

**Disinformation** - fake or misleading stories created and shared deliberately often by a writer who might have a financial or political motive.

**Misinformation** - This also means fake or misleading stories, but in this case the stories may not have been deliberately created or shared with the intent to mislead.

**Conspiracy theories** - offer a simplified model for things that cannot be explained or easily understood. They typically involve an 'alternative' explanation for an event to those provided by governments or official international bodies, sometimes suggesting a group, individual or organisation is responsible or hiding information from the public

**Fake News** - is another term that is widely used that means the news is not reliable or truthful. It is also used to refute a claim, which could in fact be true!

*Fake news fails to capture the complex problem of disinformation, which is often the skillful blending of 'facts' with the fabricated to create something that goes beyond anything resembling 'news'. On social media, this will involve a whole array of digital behaviour deliberately designed to mislead.*

### Why is it important?

- **Impact of disinformation** - whilst disinformation may not necessarily be illegal it can have a damaging impact on people and the wider society. Especially when its aim is to disrupt or challenge the democratic process, the integrity of elections and the values that shape public policies such as finance and health.
- **Risk to mental health** - disinformation and misinformation can lead to an increase in anxiety, damage to self-esteem and skewed view of the world. Conspiracy theories will encourage a sense of suspicion and potentially exaggerate tensions or make perceived threats more persuasive.
- **Risks to young people** - disinformation spreads more quickly on social media than verified news. Echo chambers and filter bubbles are used to promote disinformation. This can lead to stronger or more extreme viewpoints and can fuel resentment.

**Echo chambers** are social spaces in which the same or similar ideas, opinions and beliefs are repeated within a closed group. This can stop people from appreciating other points of view on a topic.

**Filter bubbles** occur online when users are suggested content based on their previous internet consumption habits, and can lead to them being separated from information that disagrees with their viewpoint.

### What can I do to support the young people I work with?

Increase media literacy skills to create greater resilience:

- Critically evaluate what you see, read and hear
- Look for more than one viewpoint on things
- Question information and become a healthy sceptic
- Know that the 'real' and 'false' can often be blended together
- Understand that all information can be interpreted in a number of ways
- Know the tricks (the clickbait) that will draw you into believing news stories



## One Minute Guide Disinformation, misinformation and conspiracy theories



### Resources to support media literacy

Media literacy enables young people to have the skills, knowledge and understanding to make full use of the opportunities of online content, including being able to better identify false and misleading content.

**The SHARE checklist** - This is a Government website, offering five easy steps to identify whether information might be false.

- Source** - Rely on official sources for medical and safety information.
- Headline** - Headlines do not always tell the full story. Always read to the end before you share articles.
- Analyse** - Analyse the facts. If something sounds unbelievable, it might well be. Independent fact-checking services are correcting false information.
- Retouched** - Watch out for misleading pictures and videos in stories. They may be edited, or show an unrelated place or event. Check to see who else is using the photo.
- Error** - Look out for mistakes. Typos and other errors might mean the information is false.

BBC Bitesize - a series of short videos

- How [algorithms and filter bubbles](#) decide what we see on social media
- How [false information spreads](#)

General internet safety and advice

- [CEOP](#)
- [NSPCC](#)
- [ParentZone](#)

### For more information:

Contact either Charlie Pericleous or John Webster in the Portsmouth City Council Hidden Harm Team