



What parents need to know about **Misinformation**

Misinformation is false or misleading content, shared without the intention to deceive or harm. It's important we understand the prevalence of misleading content on social media, and the difference between misinformation and disinformation.

Disinformation is false information that has been released with the intended purpose to deceive or mislead. A small, but important difference.

So, why is this so important for parents to be aware of? Fake news and misleading content has always been a thing, right? True! But the level of engagement on social media and the amount of time our young people are spending on their devices has increased exponentially.

The digital world is full of content

Society is not short of content, in fact, we're over-saturated with it! The prevalence of the digital world and how it's woven its way into every aspect of our lives has come at a cost. These saturation levels are important when we consider the younger generation, and the high value they place on their time on social media.

The majority of the content our young people are absorbing is through their social feeds. That includes local, national and international news, education, current affairs, sports, hobbies, interests, culture and entertainment.

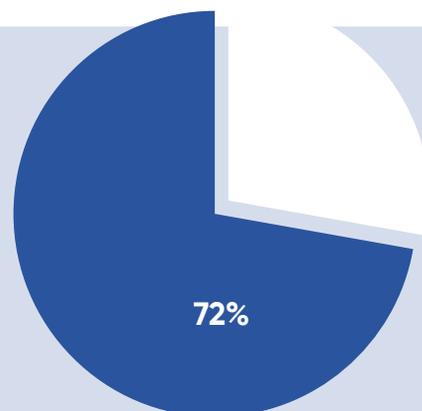
Professor Ruth Page from the University of Birmingham has been conducting some research on the influence of online content and the impact of misinformation on young people's health and wellbeing. Care for the Family has partnered with the research, to help parents and young people navigate this topic together.

What is misinformation?

Misinformation is false or misleading content, shared without the intention to deceive or harm.



48% of young people are seeing misleading content every day, with more than one in 10 seeing it more than six times a day – often leaving them feeling annoyed, upset, sad, angry, attacked or scared.¹



More than seven in ten parents are concerned that their child would be unable to distinguish between the real and the fake online.²

How does misinformation work?

Misinformation is often emotionally charged and persuasive, which makes it difficult to judge how trustworthy the source is.

Young people are likely to encounter misinformation in:

- Unverified health advice
- Content about controversial topics
- Social media posts containing false claims
- Newsfeed and platform algorithms
- Content from influencers



Here are some features which can help you assess how misinformation works.

Images

Images impact how we process information. They make claims appear more believable and can be emotionally appealing. Videos and photos that are shared on social media are highly engaging but need careful evaluation.

Oversimplified facts

Short videos and memes often oversimplify ideas and facts. This can lead to young people adopting inaccurate labels or unhelpful beliefs about themselves or others.

Volume of information

Our children encounter large amounts of social media content which can be overwhelming and difficult to sift effectively. Misleading details can be mixed with credible information, requiring more time to evaluate than 'scrolling' allows.

Top tip: Reverse image searching can show if a picture has been manipulated. You can do this by either using Google Image (on a desktop), Google Lens (on a mobile device), or another third party site like TinEye or Bing Visual Search. You paste the image or the URL of the image into the camera box next to the search bar.

How can we help our children?



Model critical thinking

Talk through your own thought processes when you encounter misleading content. Learn to verify the accuracy of the content and reflect on your emotional responses when you see it. This is a life skill we all need throughout adulthood, it's not just needed in the teenage years!

Talk about trustworthy sources

Influencers and celebrities often share sponsored and persuasive content to promote products or activities. While this is not misinformation, reviewing which influencers or celebrity accounts your child is familiar with is a good starting point to talk about how to identify trustworthy sources of information.

Know how to report misinformation

Social media sites have different policies for fact-checking their content. Look through the sites and apps you and your children use and how they deal with misinformation. This can help you become more aware of what to do if you spot misleading content, and which sites are more rigorous in protecting their members.

Keep the conversation going

Misinformation has been present for a long time and it's not just found on social media. However, the development of Generative AI will likely mean that the subtle forms of misleading content are going to be constantly evolving.

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¹ UK Safer Internet Centre, 'Safer Internet Day 2021 Press Release', 8 February 2021, saferinternet.org.uk, accessed 20 August 2025.

² Ofcom, 'Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report' 7 May 2025, ofcom.org.uk, accessed 25 September 2025.