

Tackling Online Gendered Disinformation: A Family Resource

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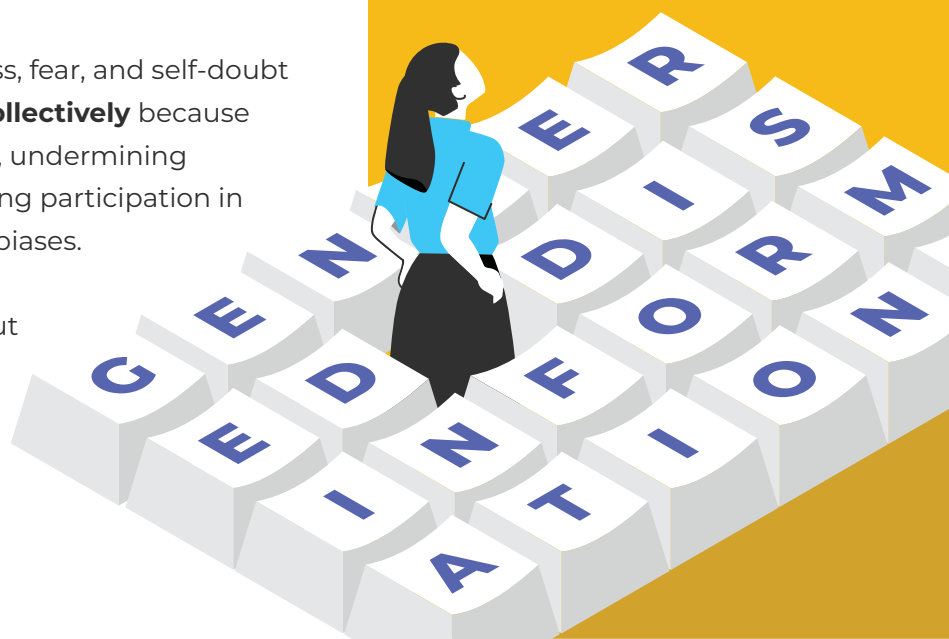
WHAT IS GENDERED DISINFORMATION?

Gendered disinformation is false or misleading content designed to harm individuals based on gender. It can take many forms, including online harassment, manipulated images, and false narratives that undermine credibility. Families may experience it in different ways:

- A mother supporting her transgender child, receives online hate messages and threats.
- A father posting about his daughter's STEM achievements is targeted by fake accounts, spreading false claims that girls and women don't belong in these fields.
- A sibling defending their non-binary relative online is harassed and attacked.

This type of disinformation can cause stress, fear, and self-doubt for individuals. It is also **bad for all of us collectively** because it harms society by increasing polarization, undermining confidence in credible sources, discouraging participation in public discourse, and reinforcing harmful biases.

Awareness helps. This resource talks about ways that families can recognize and respond to disinformation together - including getting help when needed.



EMPOWERING YOUR FAMILY AGAINST DISINFORMATION

1. START WITH AWARENESS

Learn the tactics:

- Doxxing (sharing private info to intimidate).
- Deepfakes and manipulated media.
- Non-consensual image sharing.
- Fake accounts, hate speech, and gendered misinformation.

Model best practices:

- Fact-checking before sharing.
- Talking openly about your own digital choices (for example, share when you block/report, why you avoid certain sites, or how you set screen time limits for yourself).

2. CREATE A SAFE SPACE FOR CONVERSATION

Safe Space:

- Validate emotions and reassure individuals it's not their fault if they're targeted.
- Let kids know they won't be punished for being honest about digital experiences.
- If you notice changes in your child's behaviour – online or otherwise – create a space to talk to them about it or consider getting help from another appropriate support network (e.g, school staff, behavioural consultants, social workers, and others).

Talk about it:

- Use media examples or digital citizenship discussions to introduce the topic.
- Encourage family members to share what they see and experience online.

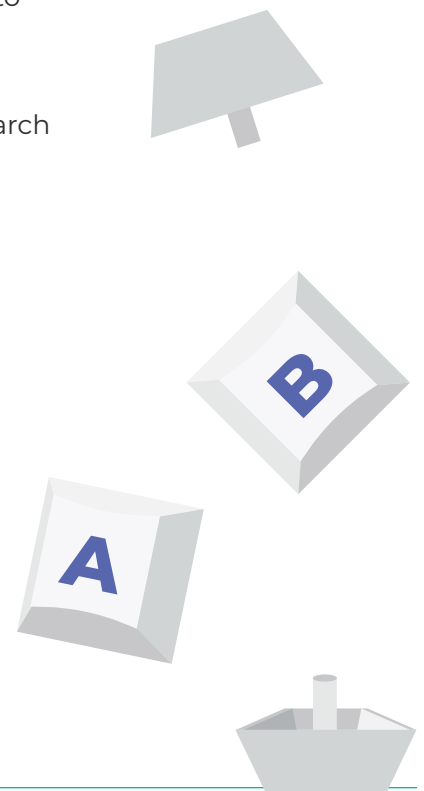
3. PRACTICE CRITICAL THINKING

Teach kids and teens to ask:

- Who created this content?
- Are they generally considered to be a credible source?
- What could their goal be?
- Is there credible evidence backing up the story - for example, is similar content being shared by other credible sources online and offline?

Help them spot:

- Posts designed to provoke strong feelings like confusion, distrust, fear, anger, or shame (e.g., fake news, manipulated images and videos):
 - **Cross-check with other sources:** Look for the same story or media on trusted news sites. If it only shows up in one place, be cautious.
 - **Check the context:** Make sure quotes, images, or videos aren't being taken out of context to mislead. Old content is often reshared to mislead—always look at when it was created.
 - **Use verification tools:** Try tools like Google Reverse Image Search to check where media originally came from.
 - **Look into the source:** Check if the site or account sharing the content is reliable and has a trustworthy history.
- Claims that reinforce harmful ideas about gender roles.
- Content that lacks or dismisses other perspectives.



4. PROMOTE SAFE ONLINE HABITS

- Use strong passwords and privacy settings.
- Block and report abusive accounts.
- Avoid sharing personal info publicly.
- Use kid-safe browser settings or tools when needed, and explore new websites as a family when possible.

5. SUPPORT EACH OTHER

- If someone is targeted, respond with care, not blame.
- Document abuse if needed and consider seeking help from relevant authorities/professionals (e.g., schools, police, legal practitioners).
- Report disinformation or harmful content together.

6. SUPPORT ONGOING LEARNING AND HEALTHY PEER RELATIONSHIPS

- Explain how critical thinking and online safety are lifelong skills to develop and practice, like fire safety, safe driving, or healthy eating.
- Like lots of skills, it helps to have people you can look to for support, and to support others along the way.
- Model and talk about the importance of friendships and other relationships that are based on respect and inclusion.
- Model and discuss the kinds of educational, volunteer and workplace interactions that reflect values of respect and inclusion.

7. AMPLIFY POSITIVE VOICES

- Follow and share accurate, empowering content.
- Model respectful online behaviour.
- Encourage children to share what they know with others.

FACING DIGITAL CHALLENGES TOGETHER

Navigating online spaces can be overwhelming for young people, especially when they're facing challenges like disinformation, exclusion, or harmful content. Your words and actions can shape how your child understands and responds to these moments. Below, you can find examples of how to start supportive, open conversations – helping your child feel seen, safe, and empowered to think critically and navigate online spaces with confidence.

When you are approaching these challenges, it is important to consider the following:

- Create and model a safe, trusting space for discussion.
- Show empathy and avoid judgement.
- Encourage critical thinking and education.

Note: These scenarios can happen to any family member, but young people are more vulnerable due to their online presence and developmental stage. Whether it's a parent, grandparent, older sibling, or other caregiver, it's important for those who support young people — and each other — to be aware and ready to address these challenges.



SCENARIO	WHAT'S HAPPENING?	SUGGESTED APPROACH
AMOUNT OF TIME ONLINE	Your child has been gaming for hours, and you're noticing they seem tired or irritable.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness without blame: "I noticed you've been online for a while, it's easy to lose track of time especially if you're doing something you enjoy." Empathy: "It can be draining to be behind screens for so long. Do you want to take a break together or go for a walk?"
ECHO CHAMBERS	Your child repeats a political view they've seen shared on social media, such as claiming a specific candidate is the only 'right choice', without considering opposing viewpoints or questioning the sources of the information.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Critical thinking: "That's an interesting take. Where did you first hear about that?" Educate – encourage learning about different views: "Sometimes we see a lot of the same kind of content online over and over again, so it can help to check out other views too. Want to explore a few different takes on this together?"
EXPOSURE TO DISINFORMATION / DEEPPAKES	Your child is upset after seeing a fake video about someone they admire or a community they belong to.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Validate and empathize: "That video seemed really intense, do you want to talk about how it made you feel?" Educate – encourage checking the facts: "Some content is made to trick or upset us, and it can be hard to tell what's real. Let's look at some ways we can figure out what's trustworthy."
BEING TARGETED ONLINE	Your child shares that someone has been sending them mean or threatening messages, or spreading false information about them.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Empathize: "Thank you for telling me. That sounds really upsetting, and I'm here for you. You don't deserve to be treated that way." Offer Support: "Let's go through this together and see what we can do, whether that's reporting it, saving evidence, or taking a break." Reaffirm Support: "You are not alone."

SEEKING SUPPORT

The fight against gendered disinformation isn't just about stopping fake news — it's about creating a digital world — and a society — where everyone can participate safely. If we work together — across schools, families, and communities — we can build resilience against disinformation and create a more just and informed society.

It's okay to ask for help. Cyberbullying and gendered disinformation can feel overwhelming, but there are people and organizations ready to support you. By speaking up, we help make the internet a safer place for ourselves, our families, and others.

If the situation is serious, such as threats or ongoing harassment, you can also report it to:

- NeedHelpNow.ca,
- Cybertip.ca,
- the Canadian Centre for Child Protection (Protectchildren.ca),
- ProtectKidsOnline.ca,
- NeedTalk.ca,
- or even local police if necessary.

FAMILY GAME PLAN

- ☐ Talk about gender and online safety regularly.
- ☐ Follow trustworthy, inclusive sources together.
- ☐ Report and block harmful content – don't ignore it. Show your child how they can do the same.
- ☐ Encourage your child to come to you if something feels off.
- ☐ Normalize seeking help – from each other, from school systems or professionals and authorities.
- ☐ Learn about what your child's school might be doing to teach digital safety and to enable safe online environments. Encourage your child to participate in those positive learning environments.

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Actua is creating a Canada where every child has the skills and confidence they need to achieve their full potential. As a leading science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) outreach organization, Actua includes over 40 universities and colleges, engaging 500,000 youth in 600 communities each year. For 25 years, Actua has focused on identifying and removing the barriers for entry into STEM and now have national programs dedicated to engaging Indigenous youth, girls and young women, Black youth, those facing economic barriers and youth in Northern and remote communities.

The Community Safety Knowledge Alliance (CSKA) is a non-profit applied research organization that supports governments, police, public health and human service leaders in developing, implementing and assessing new approaches to enhancing community safety and well-being service delivery and outcomes. Over the past decade, CSKA has conducted interdisciplinary research and engaged with change-makers on some of Canada's most pressing social issues, including intimate partner violence, youth radicalization to violence, cybersecurity, food security, drug policy, human rights-based policing, and community reintegration initiatives. CSKA maintains an active posture on issues such as disinformation and artificial intelligence to support adaptive responses to these emerging challenges.

Sapper Labs Group (SLG) conducts research to understand the methods and impacts of disinformation and influence campaigns and networks and as input to the development of processes to support effective countermeasures. SLG is supported by global partners and a comprehensive intelligence sharing network. The goal of SLG is make the world a better safer place in line with objectives around: countering foreign interference and influence, countering radicalization and extremism, supporting human rights and other activities involving capacity building related to information integrity.