

Online hate: what is it?

A high proportion of young people aged 12-17 in Australia have encountered inappropriate or hateful content online. These include:

- being targets of bullying or hurtful comments
- seeing real violence that disturbed them
- seeing racist comments
- seeing or hearing hateful comments about cultural or religious groups

Helpful conversation starters for you...

What is hate speech?

Look up the definition of hate speech and talk about whether your kids have encountered it. It may have been just a word, or it may have been in a video or a meme. How can you tell if someone is trying to be funny or their words are intended to hurt?

How does hate speech affect people?

How would you feel if you were a member of the group targeted by cruel language? Does it matter if you're exposed to it a lot or a little? Are people with different social statuses (for example, a popular kid Vs a loner type) affected differently?

What's the difference between hate speech and cyber bullying?

If someone is trying to hurt someone, or knows that they're hurting someone, and does it repeatedly, that's cyber bullying. When someone expresses vicious views about a group or toward an attribute of a group, that's hate speech.

What's your role in online hate speech?

Do you feel safe calling out the person or people using hate speech? Would it make you feel cooler to do that, or would it make you feel uncool - like you're not part of the group? Would you block people using hate speech? Would you ignore them? Would you stand up for the person or group of people being targeted?

How far does the right to free speech go?

Is there a clear boundary between free speech and hate speech? What is it? Should people have the right to say and do whatever they want online? If people's feelings are hurt or they're offended, they can just go on a different site, right?

Does hate speech lead to hate crimes?

Convicted killer Dylan Roof, accused murderer Robert Bowers, and others accused of hate crimes left clues to their murderous views online. Should there be a place for people with extremist leanings to gather and share their ideas online, even if they're offensive and threatening? Or not?

What responsibility - if any - do technology platforms have?

Should Instagram, for example, be held accountable to victims of hate crimes committed by users who posted hate content? Should they try to bring people together, either through dedicated spaces, new algorithms, or other methods?

Why are certain people attracted to hate groups?

It's natural for tweens and teens to want to join groups, and sometimes groups devoted to hurting others make certain kids feel more powerful. Kids who have pent-up anger or insecurity about other things in their lives may be attracted to groups that feel protective and united. Can you imagine why someone might be swayed by hate speech rhetoric?