

## Fake news and critical thinking

Information and resources for schools

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*Keeping children safe in education* (2018) has added **fake news** as category of content that poses safeguarding risks to children. This looks at the issues around fake news.

- **content:** being exposed to illegal, inappropriate or harmful material; for example pornography, **fake news**, racist or radical and extremist views;

### What is fake news?

The parliamentary **Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee** categorises fake news in several ways:

- **Fabricated content:** completely false content;
- **Manipulated content:** distortion of genuine information or imagery, for example a headline that is made more sensationalist, often popularised by 'clickbait';
- **Imposter content:** impersonation of genuine sources, for example by using the branding of an established news agency;
- **Misleading content:** misleading use of information, for example by presenting comment as fact;
- **False context of connection:** factually accurate content that is shared with false contextual information, for example when a headline of an article does not reflect the content;
- **Satire and parody:** presenting humorous but false stories as if they are true. Although not usually categorised as fake news, this may unintentionally fool readers.

**Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee**, Interim report (July 2019)

## Fake news and critical thinking

The committee's interim report goes on to say:

*'There are many potential threats to our democracy and our values. One such threat arises from what has been coined 'fake news', created for profit or other gain, disseminated through state-sponsored programmes, or spread through the deliberate distortion of facts, by groups with a particular agenda, including the desire to affect political elections...[o]ur democracy is at risk, and now is the time to act, to protect our shared values and the integrity of our democratic institutions.'*

### Why does it matter?

The internet has become an integral part of our lives today, particularly for children and young people. The internet provides the opportunity to share ideas, thoughts and beliefs with a community of people from all over the world.

However, the size and range of people in this community makes it essential to encourage critical thinking skills to ensure that this proliferating information is read, and understood, critically.

*'News consumed online or via social media can be challenging to interpret, with nearly half of 12-15s who use social media for news agreeing that it is difficult to tell whether a news story is true, and two in five saying they have seen something online or on social media that they thought was fake news.'*

**Children's and parents' media use and attitudes, Ofcom 2017**

*\*NEW LEGISLATION\* has passed today in Parliament that any body caught using a "mobile phone" whilst driving or whilst the engine is running will lose their Driver's Licenses on the spot for \*3 months.\* No excuse will be tolerated or accepted by a Police Officer. As soon as you get into your vehicle turn on the Bluetooth of the car or phone. If you don't have Bluetooth technology you have to safely pull over switch off your car engine then you may answer your mobile phone. Keep in mind that even though you have pulled over & your engine is running you will still cop the full wrath of by the law. So turn off your car engine if you don't have Bluetooth, prior to answering your mobile phone.*



Using a phone or a sat nav when driving - GOV.UK

It's illegal to hold a phone or a sat nav while driving - you'll get penalty points, a fine and can be banned from driving.

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*...almost half of older children get their news from websites (43.8%) and social media (49.5% from Snapchat)*

**NLT, 2018**

## Facebook's advice – 10 good rules

1. **Be sceptical of headlines.** False news stories often have catchy headlines in all caps with exclamation points. If shocking claims in the headline sound unbelievable, they probably are.
2. **Look closely at the link.** A phony or look-alike link may be a warning sign of false news. Many false news sites mimic authentic news sources by making small changes to the link. You can go to the site to compare the link to established sources.
3. **Investigate the source.** Ensure that the story is written by a source that you trust with a reputation for accuracy. If the story comes from an unfamiliar organization, check their "About" section to learn more.
4. **Watch for unusual formatting.** Many false news sites have misspellings or awkward layouts. Read carefully if you see these signs.
5. **Consider the photos.** False news stories often contain manipulated images or videos. Sometimes the photo may be authentic, but taken out of context. You can search for the photo or image to verify where it came from.
6. **Inspect the dates.** False news stories may contain timelines that make no sense, or event dates that have been altered.
7. **Check the evidence.** Check the author's sources to confirm that they are accurate. Lack of evidence or reliance on unnamed experts may indicate a false news story.
8. **Look at other reports.** If no other news source is reporting the same story, it may indicate that the story is false. If the story is reported by multiple sources you trust, it's more likely to be true.
9. **Is the story a joke?** Sometimes false news stories can be hard to distinguish from humour or satire. Check whether the source is known for parody, and whether the story's details and tone suggest it may be just for fun.
10. **Some stories are intentionally false.** Think critically about the stories you read, and only share news that you know to be credible.

## What should I do if I'm worried one of my pupils is being influenced by someone online?

Sometimes misinformation and malicious content can be particularly sinister and become part of radicalisation. If you have noticed a change in a pupil's behaviour, or if someone raises a concern with you, these issues must be treated as safeguarding issues. A report should be made to the designated safeguarding lead in school where you have any suspicions.

## Resources about fake news and to use with pupils

The **parliamentary Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee** on disinformation and 'fake news' has produced a series of publications of their work, including their July 2019 interim report.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/digital-culture-media-and-sport-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/fake-news-17-19/>

The **Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy Skills**, launched by the **All-Party Parliamentary Group on Literacy** and the **National Literacy Trust** has produced a report and an extensive series of teaching resources available on the NLT website ([literacytrust.org.uk](http://literacytrust.org.uk)). These are for primary and secondary schools. You do need to join the NLT to access the resources but they are all available with their free membership, not full (paid) membership.

**ChildNet international** has produced a **Trust Me** toolkit, for both primary and secondary schools (<https://www.childnet.com/resources/trust-me>) designed to support teachers in exploring critical thinking online. The resource has been created with teachers in mind after hearing from schools that they wanted a resource which would start the conversations around extremism and extreme – linked through to Prevent – online content.

The **London Grid for Learning** has a number of resources looking at fake news and hoaxes in their online safety resource centre (<https://www.lgfl.net/online-safety/resource-centre>). You need to look for *fake news and hoaxes* as the **topic**.

The **BBC Academy**, with *The Moral Maze*, has produced a series of lessons and online resources to support secondary teaching, to help students examine critically information they receive online through websites, social media, pictures and data and to develop skills and methods to help determine what is real. These are available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/en/articles/art20180302141419477>.

The **Full Fact Toolkit** (<https://fullfact.org/toolkit/>) give helpful information and includes lesson plans and suggestions. Full Fact is an independent charity.

The **UK Safer Internet Centre** has produced information about fake news - <https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/blog/fake-news-and-critical-thinking>.

- Their Safer Internet Day 2017 education packs include resources on digital youth culture, looking at how images and media can be used to mislead.

## More information

Name	
Email	
Telephone	