Misinformation and Youth: Tips for Parents and Caregivers

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In today's digital-driven world, youth encounter endless online information – some true and some not. Misinformation refers to false information that is not intended to cause harm and is often spread through the news or social media. Helping your kids understand what misinformation is, how to spot it and how to combat it will help them stay safer online.

Tips For All Age Groups

TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT MISINFORMATION

This should be an ongoing conversation. Regularly bring up the topic to help them understand what misinformation is and how to recognize it.

ENCOURAGE CRITICAL THINKING

Remind youth to be attentive and intentional online - taking a moment to ask questions about information before accepting it. This approach helps them understand the bigger picture and make confident, informed choices.

BE A ROLE MODEL

Parents and caregivers should practice these tips themselves, share their experiences with misinformation with their children and help them identify fake information from facts.

Tips For Young Kids (Ages 7-12)

EMPOWER YOUR CHILD TO STAY CURIOUS AND INFORMED

Encourage children to bring questions to you about anything they encounter online. By keeping communication open, you can help them develop the skills and confidence to navigate digital information responsibly and safely.

PRACTICE FACT-CHECKING TOGETHER

Show children that double-checking information can be fun and empowering. Look up claims on kid-friendly news sites or check multiple sources together. Practice simple ways to verify facts, such as checking if the story appears on a trusted website. Learning to fact-check can help them feel more confident online.

DISCUSS WHY PEOPLE SHARE WRONG INFORMATION

Teach them that sometimes people share links, videos, articles, and posts without checking whether they are true. Explain that even adults can make mistakes. In fact, even artificial intelligence can make mistakes, which is why the information it generates should also be fact-checked. Together, talk about how stories can get mixed up and encourage them to ask you or a teacher if something sounds strange or untrue.

POINT OUT RELIABLE SOURCES

Explain that some sources, like educational websites or kid-friendly news outlets, are usually more trustworthy than others. Show them how to spot clues of credibility, like familiar names or clear author information, and make a list of 'go-to' trusted sources they can refer to next time. Most importantly – remind them they can always come to you if they aren't sure if something is real or fake.

Tips For Teens (Ages 13-17)

VERIFY BEFORE YOU SHARE

Explain the importance of verifying facts before sharing them with other people. If they aren't sure about something, encourage them to hold back on sharing it. This habit can help reduce the spread of misinformation and build credibility among peers.

DISCUSS REAL-WORLD CONSEQUENCES

Talk about how misinformation can impact people's lives, from creating unnecessary panic to damaging reputations or influencing public opinion. Understanding the real-world effect can help teens see the importance of making responsible choices with the information they share online.

PRACTICE MEDIA LITERACY BY QUESTIONING THE SOURCE

Encourage teens to question the source of information they encounter constantly. They should ask themselves questions like: Who created the content? Is it from a reputable news organization, an individual or an organization with expertise, or an unknown or malicious source? Understanding the source's credibility is crucial for determining the reliability of the information. This practice helps them engage with media using discernment and empowers them to recognize potential bias or misinformation.

ENCOURAGE OPEN DISCUSSION AND CRITICAL THINKING

Keeping an open dialogue with your teen about the content they access online can help reinforce these practices and give them the confidence to identify misinformation. The more they understand how it works, the better equipped they'll be to make informed choices and avoid spreading false information.

Continue Your Learning

A critical part of engaging youth in technology is ensuring they have the knowledge and skills to be responsible and empowered online. **Actua's Cyber Smart Education Project** aims to empower youth to explore, create, and connect responsibly online.