

Dealing with Hate Speech in Digital Spaces

In today's world, we are increasingly brought together through digital spaces. Whether it's keeping up with friends on Instagram, playing games with friends on Discord, or just sending TikToks to family, the internet is playing an increasingly larger role in how we communicate with one another. However, this constant connection has also provided opportunity for people to spread hate speech online, and lure teens and young adults into their belief systems, without anyone noticing.

Hate groups and ideologies are provided a very powerful tool by social media. On social media, these apps have a tendency to promote content similar to what you've watched in the past. Because of this, a sort of "pipeline" or "hate highway" can be created. The highway begins with a simply controversial opinion, but watching said video will increase the chance that something more offensive is recommended. Slowly, across a span of weeks or months, a user's feed can transition into regularly showing plain examples of racism or hate speech.

While most adults would be mostly unaffected by this kind of advertising, teens and young adults are especially vulnerable. The reason for this susceptibility is that these hate groups provide a sense of acceptance and identity that a youth may not be able to find elsewhere. The mid-to-late teens is a time of extremely rapid identity growth, and can lead to kids rebelling against what their families and schools typically approve of. Hate groups prey upon this experimentation in order to indoctrinate new members while they are young.

***InternetMatters.org* lists these, among many others, as potential signs of being vulnerable to hate messaging:**

- Struggling with a sense of identity
- Experiencing family problems
- Difficulty with social interaction
- Troubles with low self-esteem

While this is a serious issue to keep in mind, it's important to remember that most content on social media is *not* any type of hate. Almost all users are perfectly benevolent, and using it like anyone else. However, if you're concerned that your child is being influenced by hate messaging, you may find the following resources helpful. They go further into detail on behaviors that may lead youth to hate groups, as well as how to discuss this messaging with a child.

- *InternetMatters.org*: Discusses the warning signs in greater detail, as well as a few things you can do to keep an eye out.
- *Fosi.org*: Discusses how to speak to your child about hate speech, and prepare them for seeing it online.

- *CommonSenseMedia.org*: Further discusses speaking to your child about hate speech, as well as good conversation starters to think about the roles people play in it.

Sources

<https://www.internetmatters.org/connecting-safely-online/advice-for-parents/tackling-the-hard-stuff-on-social-media-to-support-young-people/tackling-hate-speech/>

<https://www.fosi.org/good-digital-parenting/talking-your-family-about-hate-speech-online>

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/articles/where-kids-find-hate-online>

<https://www.science.org/content/article/dark-pools-hate-flourish-online-here-are-4-controversial-ways-fight-them>