



UNLEARN ANTISEMITISM

PARENTS' GUIDE: UNDERSTANDING ONLINE HATE



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Parents of school-aged children have a significant role to play in protecting their children from the dangerous influence and potential recruitment that occurs in the online environment.

Whether it is by video, social media, gaming platforms, discord servers, or dark web platforms dominated by extremist groups, hateful and dangerous information can spread quickly.

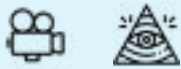
ALGORITHMS

YouTube and social media platforms like TikTok want viewers to stay on their applications as long as possible. Once a visitor starts watching content of a certain kind, the platform's algorithms feed the visitor similar content that they determine is likely to be attention-getting. This can be increasingly extreme content of the kind they were originally viewing.

This can be particularly dangerous for younger, impressionable online visitors. Take someone looking at videos about a common but not in itself a directly harmful conspiracy theory – that the moon landing was staged.



A student goes onto YouTube to look at videos about the moon landing, just out of personal interest or because it is related to a project at school.



There will be both historical and accurate documentaries as well as conspiracy theory videos about how the moon landing did not happen.



After watching some of these conspiracy theory videos about the moon landing, the algorithm may then recommend different conspiracy theory videos on other topics.



Many of these other conspiracy theories point to minorities, particularly Jews, as being responsible.



This can then spiral toward content demonizing Jews as the root of all evil in society, even advocating violence against them.

This is how young people can be taken on an online journey that leads to incrementally more extreme, racist and violent content, without actively seeking it from the start or necessarily being aware of the shift that is gradually taking place.

There is work being done to combat this phenomenon. In January 2022, the World Jewish Congress and UNESCO partnered with TikTok to offer [a comprehensive Holocaust education resource](#) to its users. This has helped counteract Holocaust denial and stem the flow of antisemitic and hateful material that Tik Tok users might encounter.

INFLUENCERS

Social media influencers with a big reach on platforms may spew hateful messaging cloaked in hipness, humour, or irony, specifically intended to attract young people.

Those who interact with them may at first be drawn to the humour and spectacle, not realizing the underlying hate messaging that is part of the influencer's persona.

This is a fast-changing environment with new players gaining popularity seemingly out of the blue. Algorithms used by social media platforms often "recommend" a continual stream of like-minded videos or social media content which intensifies the messaging.

ONLINE GAMING

The violence found in today's hyper-realistic video games can be linked to real-world violence.

One component of the world of online gaming is playing and interacting with anonymous strangers. This is, therefore, an environment where parents should be aware of what their children are seeing and doing, just as in an analogous offline space.

As with any online content aimed at youth, what can at first seem like innocent banter can become increasingly hateful.

HATE RECRUITMENT

Youth, particularly boys aged 12-17, are increasingly likely to be recruited by hate groups and even to commit hate crimes.

Many young people may be looking for causes that will give them a sense of identity. Recruiters for hate groups are skilled at taking advantage of this search for identity or belonging.

It is important to educate children about online hate so that they can avoid these traps.

Youth are often inundated with online memes featuring subtly racist, sexist, homophobic, antisemitic jokes. Without comprehending the hate, they share the jokes or memes.

This can lead to desensitization, and the explaining away of hate as "it's just a joke."

When parents, teachers or classmates call out this behaviour, the immediate response can be one of shame or embarrassment.

However, the youth may subsequently be attracted to content that plays on themes of "people are too sensitive," or "you can't say anything anymore." These messages may ring true for them, and their initial shame or embarrassment can turn to anger directed against those who "can't take a joke."

Hate groups use both humour and rage to manipulate youth into joining their ranks.

WHAT CAN A PARENT DO?

Instead of calling a child out, call them in.

Go through your child's online activity with them. Explain the impact of hate on those targeted and on our broader society sympathetically – without judgment and without shaming them.

Remind them that they are a good person, that this not necessarily about their intent, but rather about the impact of their online activity.

Explain that this is how propaganda works – normalizing extreme views and lies by repeated exposure over time.

Ask them to assert their independence by taking time to spot the lie and recognize the impact, and that, as a parent with more experience, you are there, without judgment, to help.

Becoming familiar with some of the more common [online hate symbols](#) is another important step for parents to take in understanding what perils exist on the web for their children who are spending increasingly more time online, particularly since the pandemic.

OTHER HELPFUL LINKS

The resources below will help you to identify what your children are seeing online and how to begin having conversations with them to keep them safe. Checking back in with them regularly will allow you to stay current on the latest trends and facilitate meaningful conversations with your children.

[Kids Help Phone](#): An introduction to helping young people recognize and respond to online hate.

[Media Smarts](#): Canada's centre for digital and media literacy provides a tip sheet for talking to kids about hate online.

[Internet Matters](#): Age-specific checklists to advise parents on how to help children stay safe online at all stages.

[Public Safety Canada](#): Digital Citizenship Guide for Parents.

[Hatepedia](#): A database of online hate symbols with their meaning and other resources produced by Toronto's Holocaust Museum.