



Talking to Kids About Hate in Media

– tip sheet

Along with images of natural disasters and violence, one all-too-common news item that can be distressing to kids is reports of hate crimes. Seeing or hearing about hate-motivated assaults and vandalism of homes, cemeteries and places of worship in media, can lead to fear and anxiety in young people, especially if they belong to a vulnerable group. In many cases, the effect will be worse because news isn't the only place Canadian kids see hate and racism: almost half see hateful content online at least once a month, and one in six sees it every day.

As well as helping them to feel safe, it's important to talk to kids about hate from an early age, because youth – especially boys ages 12-17 – are the most likely group to commit hate crimes in their communities. Organized hate groups know this, and consciously try to radicalize young people both online and offline. Teenagers and young adults are prime targets for hate groups because many are looking for groups or causes that will give them a sense of identity.

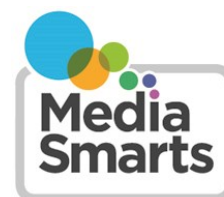
Here are some tips on what to say to kids when there's a hate incident in the news:

Talk about it.

Don't assume that they haven't heard about a disturbing news event: ask first and, if they have, talk about it. Talking honestly and reassuringly to kids about traumatic events goes a long way in calming fears. It's also important for young people to understand how history affects how we see ourselves and others. Without knowing about slavery and civil rights, or the long history of anti-Semitism, it's difficult for a young person to understand the difference between reasonable debates and hate material.

Watch for signs of anxiety.

Some kids are more susceptible to anxiety about events reported in media. Various factors influence a child's reaction, including age, temperament, a tendency to worry or a vivid imagination. Kids may also be more likely to feel



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anxious if they or people they know well are members of the targeted group. For a list of victim support services that provide counselling, see <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/victims-victimes/vsd-rsv/agencies-agences.aspx>.

Make the time to listen to any concerns.

Be honest when answering questions, but avoid giving long, detailed explanations to younger kids. Also, some kids may not want to think about an incident in order to avoid unpleasant feelings. If they don't want to talk about what happened, tell them that this is fine. It's okay to just let them be kids.

Share how you're feeling.

Be aware of the impact that incidents of hate may have on your own emotions and behaviour. Share your feelings with kids. It helps older kids to know that such events are upsetting to adults as well. Remember, however, that young kids may become more fearful if they sense anxiety and tension in the adults around them.

Emphasize the importance of tolerance and respect.

Explain that media coverage can trigger powerful feelings of fear and anger in people, which can turn into hate directed at certain groups.

- Explain how negative stereotypes can lead to simplistic and dangerous “good versus evil,” “bad guys versus good guys” perceptions. Point out that peaceful solutions to conflict are always preferable to retaliation and violence.
- Clearly communicating your values to your kids is one of the strongest ways of influencing how they behave: MediaSmarts' research has found that kids with rules at home about treating people with respect are substantially less likely to be mean or cruel to others online.
 - ◇ It's particularly important to talk about this issue with boys, who are much more likely than girls to say they and their friends “don't mean anything by it” when they say racist or sexist things.

Teach kids to be skeptical of sources of information online.

Because young people are so comfortable using computers and the Internet, we may think that they already have the digital literacy skills to understand and deal with hateful online content. In fact, even the most Web-savvy youth may have trouble recognizing the true messages of hate sites. Hate groups put a lot

of effort into making their sites look legitimate through a dot-org Web address, claims of expertise, and an appealing and professional design. Young people need to learn how to dig deeper to verify sources, such as finding out who links to a site, doing a *Whois* search to show who owns a domain, or doing a search on the source itself.

Help them recognize hate when they see it online.

Although many hate groups try to hide their true nature, the messages they use can still give them away. Here are some of the most common ideas found in hate content, whether it's found on websites or spread via social media:

- **The Other:** The most basic element of hate is the idea of "the Other" – a group that is seen as being completely different from the author's group, sometimes even portrayed as inhuman.
- **The Glorious Past:** Another important element of hate is the idea that the group has fallen from its once-glorious past. This fall is shown as being the fault of the Other, and it is only by defeating and destroying the Other that this glorious past can be regained.
- **Victimhood:** Hate groups typically portray themselves, and the group they claim to represent, as victims of the Other.

Teach kids to stand up to hate.

MediaSmarts' [Responding to Online Hate guide](#) provides information on how to confront hate content, but there are other steps kids can take as well. When a hate crime is committed against a person, group, or property, helping the victims can help lessen feelings of despair and helplessness. Let kids choose their own course of action:

- Depending on their age and what they feel comfortable doing, they can help raise funds for repairs, join a protest against hate or write a letter expressing their concerns to the local newspaper. For example, when a mosque in Peterborough Ontario was vandalized an online campaign raised more than enough to pay for repairs in just a few days.
- If they know the victim, kids can also reach out to them privately to offer comfort and support – this is one of the most effective strategies for helping people who are being bullied.
- As well, make sure kids know that they have a right to insist on a hate-free environment, both online and offline, and the power to create one: research has shown that it can take just a few voices to influence a community's values.

