use PPT slide to explain these two teams are going to compete to run the country. Each team will be given a set of skills they must use to argue their case to travel and form the new Mars community!

② **Each team should brainstorm why their set of skills makes them well-placed to join the mission, on flip chart paper.** Encourage them to consider knowledge, skills and experience, and what would be needed to survive on a new planet. They should add points to their flip chart in preparation for the final debate. During this time, F prompts each group to deepen their team's identity; what are their core values, what do they stand for, what does their flag represent, what is their team motto and chant? **The teams will then pitch for the opportunity to govern.** Each group should have at least 5 minutes to present their teams and the relevant skill-sets they bring. Once both teams have presented they will have another 5 minutes for 'points of information' and debate, adding rebuttals and any additional reasons why their 'crew' is superior. Decide which group will present their skills first, and give each the same amount of time. F should encourage them to be competitive with each other, using key questions (*). Once the debate has finished, F can choose a winner.

KEY QUESTIONS

(*)
- What skills does your team have that the other doesn't?
- Why would your crew be better in this scenario?
- Which team is more practical/ creative/varied/ successful?
- What makes your crew special in comparison to the other group?
- Why is the other group unsuitable for this task?

ACTIONS

③ **F asks each team to provide adjectives they would use to describe their own team (under 'Our team' heading) and adjectives they would use to describe the opposing team (under 'Their team' heading),** making it clear that any personal (ad hominen) attacks towards a group member are unacceptable and will be discounted. F captures adjectives on the white board. F then removes headings and replaces them with the terms 'In-group' and 'Out-group'. F ask YP to imagine these adjectives were used to describe different sides of a political, religious, cultural, or class divide.

④ **F introduces the idea of the 'us vs them' mentality, guided by key questions (**).**

⑤ **F introduces the idea of echo chambers, and discusses their potential consequences,** using key questions to guide where necessary **(***).**

⑥ **In pairs, YP produce a list of ways that they can bridge divides between individuals or communities.**

⑦ **F takes feedback from YP,** and discusses the importance of respecting other people's identities and vice versa.

KEY QUESTIONS

(**)
- What emotions did you feel while playing the game?
- How competitive did you get?
- Why do you think this was?
- Now you have learnt about the 'us vs them' mentality, can you imagine how powerful this feeling might be if the game was based on differences in identity, culture, politics or religion?
- Can you think of examples of where you have seen the 'us vs them' mentality in action, either on or offline?
- How does an 'us vs them' mentality affect both individuals and communities?
- Can what we see online reinforce 'us vs them' thinking, and support our existing biases? What type of content might do this, and how does it affect us?
- Thinking back to the last session, how should we respond when we see something online that provokes an emotional response?

(***)
- How did being a part of a group during 'Mission to Mars' affect your own behaviour, and the groups' behaviour as a whole?
- Think back to filter bubbles from the last theme: if we only spoke to people with the same interests, opinions, and biases as us, how might that affect the way we view certain topics?
- How might this affect the way we relate to other people ('them'), who are not a part of our groups?
- What could the consequences be of 'us vs them' thinking and echo chambers?

MAIN ACTIVITY GUIDANCE ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

Us vs Them

▶ Main Activity

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

This activity is designed to demonstrate how quickly we can fall victim to an 'us vs them' mentality, and resort to stereotyping perceived 'out-groups'. Each group should feel a sense of allegiance to their team, and can create their own team mottos on Handout 3 to demonstrate this:

Team Discover is defined by practical, 'hard' skills. They can use their technical competence and efficiency to set up a prosperous society, founded on dedication to hard work.

Conversely, **Team Rover** boasts a range of 'soft' and creative skills. These will enable them to build a flourishing community, founded on principles of cooperation and peaceful co-existence.

As you move between them, bolster each group's sense of pride and team identity , stirring rivalry based on key differences (e.g. **Team Discover** are cold and uncaring, **Team Rover** are weak and lack the technical skills to survive), although be clear that any personal attacks towards their peers will be disqualified. In justifying why their characters and skill sets are superior, young people should experience a friendly and competitive tension, helping them reflect on the 'us vs them' dynamics which arise.

Following the game, emphasise that young people just experienced a form of 'us vs them' thinking, even though the groups were entirely random and the task had no real stakes or significance. When collecting adjectives, young people are likely to highlight the strengths of their own team, while resorting to insults and stereotypes about their counterparts. Prompt them to consider whether this form of oppositional thinking is found elsewhere in society (such as religious, political, class or cultural divides), and how this reflects many people's tendency for 'us vs them' viewpoints.

Differentiation: to ensure all young people feel able to contribute to the debate, you could assign a specific skill for each of them to present on (or in pairs, depending on group size). This ensures the activity isn't dominated by a small number of more confident/vocal participants.

Use **Facilitator Explanation** to guide the discussion on this concept. Belonging to a group with a name and purpose quickly created an 'identity', turning them against each other and encouraging stereotypes about the opposing side. Young people should understand that divisions between social groups exist and are often reinforced by 'us vs them' thinking, especially when people feel empowered to use aggressive and hateful speech behind a computer screen (or even anonymously).

You could then prompt the group to consider where they have seen this mentality in action: can they cite examples of 'us vs them' thinking in comments on social media posts? Or even in the headlines of more traditional media? Have they ever witnessed the negative consequences of 'us vs them' thinking, whether online or offline? For example, they could refer to intense rivalries that exist for fans of certain sports teams (e.g. Liverpool vs. Manchester United) or musicians (e.g. Drake vs. Chris Brown; Adele vs. Taylor Swift; K-Pop vs. J-Pop), feuds between influencers (such as YouTubers Logan Paul and KSI; beauty vloggers James Charles and Tati Westbrook), or in the world of online gaming. These feuds are often based on personal interactions, differences of opinion, or misunderstandings, which have no impact on the general public – nonetheless, because supporters feel compelled to defend their idols, they can spiral into vicious attacks online and have real-world consequences. These include arguments that descend into abuse, death-threats, trolling and, in

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Us vs Them
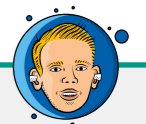
FACILITATOR GUIDANCE (CONTINUED)

extreme cases, publishing a person's identifying information like home address or contact number ('doxxing'). These methods are never justified and are in no way proportionate to the perceived 'crime'. Nonetheless, people can feel emboldened by the support of their in- group, become swept up in the frenzy, and post things they would never say offline or face-to-face.

Referring back to the starter activity, you could discuss how what we see online – especially content targeted to us via a filter bubble – can reinforce unconscious bias. This is especially true with emotive content, which often provokes feelings of anger or indignation. When this happens, we may become even more attached to an 'us vs them' mentality, and strengthen our stereotypes about others.

You could ask young people to consider Nazi Germany as an historic example of 'us vs them' thinking – early propaganda blamed Jewish citizens for Germany's economic problems, even though the primary reason for debt was WW1. This spiralled over time until Jewish communities were considered the downfall of society, providing the rationale for genocide. Equally, an 'us versus them' mentality lies at the core of slavery and caste systems, since it generally suggests that a certain race, profession, history or ethnicity renders someone 'less human'.

Here, you could mention that propaganda is sometimes based on spreading false facts about a target group (thinking back to the session on disinformation), and achieves results by manipulating people's emotions or fears -- a common example would be immigration, where foreign workers are blamed for economic downturn and job loss, despite all evidence to the contrary.

You can now use the **Facilitator Guidance** to introduce the idea of echo chambers. Young peoples should refer to the previous theme: echo chambers are often a consequence of filter bubbles, i.e if we receive most of our information from sources who adopt the same views, or give us a one-sided picture of events, we can quickly find ourselves in an echo chamber. This is not necessarily a bad thing in every instance: echo chambers can bring a sense of community, and an opportunity to enjoy a common interest with like-minded people. Indeed, social media has facilitated global interconnection between people, and more than ever before has provided them with access to a vast number of groups and fora through which they can build relationships and learn from each other. On the other hand, if they are based on shared stereotypes of others, they can push people further into 'us vs them' thinking and lead to greater divides between groups.

Us vs Them

▶ Main Activity

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE (CONTINUED)

Ultimately, young people should recognise the importance of critical thinking when reading information or content online. This means questioning *why* we agree with something, and whether our opinions and viewpoints are based on credible information or an emotional gut-reaction. We should always ask ourselves, "do I only agree with this because it supports my biases?", and "is this content unhelpfully stereotyping a particular group in society?". Challenging our own viewpoints is useful, if only because it helps us explain the reasoning and rationale for those beliefs to others.

When discussing the power of community, ask young people to think of people in their lives that are effective at bringing others closer together or helping to bridge divides. This could be someone they know personally (e.g. a family member, a friend, a youth worker), or in the public sphere (e.g. an online influencer, politician, sportsperson). They should consider the positive impact of social media on a variety of inspiring initiatives like #Clapforourcarers or Youth Strike for Climate in promoting solidarity, and powerful messages of influencers such as Nadir Nahdi, Nas Daily, Jessica Kellgren-Fozard, Agon Hare, Tyler Oakley, Harnaam Kaur, or Salice Rose, who promote respect for diverse identities (some of these are YouTube Creators for Change).

▶ End of Session

ACTIONS

1. **YP use the remainder of the session to reflect on and answer the following questions in their journal:**

   - How might people stereotype you, and why would this be inaccurate? What adjectives do you wish they would use instead?

   - How might people stereotype you, and why would this be inaccurate? What adjectives do you wish they would use instead?

   - How has this session changed how you feel about yours and other's identity?

2. **F can then volunteer to share their answers with the whole group.**
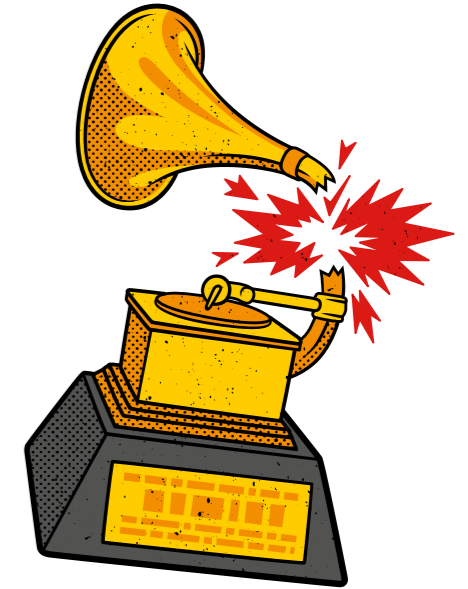
Us vs Them

▶ **End of Session**

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

When listening to young people's responses, emphasise that individuality is a virtue, and it is possible to feel part of a group without alienating/demonising others. <u>Belonging to a community should never mean you have to think, believe or act the same as everyone else – that is a cult!</u> The internet can feel like a zero-sum place, where only one fan-base or phenomenon can be king – in reality people are not one-dimensional, and our likes/interests are entirely personal, unique and often 'contradictory' (e.g. a bodybuilder who does ballet). Stereotyping can be tempting because it makes the world easier to understand, but it takes us further away from connecting with people or exploring their viewpoints in any meaningful way.

As this is a personal reflection activity, S do not need to share their responses with the group. However, some S may volunteer to contribute, particularly to the second question in their journals: "How would the world be different if people stopped stereotyping others?".

When considering how to recognise and counteract their own and others' biases, young people could mention the following:

- **Actively listening to other people's perspectives rather than automatically judging them:** this helps to build empathy and develop an understanding of why someone holds a certain point of view. This doesn't mean you have to agree with them – indeed, it may reinforce your own existing opinion – but it lays the foundation for effective communication and means disagreement can be respectful rather than hostile.

- **Pause to consider your own response to information or interactions:** this is especially important online where social media platforms are designed to encourage rapid, brief, and potentially thoughtless interactions, whether with content or other people. Before sharing content or communicating with others online, it is useful to ask: am I acting out of impulse/emotion or have I really considered what I am about to say? Am I about to stereotype? Would I make the same point if it related to someone of a different race or gender (for example)? Would I say this to someone's face?

- **Embrace diversity:** we can prevent the harmful consequences of echo chambers by seeking diversity in our friendships, interests and interactions. This is more possible than ever online, where we can learn from and engage with endless communities if we make the smallest effort to seek them out.

- **Avoid generalisations about individuals or groups:** making broad statements about people with little understanding of their true identity strengthens negative stereotypes. Not only can this cause hurt, but it limits your own opportunity to experience meaningful engagement or even friendships with others. We must also speak up when others make similar generalisations, explaining to them why their statements are problematic. It can be really hard to confront friends and family on these topics, but stereotypes thrive when we stay silent.

▶ **Additional Activities**

1) **Unconscious biases:** this can also be folded into the discussions on unconscious bias in the introduction. Ask the group to imagine 'a scientist', considering the details of what they look like. After about 20 seconds, put a stock photo of an older, white-skinned man wearing a lab coat on the screen, and ask how many young people pictured something similar or identical. Similarly, young people may imagine athletes to be exclusively able-bodied people, despite their being a huge number of Paralympians. This is a neat illustration of bias, and works in many scenarios.

2) **Search engine bias:** type the words 'sports player' or 'footballer' into a search engine. You should find that the vast majority are images of men, despite the number of female sports players and celebrities in the public sphere. Similarly, until recently typing 'CEO' into an image search revealed page after page of caucasian-looking men – the first image of a woman was around #100 and pictured Boss Barbie! Search engines have since amended their results to show far greater diversity in both gender and ethnicity. However, a search for 'girl's toy' will still reveal almost exclusively pink dolls and beauty kits, while 'boy's toy' shows cars, superheroes and construction tools. Such biases profoundly limit our understanding of the world and reinforce stereotypes that do not reflect reality.

3) Group debates the following motions:

   a) *"There is no point debating people on social media."*

   b) *"Social media is better at uniting than dividing."*

   c) *"Echo chambers are a positive form of community."*

Speaking Up, Speaking Out

SESSION OBJECTIVE

- To understand the difference between free speech and hate speech, and how to effectively respond to online hate and abuse

EQUIPMENT

- Access to a computer with PPT presentation software to display accompanying slides
- A project and screen, or interactive whiteboard

HANDOUTS

Handout 1, 4 and 5

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Young People (YP) can:

- Define freedom of speech and explain the benefits it offers citizens and wider society;
- Describe impactful, positive uses of freedom of speech online;
- Define hate speech and identify cases online;
- Explain the real-world harm caused by online hate speech for themselves and others;
- Employ a range of responses to hate speech and verbal abuse online (e.g. reporting, counter-messaging, peer support, debunking false claims).

Speaking Up, Speaking Out

▶ Key Concepts

Free Speech

DEFINITION

Free speech is the right to hold opinions, and to receive and share information and ideas freely, without fear of retaliation or censorship by the government.

FACILITATOR EXPLANATION

Freedom of expression is recognised as a human right under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In the UK, the Human Rights Act grants all citizens the right to free expression, giving each individual the freedom to hold opinions and receive and impart information without interference from the government. This includes the right to question, challenge or speak out against the deeply-held beliefs of others, including the government itself, a right that is not afforded in numerous countries around the world.

According to the law, the right to free speech carries certain duties and responsibilities, in particular that what a person says cannot threaten, dehumanise or encourage violence against others. Hate and extremist groups across different ideologies try to stretch this definition and expand what is 'permitted'. Often they will actively spread hate and division under the banner of 'free speech', then claim that any efforts to limit harm are abusing their civil rights. Even if an act of speech is technically 'legal', it can still cause serious harm. Also, while everyone is entitled to hold personal beliefs and ideas, even controversial ones, we do not have an automatic right to publish those views online to the widest possible audience – in other words, **'freedom of speech does not equal freedom of reach'**. Social media platforms set their own community guidelines, enabling them to remove or limit the distribution of content that breaches these rules, even if it is not technically 'illegal'. User policies are public for all major platforms, and updated regularly to outline what is/is not acceptable. A good example is Germany, where it is illegal to deny the Holocaust happened – the country is very aware how dangerous this conspiracy can be, and how hurtful to those whose families were victims in WWII, so prevent such views from being aired publicly.

Free speech must be exercised with care and consideration, so that it becomes a tool for inclusion rather than intimidation and abuse (especially of minority groups). For example, you are entitled to disagree with someone's religious beliefs, or be critical of a religion broadly, but that does not mean you can purposefully attack or harass someone for their beliefs.
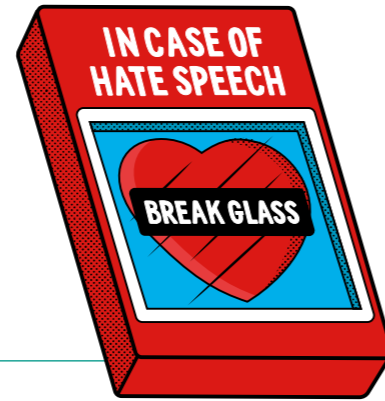
> YOU CAN ALSO READ THE FACILITATOR GUIDANCE SECTIONS THROUGHOUT THE SESSION PLAN FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON FREE SPEECH.

Speaking Up, Speaking Out

▶ Key Concepts

Hate Speech

DEFINITION

Hate speech **attacks a person or group based on their race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or physical and mental abilities**. These are sometimes referred to as 'protected characteristics', i.e. things about an individual which cannot be changed, are central to their identity or 'make a person who they are'. As such, abusing someone or discriminating against them because of these factors is prejudiced and unfair.

FACILITATOR EXPLANATION

There are several laws which seek to protect certain characteristics from hate and abuse in the UK. These include:

- The Public Order Act (1986)
- The Malicious Communications Act (1988)
- The Religious and Racial Hatred Act (2006)
- The Equality Act (2010)

These laws provide a check on 'pure' freedom of expression, ensuring free speech is not misused to attack, oppress and intimidate individuals or groups in society. Online hate speech is both an ongoing and growing problem and something many young people will encounter on a variety of digital platforms. To date it has proven much harder to regulate, not least since many people cannot be identified online, or phrase their hateful comments to sit in the 'grey zone' between technically legal and prosecutable.

Such hateful content can nonetheless fuel 'us versus them' beliefs and drive individuals towards discriminatory and violent behaviour both on- and offline. Moreover, it can cause significant harm to those targeted by it, including damage to mental wellbeing.

The Equality Act in particular safeguards people from discrimination based on a range of characteristics that may be integral to their identity. In contrast, things like political views or hobbies are **not** included, because they are more fluid, can shift over time, and encompass people from many different backgrounds. Moreover, while people may disagree with someone else's political views, or diverge in their interests, these typically reflect opinions rather than core beliefs, and are therefore not subject to the same levels of prejudice or discrimination. You may vote for one political party today and another in the next election, or stop supporting one football team and join another – this is fundamentally different from the colour of your skin, physical traits or religious values.

Speaking Up, Speaking Out
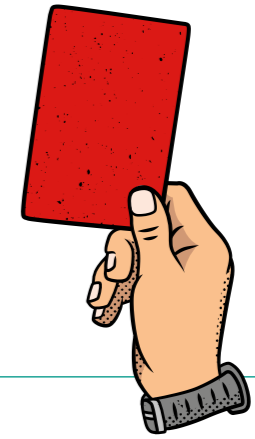
Effectively dealing with this material is key to tackling hate and extremism, whether that means preventing its creation or limiting its spread and visibility online. By learning the definitions of these concepts, young people should recognise that hate speech is an illegal practice which creates or worsens divisions in society. Other consequences of hate speech include damaging others' self-esteem and mental health, emboldening individuals to commit acts of violence, or causing people to develop inaccurate beliefs about certain groups or individuals.

YOU CAN ALSO READ THE FACILITATOR GUIDANCE SECTIONS THROUGHOUT THE SESSION PLAN FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON HATE SPEECH.

Speaking Up, Speaking Out

▶ **Key Concepts**

FURTHER INFORMATION ON FREE SPEECH AND HATE SPEECH:

RESOURCE	SUMMARY	AGE-GROUP SUITABILITY
SELMA: Hacking Hate	A project to raise awareness about online hate speech, providing empirical research and a toolkit of educational resources.	All ages.
Ditch the Label	Youth charity that provides a range of resources to empower young people to overcome issues related to bullying, digital wellbeing, and on and offline relationships.	All ages.
Report Harmful Content	A service provided by the UK Safer Internet Centre to support internet users report content that violates social media platform community guidelines.	All ages.
Citizens Advice: racist and religious hate crime	A list of FAQ responses regarding racial and religious discrimination. Includes details on how to respond to incidents at home or school.	Suitable for young people aged 15+
Stop Hate UK	Charity website. Stop Hate UK are dedicated to supporting the victims of hate crime. They offer educational resources for young people.	Suitable for young people aged 15+ **N.B. Exercise extra caution as video resource may be distressing for some young people.**
Press Freedom Index	An index ranking 180 countries and regions according to the level of freedom available to journalists.	A resource for facilitators.

Speaking Up, Speaking Out
Session Activities Plan

▶ **Introduction**

ACTIONS

① **F displays the definition of 'free speech' on the board.** YP should copy this down and F checks for understanding.

② **F explains the 'silent discussion' activity to YP.**

③ **YP respond to the following questions,** each written on a piece of A2 or flip-chart paper:

- Do you think it is important for society to have laws that enable free speech? Why/why not?
- What might happen if we didn't have free speech, and we were censored by those in power?
- What are the different ways in which people can exercise their right to free speech?
- How can people use free speech in a positive way?

F should monitor responses and prompt YP to stretch their thinking as far as possible, using key questions (*) to support if necessary.

④ **Whole group goes through the responses to each question.** Following discussion, YP could stick each piece of paper in a corner of the room so they are displayed for the rest of the session.

KEY QUESTIONS

(*)
- How do we all benefit from being able to share and listen to other points of view?
- How does being able to express ourselves help us to grow as individuals and a society?
- Do people exercise their right to free speech online as well as offline? On what different platforms?
- How can we communicate positively and effectively with others?

MAIN ACTIVITY GUIDANCE ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

Speaking Up, Speaking Out

▶ Introduction

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

This activity allows you to benchmark young people's understanding around the right to free speech. Through the silent discussion, participants should acknowledge free speech as a fundamental human right for UK citizens, protected under domestic and international law. They should also consider how the rise of digital technology, and social media in particular, has provided a wide range of avenues through which people can exercise their right to free speech.

During the activity, young people should silently write their own answers to the questions on each piece of A2 paper, as well as reading and responding to the answers left by their peers. This way, discussions will stem from each question, and all young people should feel encouraged to take part owing to the silent nature of their written contributions.

Use the **Facilitators Explanation** to guide your introduction to the concept of free speech. Young people should recognise that free speech allows citizens to hold opinions, and to receive and impart information on almost any issue, free from government interference or censorship. In a true democracy, each individual is entitled to their own beliefs and points of view.

By way of comparison, young people should be made aware that not all countries permit freedom of speech, and many actively try to suppress it. You could draw example countries from the **Press Freedom Index**, where the ruling party has complete ownership of the media and control over citizens' communication. In some countries, citizens can be sent to a concentration camp for viewing, reading or listening to content provided by a media outlet based outside of the country. In some of these countries, certain websites like Google, YouTube, Facebook, Wikipedia, Instagram, Twitch, TikTok and the BBC are blocked, alongside major international newspaper and media outlets.

By limiting the information available to citizens, governments can create their version of 'reality', control public understanding of the world, and increase the impact of political propaganda. Even in some EU member states, all major newspapers, radio stations and TV channels are being taken over by the government or its allies, making it difficult for any opposing viewpoints to enter the mainstream. Again, this denies citizens a balanced debate on public life, including government actions, and effectively silences criticism.

Young people should consider that in the UK the media is largely allowed to report on any topic without fear of censorship or punishment, including strong criticism of the government. The only limits are those sometimes imposed on stories which could endanger or bully individuals with no public benefit (e.g. sharing details of someone's personal life when it has no relevance to the general public), or that violate civil rights (e.g. by hacking a person's phone to gain information). This privilege extends to individuals; young people should recognise that they can comment on any issue or event that interests them, in both on and offline settings. The meteoric rise of social media means that people are able to share their thoughts and feelings with any number of their peers and the wider public at one click of a button.

Of course this system must have some checks and balances to keep everyone safe. Young people should also recognise that they have a responsibility to exercise free speech in a constructive way. Without this, dialogue breaks down between individuals and groups, and it becomes harder or impossible to have a reasonable discussion based on valid differences in opinion. Young people should begin to consider what responsible exercising of free speech looks like (e.g. engaging with others in a productive, respectful way, even when they do not agree on the issue at hand).

▶ Main Activity

ACTIONS

1. **YP brainstorm: features of effective and ineffective communication with other people online.** N.B. This activity may be more suited to young people aged 11-13. For older groups, it could be replaced with a discussion based on the following stimulus question: "Should we communicate to people online in the same way we communicate in the real world?".

2. **F takes feedback and leads discussion with YP using key questions (*).**

3. **F displays the definition of hate speech to YP.** YP consider where examples of hate speech and abuse are found online, and why someone might post them, using key questions (**) to guide the discussion.

4. **YP are split into 6 groups, and each group is given a scenario to analyse from Handout 4.** YP discuss:
   - how someone should respond if presented with these scenarios in reality;
   - the impact the scenarios could have on individuals involved;
   - the impact the scenarios could have on wider society.

5. **F takes feedback from each group, asking other groups to comment whether they agree or not with their analysis.**

6. **F displays PPT slide and discusses the range of responses to online hate speech and abuse that YP can take when witnessing it online.**

KEY QUESTIONS

(*)
- What are we trying to achieve when we communicate?
- What happens when we communicate well/effectively and vice versa?
- How can online communication differ from offline communication? Is this better/worse? Why?
- Should our behaviour be any different online? Why/why not?
- Which offline behaviours should we replicate online?
- How do people abuse the right to free speech online?

(**)
- What drives someone to post something hateful online?
- How might they be feeling?
- Why might they be feeling this way?
- Does the fact that they are posting online change the way they might express their views?
- Does online hate speech always reflect how the person posting it truly feels?
- If not, then why do they post?
- What are different ways in which hate speech might impact an individual on the receiving end?
- How does it affect society as a whole?

MAIN ACTIVITY GUIDANCE ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

Speaking Up, Speaking Out

▶ **Main Activity**

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

This activity prompts young people to consider the principles and benefits of effective communication online. They should recognise the standards of behaviour we use offline also apply on the internet, even if social media allow greater anonymity. **They should always ask themselves 'would I say this to a person's face?'** – if not, it is inappropriate in any context (unless of course they are reporting something which could not be expressed in person, like mental health issues or domestic abuse).

Maintaining good habits can be challenging and you should push young people to consider why: for example, while social media has made it easy to communicate with a vast number of people around the world, the quality of these interactions can often be shallow and fleeting, and have the potential to lead to greater misunderstanding or hostility towards others. Moreover, while constructive discussions do take place on social media, comments sections are not always the best forum for debates on complex topics, and can promote rapid responses above substantial or productive interactions. Comments sections or character/word-limited posts are not the best arena for debates on complex topics, as they are designed to promote rapid responses above substantive or productive interactions. As such, discussions on such platforms can descend into abuse within just a few messages, as users – often emboldened by anonymity – post their opinions forcefully, quickly, and in a way that gains attention without truly considering another's point of view. In these scenarios, it often feels like the aim is to 'win' rather than learn or have a meaningful dialogue. People can also be looking for the most sensational or outrageous thing to say to 'go viral' and increase likes, shares and comments.

Young people should consider how they would hope to be treated online, and the following key principles for their own interaction:

- A willingness to listen to other people's opinions and engage with them in a constructive way;
- A respectful, non-hostile tone, even when debate becomes heated;
- A consideration of other people's feelings, even when disagreeing with their point of view;
- An open-mindedness and readiness to be educated on a topic;
- An understanding of when to walk away from a discussion;
- A commitment to separate people's identity from their opinions, and keep their private lives out of debate (e.g. personal insults);

An appreciation of changing one's mind, and the strength in admitting 'I was wrong' or saying sorry.

It is important for participants to understand that people will always disagree on issues, especially when they relate to complex and sensitive matters such as personal beliefs or values. The key is to respect everyone's right to believe something different, so long as it does not directly endanger others. Furthermore, young people should consider the way they explore and criticise someone else's viewpoints; even if you disagree, reasoned dialogue is stronger than abuse, harassment or shaming. Constructive debate can help us develop a stronger understanding of opposing views, and in turn better articulate our own counter-arguments and beliefs.

Speaking Up, Speaking Out

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE (CONTINUED)

In today's society, especially online, people abuse the right to free speech by purposefully disrespecting and abusing others' for their beliefs or opinions. When this happens, the opportunity for useful debate breaks down – neither side develops their understanding of the issue, and may well have offended or alienated the other person so they are now viewed as 'enemies'. For example, you can legitimately question why a religion follows certain rituals and codes of behaviour, but cannot aggressively mock, insult or spread hate about those beliefs when they do not harm you or wider society (e.g. women's free choice to wear a hijab).

When discussing the concept of hate speech, young people should understand that there are several laws designed to keep people safe from discrimination, as outlined in the **Facilitators Explanation**. When considering why a person might post something hateful or abusive, they could reflect on the learning from previous sessions: for example, someone may have developed a belief based on stereotypes about a group or due to false, misleading or biased information. This is especially true if they are socialising in an echo chamber that strengthens their view and leads them into 'us vs them' thinking. On the other hand, some people may just be 'internet trolls' or trouble-makers, trying to create controversy for attention. Such individuals often exploit the fact they can be anonymous online, and may not even believe what they are posting – the aim is purely to spark a response, usually anger or offence, gain visibility for their content, or take out personal feelings of hurt on others. This kind of spam clogs up the internet and ruins the experience for those trying to have fun, share information, build communities, and otherwise enjoy these platforms. We can all help limit this behaviour by (privately) calling out friends who we see 'trolling' others or making the internet a more stressful and hostile place. In these interactions, it is important to try

and show empathy even to those behaving badly – accusations can often make people defensive or more determined to act out, so the object should not be to shame them, but rather to point out the real consequences of their actions.

The case studies to be handed out are as follows (see **Handout 4**):

1) **Someone shares a balanced news article asking whether terrorist fighters returning to the UK should be allowed back for trial, making points for and against. You read the article but then notice lots of racist comments underneath the post.**
   (To consider the reliability of the information in this article, and form their own opinion on it, young people could draw on the media literacy skills they developed in the first theme. They should recognise that the racist comments underneath the post are acts of hate speech, and should be reported to the platform immediately. If they know the people posting the racist comments, they could report them to other relevant authorities, including their parents, a school, or even the police. If these comments are not reported, it is possible that those who posted them will not understand the comments are illegal, prejudiced and can cause real-world harm. If they are not reported for removal, a greater number of people will see and be hurt by them.)

2) **You and a female friend are playing an online video game when another user starts posting abusive comments, saying that women are terrible at gaming and should be kicked off the site.** (Young people should consider the impact this would have on a young woman, who as well as being upset and humiliated in the moment, may feel intimidated about gaming online in future. If repeated over time, comments like this may also

Speaking Up, Speaking Out

▶ Main Activity
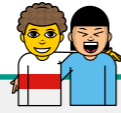
FACILITATOR GUIDANCE (CONTINUED)

cause the girl to suffer self-esteem issues and lose confidence in something she enjoys. Young people might consider sticking up for this person, calling out the behaviour as sexist, or report the comment if that option is available. More broadly, young people could recognise that this comment reflects an ignorant stereotype that continues to grow within the gaming community, and can spread to other areas of life. You could highlight to young people that 33% of women report experiencing abuse from male gamers.)

3) **In a private instant-messaging group, a video of another young person is shared. They are not in the group but other members start mocking them with homophobic names based on their clothes and body language.** (Young people could acknowledge that just because a discussion takes place in private does not excuse discrimination. This type of behaviour may cause the group to experience an echo chamber effect, where they believe it is acceptable to disrespect someone based on their perceived sexual orientation, simply because no-one argues against it. Alternatively, members of the group may be offended but feel uncomfortable speaking out – they might even be gay themselves and too nervous to 'come out'. In this situation, young people are encouraged to stand up for what is right; if they are talking in a group with friends, they might take a softer approach at first, calmly explaining why this attitude is harmful. They could find a video or post where someone discusses a personal experience being bullied, to illustrate the real-world harm – especially if it's a public figure the group respects and follows. If this does not work, they could speak to their parents about it and ask them to intervene, or even raise it with facilitators at school. Young people could also leave the group, if they feel that their

concerns are not being listened to; this both removes them from taking part in offensive discussion, and can send a message to their peers that the conversation is not acceptable.)

4) **You see a social media post linking to a news article which claims religious diversity is bad for society. The article is from a popular British tabloid, and does not use directly abusive language about the religion or its followers.** (Young people should be encouraged to use their media literacy and critical thinking skills in this scenario. They could think back to the previous sessions and consider: who is writing this, what do they want me to think, do I agree with this, what are others saying about this issue, what are some of the facts, is this writer trying to manipulate the reader's viewpoint, and how? They might consider how this writer is exercising his or her right to free speech, but the article can still have consequences: for example people attacking minority religions or vandalising their places of worship, and a broader hatred for people who look or live differently. These groups may be blamed for bigger issues in society, and be made to feel unsafe or unwelcome as a result.)

5) **Someone posts a meme featuring a disabled person, designed to make fun of them. In the comments section there are a number of people mocking those with disabilities, as well as others standing up for people with disabilities.** (This type of content discriminates against people with disabilities in a hateful way, and has the potential to cause serious mental harm to an already vulnerable community. Young people should recognise the need to report both the video itself and the subsequent comments. Young people might consider that if content and comments like this go unreported, then ignorant, unkind stereotypes of

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FACILITATOR GUIDANCE (CONTINUED)

those with disabilities may develop, reducing people's empathy or understanding of different life experiences. Moreover, young people may feel that reporting is not enough, and consider demonstrating additional traits of digital citizenship: they might share educational resources that outline why ableism is problematic, and/or that tell stories of those affected by disability-based discrimination.)

6) **You see a debate taking place in the comments section under an image of a footballer, about whether male or female players should be paid the same amount of money.** (Young people could apply their learning from the previous activity and consider what makes for a constructive debate. When deciding whether or not to engage, they could reflect on whether they know enough about this topic to offer a well-informed contribution. If not, they may want to get their facts straight first, rather than posting a knee-jerk comment based on an emotional reaction. They could also read through the comments to understand the tone of the debate: if it is reasonable and open-minded, they might feel more inclined to engage. If, however, it is abusive and unkind, they could ignore it entirely, or report comments that are overtly hateful. With a topic like this, they might consider the feelings of those involved, and put their opinion forward in a sensitive manner that does not intentionally seek to cause harm.)

When recapping the ways to respond to online hate speech and abuse, it is important to emphasise the need for a safe approach and risk mitigation for themselves and others. These include the following principles:

1) **Assess the situation before getting involved.** You can do this by asking several questions: can I positively influence the situation, or should this be immediately flagged to the platform/an adult? Does getting involved risk me or the person I am defending being harmed?

2) **If you do get involved, do not become abusive yourself.** Again, only engage if you think something is potentially upsetting but does not merit being flagged to the platform or an adult. If you do get involved, keep it polite, don't fuel the aggression. This is only likely to worsen the situation and lead to more abuse, which could spill into more extreme retaliation (e.g. doxxing, trolling) or offline violence. Maintain a rational tone, sharing facts on why the person is mistaken or hurtful in what they are saying, or post a positive comment to support and show solidarity with the victim of the attack.

3) **Have an exit strategy.** Know when to exit a discussion online, recognising that it is no longer constructive. If it has become abusive, flag it to the platform or a responsible adult. Alternatively, you can stop responding to comments or messages, turn off notifications or log off entirely to limit your own exposure to abuse and offensive content. It is OK to walk away, and does not imply weakness.

Speaking Up, Speaking Out

▶ **End of Session**

ACTIONS

① **YP complete the following 3,2,1 exit card (see Handout 5):**

- 3 actions they will take to help challenge online hate and abuse.

- 2 measures to keep safe while taking these actions.

- 1 aspect of being a good digital citizen they still want to learn more about.

② **YP should complete their reflective journals once they have finished the exit card.**

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

If the necessary equipment is accessible, young people could have their exit cards laminated so that they can take them home to serve as a reminder of these key reflections.

Speaking Up, Speaking Out

▶ **Additional activity ideas:**

1) Group debates on the following motions:

- *"Free speech should have no limits."*

- *"Hate speech does not count in a private group."*

- *"Hate speech is an inevitable part of being online."*

- *"If you can't handle hate speech, you should not use social media."*

2) Plan a presentation for a younger age group, in which you educate them on free speech and how to safely confront hate speech and abuse online.

Manifesto for a Better Web

SESSION OBJECTIVE

- To consider how people would act in an ideal version of social media.

EQUIPMENT

- Access to a computer with PPT presentation software to display accompanying slides
- A project and screen, or interactive whiteboard

HANDOUTS

Handout 6

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Young People (YP) can:

- Explain their views on the positive and negative aspects of social media.
- Distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate online behaviour.
- Articulate the ways they will make their online communities better places for sharing, learning, entertaining, debating and exploring.

Manifesto for a Better Web

Session Activities Plan

▶ **Introduction**

ACTIONS

1. **F introduces *My Manifesto for a Better Web* activity.** YP should imagine they control their favourite social media platform for the day and write their top five golden rules to moderate how people behave and give everyone the best experience. Use questions (*) to support.

2. **YP volunteer to read out their five golden rules.** They should provide the rationale behind each decision, and how this might improve their own experience of the platform in its current state.

3. **Other YP in the group have the opportunity to question their peers' choices and add more ideas.**

KEY QUESTIONS

(*)
- Now that you are in charge, what is the core mission of your social media platform?
- What type of behaviour and activity do you want to encourage on your platform?
- How will people use the platform?
- Can any information be shared on the platform? Why/why not?
- Would there be any limits to free speech?
- Are there any existing platform features or functions you would change or remove?
- What would happen to people who disrespect the rules?

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

From the previous sessions, young people will likely have ideas on the aspects of social media they find most enjoyable and empowering and those they recognise as unhelpful or even harmful. Some may have gone on a learning journey, and recognise that aspects they previously enjoyed now appear problematic e.g. provocative viral content that victimises an individual or group.

This activity puts them in control, challenging them to consider how they would change a social media platform to be more inclusive and enjoyable for all. In doing so, they should conceptualise what a 'better' social media experience looks like. This could be anything from introducing a greater range of 'reactions' to content or removing the 'likes' function to more advanced ideas, such as replacing comments sections with moderated forums for debate or putting curbs on news stories going viral before the facts have been verified.

Manifesto for a Better Web

▶ **Main Activity**

ACTIONS

① **YP work in groups of no more than 4, or pairs if the overall group size is very small.**

② **Each group is given a set of cards (Handout 6) and must arrange the cards in a diamond shape in the order of agreement.** The statement at the top will be the one they most strongly agree with, while the bottom statement is the one they most strongly disagree with.

③ **F takes feedback from each group,** asking for their top and bottom choices. Ask the next group if they agree or disagree, and continue to take feedback from each group. Use key questions (*) to guide discussion.

④ **F draws attention to any statements which haven't been commented on.** F asks a group where they placed that statement and again takes feedback on whether other groups agree or disagree.

KEY QUESTIONS

(*)
• What similarities did you notice between the groups?
• What have most people prioritised, and why?
• Does anyone disagree with the general consensus?

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

This activity enables young people to reflect on their own values with regard to online communication. In ordering the statements, they will draw on prior learning from this and the previous sessions, to begin articulating their views on how to be a good digital citizen. There is no right or wrong order of statements; the hierarchy will be subjective to each group, and should be arrived at through careful discussion among team members. This way, the activity provides an opportunity to work in groups and for young people to communicate and rationalise their ideas to each other.

The statements themselves are designed to be thought-provoking, and in most cases should lead to nuanced debate, rather than straightforward answers.

An exception to this rule would be "The best way to respond to hurtful comments is with your own hurtful comments", which young people should recognise as an unhelpful response in any situation. Young people should consolidate their understanding of compassion in the online context, for example considering others' feelings when interacting with them or posting their own content with no particular audience in mind.

They should explain their reasons for ordering the statements in a certain way, while also making compromises with each other over the position of each statement.

Manifesto for a Better Web

▶ **End of Session**

ACTIONS

① **YP return to their manifestos from earlier.** Based on their debates, they should edit them in a different colour to reflect their new top five rules.

② **F then takes ideas from the group to construct their collective 'Manifesto for a Better Web'.**

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

In this closing activity, participants will consider how discussion with their peers has shaped their priorities for online engagement and especially how people should behave towards each other on social media.

Collecting the top five ideas from the group as a whole will provide a final opportunity for debate and self-reflection. While they may not be able to directly realise all of their ideas (e.g. changing platform functions) they should consider what actions they can take to achieve the underlying goal (e.g. showing more solidarity with victims of abuse, striving to be positive in their own posts).

For example, while they cannot prevent all false information from being spread on platforms, they can identify it to others and point their peers towards more credible sources of information. Similarly, they may not be able to remove the 'like' function on a particular platform, but could recognise the need to consider more carefully what they like online and their motivations behind posting content on social media.

Facilitators could turn the captured manifesto ideas into a poster displayed in the youth centre. Alternatively, those with recording equipment (e.g. a smartphone) may wish to produce their manifesto in video form, as part of their campaign in the following session.

Manifesto for a Better Web

▶ **Additional activity ideas:**

1) **Group debates these statements:**

- *"The best way to counter hate speech is to attack or shame the author."*

- *"If the social media platform removes a post that counts as censorship."*

- *"Social media platforms should allow you to share information but not comment on other people's posts."*

- *"The web cannot be fixed – this is just how people interact."*

2) **Diary Entry:** young people could keep a journal for each time they go on social media (say upwards of ten minutes). In the entries they can document instances where they act on the rules from their own or the group's manifesto, and any barriers to action. These could be discussed in the following sessions, with suggestions for how to overcome the issues they faced.

Handouts

THE FOLLOWING PAGES CONTAIN THE SUPPORTING HANDOUTS TO BE PHOTOCOPIED AND DISTRIBUTED TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Handout 3 – Sets of skills for Team Rover and Team Discover

Handout 4 – A series of case studies on controversial social media posts to be analysed

Handout 5 – Session 3 'Exit Card' to capture key learnings

Handout 6 – A list of statements to be photocopied, cut out and ordered

Building Empathy Certificate

DISCOVER

Motto:

_____

_____

Construction skills

Engineering skills

Resourcefulness

Scientific knowledge and logic

Rationing and budgeting

Organisation/administrative skills

Medical skills/first aid

Leadership skills

ROVER

Motto:

_____

_____

Adaptability

Teamwork

Storytelling and communication skills

Conflict resolution/peacekeeping

Time management

Emotional maturity

Problem-solving skills

Creative thinking

Collective values and moral code

Someone shares a balanced news article asking whether terrorist fighters returning to the UK should be allowed back for trial, making points for and against. You read the article but then notice lots of racist comments underneath the post.

In a private instant-messaging group, a video of another student is shared. They are not in the group but other members start mocking them with homophobic names based on their clothes and body language.

You and a female friend are playing an online video game when another user starts posting abusive comments, saying that women are rubbish at gaming and should be kicked off the site.

You see a social media post linking to a news article that claims religious diversity is bad for society. The article is from a popular British tabloid and does not use directly abusive language about the religion or its followers.

Someone posts a meme featuring a disabled person, designed to make fun of them. In the comments section there are a number of people mocking those with disabilities, as well as others standing up for people with disabilities.

You see a debate taking place in the comments section under an image of a footballer, about whether male or female players should be paid the same amount of money.

Be Internet Citizens - Challenging Online Hate

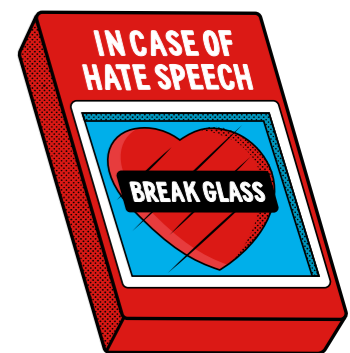▶ **3 actions** you could take to help challenge online hate and abuse:

1.

2.

3.

▶ **2 measures** to keep safe while taking these actions:

1.

2.

▶ **1 aspect** of being a good digital citizen you want to learn more about:

1.

We should demonstrate an open mind and kindness in everything we do.

It is acceptable to challenge beliefs online, even if it offends some people.

If people post horrible things, they deserve horrible things in return.

We should always try to understand why people hold views different from our own.

If you are unable to handle criticism, you shouldn't be online in the first place.

If we ignore hate, it will go away.

It's more important to express your own opinions than to worry about hurting someone's feelings.

If your views don't attack anyone's beliefs, you should feel free to share them online.
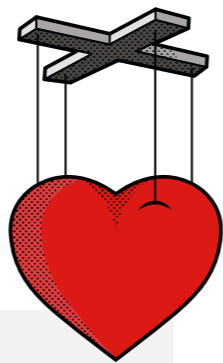
It's not worth having a debate with someone online, you can never change their mind.
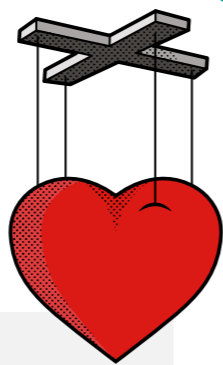
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Theme 3:
Digital Citizenship

Contents

Introduction

Session
Becoming an Internet Citizen

Young people showcase their understanding of what it means to be a good digital citizen, and demonstrate their creativity through content creation or planning a social media campaign.

Introduction

SESSION OVERVIEW:

This final session allows young people to showcase their learning from across the activities, and encourages them to get creative through producing their own content.

The first section asks participants a series of questions designed to draw together their learnings from the previous sessions, including what it means to be a good digital citizen. Their responses should inform the next section, in which they can put their new knowledge and creative skills into practice, producing content that champions positive action online.

Where possible, young people are encouraged to film what they create in this session, either on smartphones, youth centre equipment (e.g. tablets) or other recording devices available, providing a snapshot of how social media content is produced (e.g. YouTube and TikTok videos). This content could be used in a number of different ways; for example, participants might showcase their videos to other young people attending the youth centre, or to parents, siblings and school friends.

NB: Filming should only occur where young people and parents have given consent, and any footage should be used and stored in line with your organisation's data protection policy.

Session Summary

Becoming an Internet Citizen

There is no time limit for this session; you should take as much time as necessary for the young people to produce and present their creative content.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- To understand what digital citizenship means to them and consider actions to achieve it

EQUIPMENT

- Access to a computer with PPT presentation software to display accompanying slides
- A project and screen, or interactive whiteboard
- Access to computers or tablets, and printing
- Video recording equipment

HANDOUT RESOURCES

Handouts 7, 8 and 9

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Young people (YP) can:

- Define Digital Citizenship and what it entails (skills, behaviours, attitudes, knowledge).
- Demonstrate increased confidence in their digital citizenship skills.
- Articulate positive uses of the internet and how they might get involved.
- Design online content which promotes their ideas in an inclusive, engaging and appropriate manner.
- Employ creative presentational skills to communicate their ideas.

Session Activities Plan

▶ Introduction

ACTIONS

1. **F displays PPT slide which poses the question:**
   'What does a good digital citizen look like?'

2. **In groups, YP co-construct the ideal digital citizen** (e.g. adjectives, personality traits, actions, skills). F supports by posing key questions (*).

3. **F invites volunteers to share their ideas on the whiteboard.** Through this, YP will collectively construct the attributes of a good digital citizen.

4. **F presents YP with a definition of a digital citizen.** YP analyse it and discuss how they might improve it, before settling on an agreed group definition.

(*)
- How does a good digital citizen approach new information they find online?
- Where does a good digital citizen get and verify their information online? How do good digital citizens play a positive role in their online communities (e.g. a private instant messaging group, public page, or posts on their profile)?
- How does a good digital citizen react when they see something provocative or emotive online?
- What attitudes does a good digital citizen demonstrate when interacting with others online?
- What actions might a good digital citizen take to improve interactions online?
- How would a good digital citizen respond when they see others being bullied, harassed or mocked unfairly?
- What would they do if a close friend or family member shared false, offensive or otherwise harmful information on social media?
- What would they do if a funny but suspicious meme was going viral in their friendship group?
- What actions might they take to help solve real-world problems (e.g. joining/starting a campaign, sharing educational resources, signing a petition)?
- How do good digital citizens play a positive role in their online communities?

MAIN ACTIVITY GUIDANCE ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

▶ Introduction

▶ Main Activity 1

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

This activity enables young people to reflect on previous sessions, recognising that the knowledge and skills they have learnt, and attitudes and behaviours they have developed, contribute to being a good digital citizen. The interactive format should help them co-construct their understanding of what it means to demonstrate positive and impactful digital citizenship. Through brainstorming together, groups should have a lively discussion around key ideas, before arriving at an agreed vision of how a good digital citizen behaves and uses the web.

Depending on the resources available, you could have participants produce a large visual representation of the ideal digital citizen to display in the youth centre (e.g. have them draw around the outline of a peer, then fill the 'cutout' with adjectives and descriptors). This would serve as an ongoing reminder of the traits they can and should demonstrate online.

The key questions should be used to support young people in considering the range of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that good digital citizens demonstrate. These might include:

• Able to assess the credibility of information they see online;

• Being vigilant about checking information that seems outrageous and/or suspicious;

• Careful in what they consume, and considerate in what they post;

• Aware of the benefits and risks associated with filter bubbles and echo chambers;

• Capable of identifying bias in the media, and able to recognise their own biases;

• Willing to listen to other people's opinions and talk to them constructively, even when they disagree;

• Supportive of others online, calling out hate and bullying when they see it;

• Able to use their voice to spread positivity and empathy towards others.

Their definition could also include basic adjectives, such as: **curious, open-minded, accountable, sensitive, aware, independent, self-regulating, proactive, responsible, engaging, ethical, deliberative.**

When discussing the responses as a group, encourage young people to reflect on how their understanding of the internet has changed over the sessions, and how the behaviour they demonstrate offline should be reflected in their interactions on social media.

ACTIONS

(1) **YP use computers and/or tablets to research examples of inspiring digital citizenship.** F provides key questions (*) to help S get started.

(2) **YP use key questions (**) displayed on PPT to support their research.**

(3) **YP present their findings to the group.** YP describe why their examples demonstrate positive digital citizenship, and listen to others' analysis of their examples.

KEY QUESTIONS

(*)
• Where have you seen people using the internet/social media to promote a positive message?

• Where have you seen the internet used to provide a solution or push for change on an important issue?

• Which influencers do you admire? What do you like about what they say, and how they say it?

(**)
• What positive message is this person or group trying to promote (or which issue are they helping to resolve)?

• What platform and/or tools are they using to communicate their message? How do they make best use of the platform format?

• Have they enlisted the support of others? How did they encourage people to participate?

• How does viewing their content make you feel?

• What evidence is there for their success? E.g. have they helped to change things, and how do you know?

MAIN ACTIVITY GUIDANCE ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

▶ Main Activity 1

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Before demonstrating their digital citizenship, or knowledge thereof, this activity encourages YP to identify positive role models in their own lives or digital communities. In addition to using the key questions (*), you could highlight examples to get young people thinking. For example:

https://www.youtube.com/creators-for-change/role-models/ – The YouTube Creators for Change, who use their channels to unite subscribers and viewers around a positive idea or message.

https://www.kidsagainstplastic.co.uk/ – Two British teenagers started this campaign to raise awareness about plastic misuse and, via their website and hashtags, encourage young people to be more environmentally-conscious.

#FridaysforFuture – a movement started by Swedish teenager and activist Greta Thunberg to protest inaction on the climate crisis. She used social media to promote the movement and sparked student activity in countries across the globe, reaching over 13 million people.

As with the previous activity, young people could produce a visual representation of their research to display in the youth centre. This could involve printing miniature cut-outs of the digital citizenship figures and campaigns they have researched, and collating these as an 'inspiration board'.

▶ Main Activity 2

ACTIONS

(1) **F introduces the creative activity to YP.** YP will plan and produce content that demonstrates their understanding of digital citizenship and enables them to spread positivity online and/or support others in doing so. YP could produce one of the following:

- A planned digital campaign – or intention to join an existing movement – focusing on an important issue (e.g. anti-hate/bullying, environmental protection, community action, dis/misinformation)

- Offline content that reflects their learning about digital citizenship, including:
  - › Short videos delivering an inspiring message;
    - › A speech or PowerPoint presentation on digital citizenship to deliver to other youth centre attendees;
    - › A spoken word piece, poem or song about using the internet.

YP could work in pairs, small groups, or independently. The activity will require them to use learnings from all sessions, as well as incorporating their answers from the previous activity.

MAIN ACTIVITY GUIDANCE ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

▶ Main Activity 2

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

This activity should be a chance for young people to put their learning into practice. They can produce or plan content to improve their own and others' experience online, or advocate on issues of personal interest.

a) **For young people who choose to plan or join a campaign, the following documents could help provide structure:**

Planning doc A (Handout 7) – joining existing campaigns

Planning doc B (Handout 8) – starting a new campaign

NB. More in-depth toolkits to guide young people producing campaigns can be found below:

- ISD's **Campaign Toolkit**
- British Library's *'Steps to Campaigning Success'* **handbook**

b) **Those producing a video could consider:**

- Which issue is most important to them, either to share information with others, and/or support the cause more broadly?
- What exactly do they want to say about this issue and why?
- Which platforms can be used to promote the cause?

c) **Those creating a presentation or speech could include some of the following:**

- An overview of what digital citizenship is, and why it matters;
- Key takeaway facts about digital citizenship that are important to young people;
- Different examples of how the internet might inspire other young people (including positive online influencers);
- How young people can make their own contributions to an exciting and safe online environment.

d) **Those producing a poem or song may also consider the points in c), and could use the examples displayed on the slides to brainstorm ideas.**

This is a chance for young people to be creative. Where possible, they should be encouraged to use any relevant equipment your youth club can provide to bring their ideas to life (e.g. graphic design software, instruments, arts and craft materials), as well as their own acting, musical or artistic skills.

▶ End of Session

ACTIONS

① **If time allows, YP present their content to the rest of the group.**

② **YP could offer constructive feedback on each presentation.** Use (*) to guide the discussion.

NB. for those individuals or groups who wish to record their presentations, you will need to provide one of the following:

- Smart phones (YP could use their own if organisation's policy allows)
- Tablets
- Other devices that could be used to record footage (e.g. handheld cameras).

Filming should only occur where young people and parents have given consent, and any footage should be used and stored in line with your organisation's data protection policy.

KEY QUESTIONS

(*)

- What have you learnt from each presentation?
- Did you remember anything you had forgotten from previous sessions, or did you learn something new?
- What are some positive behaviours you will demonstrate online in the future?
- What inspired you about other people's content?

FACILITATOR GUIDANCE

Use this time to celebrate the creativity displayed through each presentation and to reflect on everything learnt across these sessions. Encourage them to share their digital citizenship skills and knowledge with their friends and family. Finally, provide them with **Handout 9** for possible resources to continue and expand their learning.

Handouts

THE FOLLOWING PAGES CONTAIN THE SUPPORTING HANDOUTS TO BE PHOTOCOPIED
AND DISTRIBUTED TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Handout 7 – A planning template for young people wishing to join existing digital campaigns

Handout 8 – A planning template for young people wishing to create their own digital campaigns

Handout 9 – A list of additional resources to help young people develop their digital citizenship

Digital Citizenship Certificate

▶ Key issue:

▶ Thoughts and opinions on this issue:

▶ Key message to share:

▶ How do I want to support existing campaigns:

▶ Which campaigns am I already aware of:

▶ Where can I find exisiting campaigns to join:

▶ Next steps:

In the next week I will have:

In the next month I will have:

In the next year I will have:

▶ What will success look like?

For example, No. of people joining:

For example, No. of people liking our page:

For example, No. of people sharing our hashtag:

▶ Campaign Name:

▶ Slogan:

▶ Issue:

▶ Key message:

▶ Audience:

▶ How to reach this audience:

▶ Hashtag:

▶ Next steps:

In the next week I will have:

In the next month I will have:

In the next year I will have:

▶ What will success look like?

For example, No. of people joining:

For example, No. of people liking our page:

For example, No. of people sharing our hashtag:

BELOW IS A LIST OF RESOURCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO CONTINUE THEIR DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP JOURNEY AT HOME.

They are presented in order of the Be Internet Citizens' key concepts (i.e. from disinformation to digital campaigns).

RESOURCE	SUMMARY	SEARCH TERMS
BBC Bitesize Fact or Fake	A range of articles and standalone activities on so-called fake news.	BBC bitesize fact or fake
BBC Young Reporter	A project providing young people with the skills to create and understand media today.	BBC teach young reporter
Full Fact	A fact-checking organisation, busting myths to establish the facts on important issues.	Full fact-checking
Factitious	Fun game testing your skill at identifying disinformation.	Factitious game
Newseum 'Is it Worth Sharing?' Flowchart	Visual guidance to support your decision-making when it comes to sharing online content. (Note: you have to register for a free NewseumED account to download)	Newseum is this story share-worthy?
Poynter's MediaWise Project	US-based digital literacy project with resources focused on navigating online information in a robust, critical way.	Poynter media wise
PC Mag UK: 'How to Spot Fake News Online'	List of plug-ins to help internet users establish media bias on webpages and identify fake news.	PC mag spot fake news
Snopes	A fact-checking website, used to research urban legends, folklore, myths, rumors, and misinformation.	Snopes fact check
BBC Bitesize Recognising Bias and Unreliability	Helpful information on how to identify bias and how to decide how reliable a piece of writing is.	BBC bitesize bias
Official Media Bias Fact Check	Free Chrome extension that highlights the political bias of news websites when users visit them.	Official media bias extension
BBC Bitesize: What is a filter bubble?	Short video explaining filter bubbles and some top tips for 'bursting' your bubble.	BBC bitesize filter bubble
BBC Bitesize: Shattering Stereotypes	Short interview extracts from young people discussing their experiences of being stereotyped.	BBC bitesize stereotypes
Report Harmful Content	Online service to help young people report harmful content they see on social media.	Report harmful content
Safer Internet Centre: Advice Centre for Young People	Fun games and activities to help young people enjoy the internet while staying safe online.	Safer internet centre advice
Ditch the Label	A global youth organisation empowering action against bullying and promoting discussion on mental health and digital wellbeing. Includes research on issues affecting young people, support forums and self-help guides.	Ditch the label youth
International Society for Technology in Education - Digital Citizenship diagram	Resources which visually describe ways in which young people can be good citizens for their communities, both on and offline.	ISTE digital citizenship
GCFGlobal YouTube video - 'Being a Good Digital Citizen'	Short video explaining top tips to becoming a good digital citizen.	GCFGlobal digital citizen video

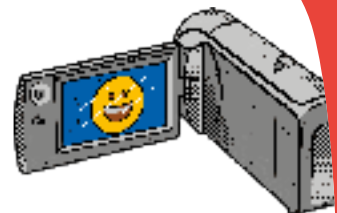BE INTERNET CITIZENS
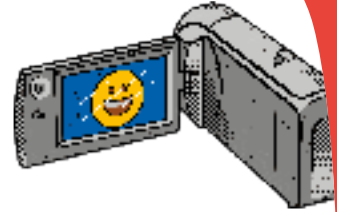
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Congratulations!

You have now delivered the Be Internet Citizens toolkit to a group of young people. Through these activities, they have begun to develop the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours needed to play a positive role in the online community, as well as become well-informed and responsible digital citizens.

While you may have finished these sessions, remember the conversation can and should be ongoing. If you come across an interesting example of disinformation, or a textbook case of biased writing, why not present it to them and see if they can still identify common traits, or analyse why it may be problematic? If a new feud breaks out in popular culture, why not discuss it through the lens of 'us versus them'? By reviving these discussions over time, participants will continue to hone their critical thinking skills, and become increasingly well-equipped to understand and navigate the digital world.

If you have any questions regarding the content of this toolkit, or would like to find out more about the wider work of the Be Internet Citizens programme, please don't hesitate to email the following address:
beinternetcitizens@isdglobal.org

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