



# Talking To Kids About Hate Online

– tip sheet

Most kids see hate and prejudice in places like games, social networks, and online videos. They also say that they want to do something about it when they see it, but don't know what to do.

Kids want to be able to turn to their parents when they see hate online. You can help them be ready to respond to it and support them when it happens.

Here are some tips on how to help your kids deal with hate online.

**Make sure they know that all kinds of hate and prejudice hurt.** A lot of the hate kids see online doesn't have a specific target. Instead, kids use slurs, mean names, and images out of habit, or for fun when they're talking to each other. Remind your kids that it doesn't mean these words and images don't hurt anybody. Even if nobody who's a member of a group sees or hears these slurs, it makes the conversation a place where those people won't feel welcome.

Kids say that it hurts them when they see hate and prejudice online, even when they're not the target. They also say that they'd be more likely to do something about it if they knew somebody had really been hurt. Help your kids put two and two together to understand that when hate and prejudice are seen as normal it hurts everybody.

**Tell them that they can make a difference.** Sometimes kids don't do anything because they don't think anyone will listen to them. Make sure your kids understand that what they say and do has an effect on what other people think. If they don't speak out, other voices will decide what's okay in their community.

Kids sometimes worry that if they speak up their friends will get mad at them, or it'll make it harder for their friends to get along. But it's their friends who are most likely to listen to what they have to say. That can be true, but it's also a reason why they should speak out: the people who care what you say are the people who will listen to you.



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**Teach kids to call in, not call out.** A lot of the time, "calling out" – putting someone on the spot for something they've said and done – will make them guilty and angry. That's more likely to make the person double down and defend what they said, instead of trying to undo it. Remind your kids that when they do speak out against hate or prejudice, they should "call in" instead by assuming that the person didn't mean to hurt anybody. Tell them to make sure not to be angry at the person. Instead, they can focus on how hate hurts people and the community, instead of blaming the person who did it.

Sometimes people *do* mean to hurt others, and sometimes they keep doing it after being called in. When that happens it's still not a good idea to get angry, but you can be firm in telling them that what they're doing isn't okay and that you don't agree with them.

**Help them be the first to speak up.** It can be hard to speak up, but somebody has to be the first. If your kids know that most other kids do think it's important to do something about hate online, they can feel safe being the first one to speak up.

It's also important to be the second to speak up – and the third, and the fourth! Every voice that's added helps to show that hate and prejudice aren't normal or okay in the community.

**Give them a toolbox for responding to hate.** It's important that kids feel like they can speak out, but sometimes speaking out isn't safe or might make things worse. Tell your kids that there's always something they can do to help.

Our tip sheet [How to Push Back Against Hate Online](#) has tips for kids on what to do in different situations.

**Make your own values clear.** Having rules in your home makes a difference in what your kids do online. Be sure your kids understand that you expect them to treat everyone with respect and kindness, and to do something if they see hate online.

Rules don't just make a difference when it comes to hate online. Kids are less likely to cyberbully others if there's a rule about treating people with respect online, and they're less likely to see dangerous websites if there's a rule about what kinds of sites are and aren't safe to visit.

Kids tell us that adults are responsible for a lot of the prejudice they see online, so it's especially important that the adults in their lives are good role models when it comes to standing up to hate.



**Help them recognize hate when they see it.** Kids most often see hate coming from their friends and families, in games or social networks. But there are hate groups that make "cloaked" sites about things like politics, civil rights or the Holocaust that they hope kids will find when they're doing research for school. Make sure your kids know that there are people online who are trying to trick them and that they have to do a bit of work to find out who the message is coming from.

Check out MediaSmarts' [Reality Check!](#) game and video series for information on how to find out what's true and reliable online.

Hate groups also target kids in popular forums like Reddit and 4chan. Make sure you have regular and open conversations about what they're doing online, who they're talking to there, and what they're talking about. People who are trying to get kids involved in hate won't usually jump straight to hate, but will start by encouraging kids to laugh at racist or sexist jokes or images, or encourage them to blame their problems on women or minority groups.

For kids who have problems at school or at home, being told they're superior because of their race or sex can make them feel more confident and powerful.

For kids who feel lost or at loose ends, being given an enemy to hate and fear can make them feel better because it gives them purpose and direction.

Don't overreact if you find your kids are on one of these forums. Remember that rebelling and shocking adults is a big part of the appeal. Instead of getting angry, make sure they know that hate groups use things like jokes and memes to try to trick people into falling for their message.

**Find out how to report hate.** Most hate online isn't against the law, but a lot of it is against the terms of service of the online spaces where it appears. When your kids use a social network, video-sharing site or any other place that people can post things online, make sure they know how to report or "flag" anything that goes over the line.

How do you know if something is bad enough to report? Usually, the difference is if it's saying you should do something against a group. Saying "I hate this group" is not usually over the line, but saying "This group should be killed" or "This group should be kicked out of the country" is.



**Talk openly about race and diversity.** A lot of people try to avoid talking about things like hate, racism or sexism, but it's important for kids to know that these are real issues. Your kids shouldn't feel guilty if they are part of a group that has these advantages, but they also need to know that the world – and the internet – aren't the same for everybody.

Don't try to raise kids to be "colour blind:" make sure they know that while we are all the same at heart, different groups face different challenges. If they understand that, they will understand why something that doesn't hurt them might hurt someone else.

It's also important for young people to understand how history affects how we see ourselves and others. Without knowing about slavery, the experience of Indigenous peoples in Canada, or the long history of anti-Semitism, it's difficult for a young person to understand the difference between reasonable debates and hate material.

The most dangerous kind of hate speech doesn't try to get you mad at other groups. Instead it typically tries to make you afraid of them, so that they feel like enemies. The more your kids know about different groups, the harder it will be for hate groups to make them think "they're all the same."

Pay attention to how you talk about other groups. Do you find yourself talking about them as though there weren't differences between them?

You can also talk to your kids about how unfair it is when a group they're part of is seen that way.

For more details on how to have these conversations, see MediaSmarts' tip sheet [Talking to Kids About Racial Stereotypes](#).

If there's been a recent hate incident online or in the news, use MediaSmarts' tip sheet [Talking to Kids About Hate in Media](#).

