

Helping children spot fake news and misinformation

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A practical guide for parents



Why this matters

- **57% of 12–15s** get news from social media; TikTok use for news has grown by **20% since 2020**.*
- News often appears in feeds **without children seeking it out**, shaped by **algorithms** and **influencers**.
- **63% of children** worry about fake or AI-generated news.*
- Many find **distressing news** in their feeds without warning.
- **AI-generated content and deepfakes** make it harder to tell what's real, increasing the risk of misinformation spreading quickly.



How fake news impacts children

- Can **confuse or mislead** them about the world.
- May **target minority groups** or spread hate.
- Can **cause anxiety or distress**, especially if violent or upsetting.

What is fake news, misinformation & disinformation?

- **Fake news:** stories that are made up, distorted or taken out of context.
- **Misinformation:** false or misleading information shared by mistake (e.g. someone passing on a story they think is true).
- **Disinformation:** false information spread deliberately to mislead (e.g. state-sponsored campaigns).

It spreads quickly on social media because:

- It grabs attention and gets clicks.
- Algorithms **boost sensational content**.
- Some content creators share stories without journalistic checks.

What is media literacy?

Media literacy is the ability to question, check, and create information responsibly. With your support, children can develop these skills.



Quick strategies to support children's media literacy

- **Talk early and often** – Ask what they've seen and how it made them feel.
- **Teach the PAUSE check:**
 - **Post:** Read beyond the headline
 - **Author:** Who wrote it? Are they credible?
 - **Update:** Is it recent?
 - **Source:** Can you find it on trusted sites?
 - **Evidence:** Does the image/video match the claim, or could it be **AI-generated or altered**?
- **Show platform tools** – Report, block, mute, limit sensitive content.
- **Diversify feeds** – Follow trusted outlets and different viewpoints.
- **Try our quiz together** ▶ [Find the Fake](#)

Age-specific tips

Ages 6–10

- Watch or read news **together** (e.g., [Newsround](#)).
- Use **Stop–Show–Share**: Stop scrolling, show an adult, share feelings.
- Keep explanations simple and reassuring.
- Use fun examples (e.g. “Would you believe it if you saw a dog driving a car?”).
- **Ask:** “What do you think this story means? How can we check if it's true?”

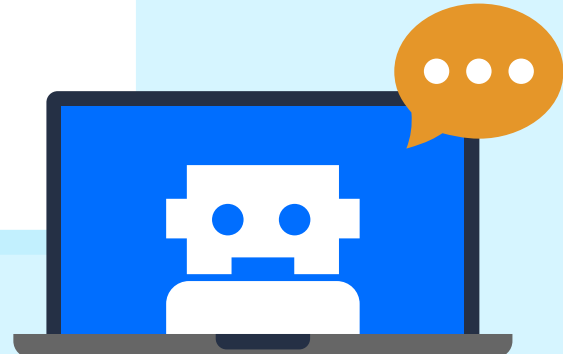


Ages 11–13

- Explain [algorithms](#): “Your feed is shaped by what you've liked, not what's most true.”
- Practise [before-you-share rules](#).
- Talk to children about what reliable sources are and what they look like. Encourage them to follow these sources. **Ask:** “If this came from an influencer, where did they get it from?”

Ages 14+

- Encourage them to curate their feeds (e.g. using tools to limit or hide content they don't want to see).
- Discuss echo chambers and **AI-generated content**.
- Talk about why **balanced debate matters**.
- Agree on steps for distressing news (mute, take breaks, talk).
- **Ask: "What would change your mind about this story?"**



Supporting vulnerable children

Children with additional needs or vulnerabilities may be more affected by upsetting or misleading news.

- **Check in often:** Ask how news makes them feel.
- **Co-view and explain:** Give context in simple terms.
- **Create a safe plan:** Stop scrolling, show you, talk about feelings.
- **Use wellbeing tools:** Filters, mute keywords, screen breaks.
- **Reassure:** Let them know you're there to listen and support them, no matter what they've seen or believed.
- **Seek extra help** if distress continues (school or specialist support).

Conversation starters

- "What news did you see today? How did it make you feel?"
- "Why do you think this appeared in your feed?"
- "Who do you trust most for news – and why?"
- "Have you ever seen something online that worried you?"
- "What do you do if you're not sure if something is real?"

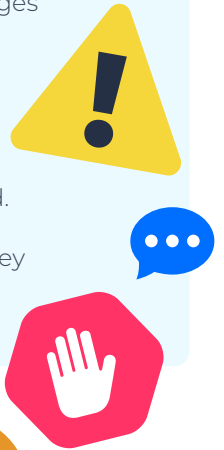




Social media tips

Help children take control of what they see:

- Use *“not interested”*/*“see less”* to manage feeds
- Look for the **blue tick** or official account badges
- **Show them how to report** fake, harmful or AI-generated content
- **Remind them:** What they like, watch and share shapes what they see on their feed.
- **Talk about content warnings** on posts so they can make safer choices about what they see.



Platforms' responsibilities

Under the **UK Online Safety Act**, parents can expect platforms to:

- Provide clear and simple reporting tools
- Reduce the spread of harmful misinformation
- Offer transparency about how algorithms and feeds work
- Give users more control over what they see



Try the quiz!



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