

Tackling hate online

Parent companion guide



Talking to your child about hate they might come across online can help them recognise it, prevent it and stand up to it.



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What you need to know

- There are 9 characteristics in the UK which are protected by law, meaning people cannot be treated unfairly because of those characteristics.
- 'Freedom of expression' does not give people the right to say what they want in online spaces; it means that the government cannot stop someone from sharing their opinions.
- Apps and platforms where people interact have Community Guidelines that everyone must follow. Your child should report any people or content which break these rules.
- Any interaction your child has on most apps and platforms tell the algorithm that they like that content. Even making a comment that says they don't like content is a 'positive' interaction to an algorithm. This means it will still suggest similar content.
- Setting limitations on the content your child sees and the people they interact with is important and must be accompanied by regular conversations about healthy behaviours to be the most effective.

5 topics to discuss

1. What online hate looks like

Under-11s: Hate vs. disagreements

At this age, children might struggle to know the difference between bullying, hate and simple disagreement.

So, talk to your child about the differences. Explain that they should always report anyone they see saying mean things online, whether bullying or hate. If someone is saying mean things to them, they should report that person and also block them.

Online, hate can look like:

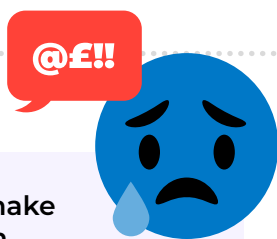
- Mean comments about race, sex, religion, disability and other characteristics.
- Videos that share unfair or hateful views of a person or groups of people.
- Video games or video game players which make fun of or target someone's characteristic (such as their religion or race).

Encourage your child to come to you if they're not sure. It's also better to report anything that seems hateful rather than ignore it. Other users won't know it was them.

Bullying: Repeated, intentional hurt which can be for a range of reasons.

Hate: Could be repeated or one-off comments about particular characteristics such as race or sex. Can sometimes be unintentional.

Disagreement: When two or more people share different beliefs or interests, which can sometimes feel offensive but is not bullying unless it escalates.



Example: Go make me a sandwich

This is a comment generally used by boys/men against girls/women online. It's used as a response to a girl's comment to mock, annoy or discredit their ideas. A lot of users, particularly boys, do this because they find it funny, but it reinforces the misogynistic idea that women belong in the kitchen and shouldn't pursue other things.

11-13s: Banter vs. hate

At this age, children might write off hateful comments or language as a joke or banter. But even if some people might find the comments funny, they still spread hate.

A lot of young people will say things that are sexist or racist without even realising that's the case. So, it's important to call out any language your child uses that could accidentally perpetuate hate such as 'you throw like a girl' or 'that's gay' and explain why it's wrong.

If they see this kind of language or behaviour online, discourage them from joining in. Instead, empower them to report this behaviour and block content which spreads it even further

14+: Algorithm influence

Most teenagers will have a good grasp of what hate is and what it looks like online. However, they might not realise how their interactions with platforms can draw them into echo chambers of hateful content.

Algorithms suggest new content based on what a user likes, shares and comments on. They also suggest content based on what other users in their demographic interact with. So, if a group of 15-year-old boys are interacting with hateful content, other 15-year-old boys might get recommended that content as well.

If your teen sees content which is hateful in any way, they can tell the algorithm they don't want to see it to help reduce similar suggestions. They should also report any content which they think is hateful, even if it doesn't directly impact them and even if they're not sure if it's against the rules.

Teen boys are most likely to know who self-described misogynist Andrew Tate is with nearly a quarter of 15-16-year-old boys having a positive impression of him. They are also more likely than girls to see content directly from Andrew Tate on social media, which is often suggested through algorithm recommendations.



2. How to tackle online hate

Regardless of your child's age, the ways to tackle online hate are similar. Talk with your child to agree on steps they should take if they come across content which is hateful online.

Encourage them to:

- **Block anyone** who is targeting them;
- **Block hateful content** if it's recommended to them;
- **Report anyone** who is sharing hateful words or ideas in comments, videos or images – even if it doesn't directly affect your child;
- **Talk to you about the incident.** For older children, this might just be them giving you a heads up while with younger children it might include a deeper conversation.

In some cases, particularly for children aged 13+ or where friends are involved, you can encourage your child to reach out to targets of hate. Sending a supportive message can help make victims of online hate feel less alone.

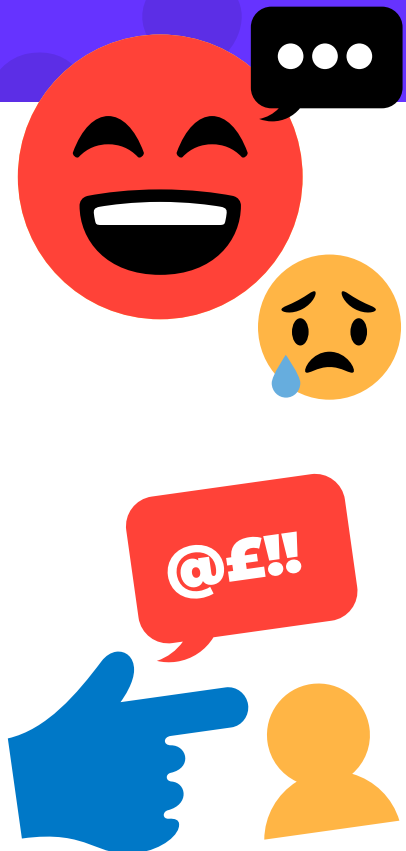
3. The impacts of hateful language

Discuss with your child the impacts of hateful language in the online space on both the targets of hate as well as the overall community.

Even if we're not the ones saying hateful things, ignoring hate that we see online still contributes to the problem. By staying silent, we help the hate grow, which makes spaces and experiences online less enjoyable for all.

Talk with your child about the direct impacts hate can have on individuals and groups as well. Discuss how hate can change into anger which can change into violence. Discuss how hateful comments can make people feel small and scared.

Explore options for making hate less impactful in online spaces by taking action to stop it.



4. Finding supportive communities

Whether your child plays online video games or engages in discussions on social media, remember to talk with them about the importance of positive communities.

While younger children won't necessarily chat with other users, they might come across games or videos which share harmful content or ideas. Older children and teens are more likely to come across other users who spread negativity. This can impact their mental health, wellbeing and general outlook.

However, you can counter these impacts by talking with your child about the importance of positive behaviour through supportive communities. This can look like thinking carefully about who they follow and what games they play on popular platforms, or it can look like seeking out safer communities online.

[Childline's message boards](#) and [Ditch the Label's forums](#) are both positive, moderated communities for young people.



5. Supporting yourself and others

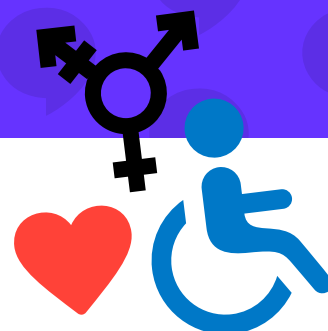
Finally, talk with your child about the importance of finding support for themselves and for others. Encourage them to protect themselves online by keeping their profiles private, declining friend requests from strangers and setting restrictions on who can contact them. Popular video game and social media platforms used among children and teens might have parental controls that can help you do this for your child as well.

If your child is a victim of online hate, encourage them to report the behaviour and block the user or content which is targeting them. Equally, encourage your child to report the behaviour targeted at other people as well.

And remember to keep conversations going. Even if the hate is reported and the offending user is blocked, continue talking to your child about hate online. Check in on how they're feeling, if they've changed anything about their activities online or if they've seen anything else troubling. Ongoing conversations leave space for them to come to you if anything else goes wrong.



Glossary of terms



When you are introducing the concept of online hate to children, there might be complex words they don't understand, so it is important to take time to help them learn what they mean. Here is a short glossary of terms that can help explain some of these terms

Algorithm

Rules a computer or programme follows to solve a problem. For example, on social media, [algorithms](#) study users' actions such as liking or commenting on content and then suggest related content users might like.

Bystander

Someone who sees something happening like online hate or cyberbullying and doesn't do anything to help. For example, if they see a hateful video, they keep scrolling rather than reporting it.

Discrimination

Treating people poorly because of a characteristic like race, gender or sexuality. For example, if someone treats a person poorly because they are Muslim, they are discriminating against them based on their religion.

Disinhibition

When someone acts without thinking about how others might be impacted. For example, on social media, many people say hateful things that they would never say to someone face-to-face. The lack of immediate feedback helps create disinhibition.

Echo chamber

A result of [algorithms online](#) where users only see content that supports their views. For example, if someone 'likes' and comments on misogynist content, they will start to only see misogynist content, which will lead to them thinking that everyone shares those misogynist ideals.

Free speech

Called 'freedom of expression' in the UK, this is a law that says the government cannot stop someone from sharing their opinions. It is sometimes used as an excuse online for people to say hateful things, but they can still be banned and receive consequences online for their words.

LGBTQ+

An acronym that stands for [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer/Questioning, and more](#). The acronym is sometimes used interchangeably with LGBT and LGBTQIA+. It refers to people who have similar identities as those listed above as well as others like non-binary and pansexual. Gender reassignment and sexual orientation are two protected characteristics which fall under LGBTQ+

Misogyny

The hate or prejudice against girls and women. Some online communities join together because of their misogynistic views. [For example](#), incels (involuntary celibates) blame women for their trouble getting girlfriends while MGTOW (men going their own way) believe that women are so toxic that men should avoid them altogether and won't even have friendships with women.

Online hate

Language, videos, images and other online content that [targets a person or group of people with hate](#). It includes posting, sharing and interacting with content that promotes hate. It will often include hate speech and discrimination in different forms.

Harassment

Making someone feel scared, stressed or threatened because of your behaviour towards them. It is against the law to harass someone in person or online in any way. An example of harassment could be sending someone hateful messages on all their different social media accounts.



Hate speech

Abusive or threatening language that is written or spoken and that discriminates against a person or group of people because of their race, religion, gender or other characteristic. For example, calling someone a racist name is hate speech.

Online Safety Act (2023)

A [piece of legislation](#) which puts more ownership on platforms to protect its users from illegal content like hate speech and content which is legal but harmful. It means that some platforms may need to add stricter rules and enforcement of those rules.

Online toxicity

Rude or nasty online behaviour that might be aggressive in nature. It's likely to be demonstrated through videos, comments and other online interactions. It could include excessive foul language and may also include hate speech.

Protected characteristics

Characteristics which are [protected by law](#). They include:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- being married or in a civil partnership
- being pregnant or on maternity leave
- race (including skin colour, nationality and ethnic or national origin)
- religion or beliefs
- sex
- sexual orientation

Discrimination of protected characteristics is illegal in workplaces, education, public spaces and other areas. The [Equality Act \(2010\)](#) legally protects people in the UK from discrimination.

Radicalisation

When someone starts to believe extreme views or beliefs about something harmful, they are radicalised. [Radicalisation](#) might be used to try and control someone, to spread hate about a group or to get more supporters

for their beliefs. It might be against a group of people in religion, politics or other parts of society such as against women or the LGBTQ+ community. It is a form of [grooming](#) that could result in violence and serious harm.

Trolling

Internet slang where a person or group of people post content that is meant to get [strong emotional reactions](#). This may include off-topic hateful comments in unrelated communities. It's against the rules for many platforms and should be reported.

Upstander

An upstander is a person who sees something wrong and takes action to stop it. Unlike a bystander, an upstander will help stop the wrong from happening. They might report hateful content, share helpful advice and resources or reach out to victims of online hate who need someone to talk to. An upstander does not argue with bullies or trolls

