TALKING TO TEENS ABOUT ONLINE HATE SPEECH:

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS & FAMILIES

*(Adapted from **When Online Hate Speech Has Real World Consequences Parts 1** and **2**, plus **student activities**)*

INTRODUCTION

Raising children in a digital age makes it essential for parents to help them process and think critically about the messages they encounter online, and to consider the impact that their own words and actions can have on others.

Hate speech is pervasive on social media. This resource is designed to support parents and other adults in helping children identify, process, and think critically about online hate speech to help minimize its harmful effects. Before engaging in a conversation about online hate speech with your teen, we encourage adults to read our **Current Events Strategies for Parents and Teens**, which has helpful tips, reflections, and resources to help guide these discussions.

01

REFLECT ON **PERSONAL EXPERIENCE**

Think of a time when someone made a negative assumption about you or stereotyped you. What happened? How did it feel? Did anyone intervene or speak up on your behalf? Do you wish they had? Do you have any coping strategies that could be helpful to share with your teen?

Discuss this example with your teen and ask them to think through the same questions. Has something similar happened to them? Did it happen online? Did they use any coping strategies that were helpful? Did others intervene or support them in some other way? How can this experience help positively shape their online behavior in the future?

02 DEFINE ONLINE HATE SPEECH

Online hate speech refers to any form of harmful, offensive, or threatening language that is directed towards individuals or groups of people on the internet. This can include racist, sexist, homophobic, or religiously intolerant comments, jokes, and memes. Online hate speech can take place on social media, messaging apps, gaming platforms, and other online forums. It can have a variety of negative effects on the people who are targeted, including:

- emotional distress, anxiety, and depression;
- feelings of isolation, exclusion, and being discriminated against;
- damage to self-esteem and confidence; and
- in some extreme cases, physical harm and violence.

In addition, online hate speech can create a toxic online environment that can affect not only the individuals targeted but also other users who witness or participate in the hate speech. Can you think of examples of language online—either from your own experience or something you have heard about happening to someone else—that insults or attacks aspects of people's identities, like their sexual orientation, race, or religion?

03 DISCUSS A **SPECIFIC EXAMPLE** OF ONLINE HATE SPEECH

Hate speech takes many forms and targets different groups. Ask your teen if there is an example of online hate speech that has affected them or someone they know. If not, try choosing one or two examples from the list below to discuss with your teen or find your own examples online. If you are choosing your own example, be sure to confirm the validity of the news source. Our **Current Events Strategies for Parents and Teens** resource has additional recommendations for finding reliable news sources.

- Florida's 'Don't Say Gay' law fuels anti-LGBTQ hate online (*Associated Press*)
- How anti-trans hate speech online leads to real-world violence (*Marketplace Tech*)
- Unpacking Kanye West's Antisemitic Remarks (*ADL*)
- Hate speech, online extremism fed Pelosi attack, terror experts believe (*Reuters*)
- How Buffalo Suspect's Racist Writings Reveal Links to Other Attacks (*The New York Times*)

Then work through the following questions with your teen:

- What information did you find surprising?

- What information did you find troubling?

- What questions does this information raise for you?

- How do you think online hate might affect the individuals whose identities are targeted? How might it affect society?

- How might the impact of encountering hate speech online be different from the impact of encountering it in person (for example, seeing a banner with a hateful message)?

- What impact do you think it can have when someone with a large social media following spreads hate online? Do people who have more influence online have different responsibilities around their speech? Why or why not?

04

DISCUSS WAYS TO **COMBAT ONLINE HATE**

It's critical for teens both to understand the ways in which they and others can combat online hate, and to feel empowered to act. Think through the following questions with your teen and then identify ways in which you both can combat online hate:

- If **social media companies** take the issue of online hate seriously, what actions should they take? What is the responsibility of social media companies to stop the spread of online hate and where does their responsibility end?

- If **schools** take the issue of online hate seriously, what actions should they take? What is the responsibility of schools to stop the spread of online hate and where does their responsibility end?

- If **I** take the issue of online hate seriously, what are the day-to-day implications for how I live my life? What might my personal actions and behaviors look like? What might I choose to do differently? When and where might I find myself speaking out?

DISCUSS WAYS TO **COMBAT ONLINE HATE**

Review the following list of actions that individuals can take to stop the spread of online hate and commit to integrating these into your family's digital health practices. Check in with your teen regularly about honoring these commitments. Hold each other accountable!

- If you are the target of online hate, let your family know. You can also reach out to other trusted adults such as a teacher, mentor, or family friend for additional support.

- When you see posts on social media that contain hate, use the reporting function to flag the post, if the platform has one.

- Be aware that responding to posts that contain hate or reposting them with your own commentary, even to disagree, can have the unintended consequence of amplifying the initial post and cause the site's algorithms to place similar content in your feed.

- Do not forward posts containing hate to people who are targeted by the hate, because seeing these posts can cause them harm.

- To counter stereotypes, learn about the identity and culture of those who are targeted from individuals, communities, and organizations within that identity and culture.

- Reach out to people who you think might be affected by hate you see online to offer support.

- Limit your own exposure to online hate, for example by unsubscribing to individuals or groups that spread hate.

- Report online hate (or other incidents of hate) to the ADL.

05

ESTABLISH **HEALTHY HABITS** FOR MEDIA CONSUMPTION

Staying informed about the world is important. But constant media consumption can negatively impact your teen's mental health, particularly when their own identities are being targeted by online hate. Read the following excerpt from the American Psychological Association article **Media overload is hurting our mental health. Here are ways to manage headline stress:**

In today's hypercompetitive and incessant news delivery ecosystem, slightly more than half of U.S. adults report that they get their news through social media "often" or "sometimes," according to a Pew Research Center survey conducted from August 31 to September 7, 2020. To drive "clickbait," news coverage and social media postings also tend to highlight the more negative or dramatic news.

This leads to suffering from, as [psychologist Don] Grant describes it, "media saturation overload," and he is not the only mental health professional noticing this specialized type of stress. Similar terms that have emerged recently include "doomscrolling," "headline anxiety," and "headline stress disorder." While these terms are newer, the psychological strain of living through and absorbing dismal news is by no means confined to recent years. But lately, said Grant and other psychologists, the steady drumbeat of headlines and related social media commentary has been without pause: an ongoing pandemic, racial injustice, climate change, election controversy, mass shootings, and the list extends onward.

ESTABLISH **HEALTHY HABITS** FOR MEDIA CONSUMPTION

Discuss the following questions with your teen:

- What do your own news habits look like?
- Do you feel in control of the way you encounter news? Why or why not?
- What do you want your routine for following the news to look like?

Together, consider commitments you can make to mitigate headline stress:

- **Set boundaries around your news consumption.** It can be helpful to designate times you will read the news and times when you will take a break or pause notifications.
- **Look for ways to act.** If there are trends in the news you find upsetting, see if you can find a way to make a difference on the issue, even in a small way. For example, you can find local organizations working on an aspect of the issue and volunteer.
- **Look for positive stories.** Many headlines highlight the negative. If there are issues you care about, research what programs are already in place that can help make a difference on the issue.