

Stop the Hate: Seven Tips to Help Youth Respond When They Encounter Online Hatred



In today's fast-paced, free-speech online world, chances are high that your child will encounter some type of hate and/or discrimination. This can be against race, religion, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, political party and others. Hate speech can range from disparaging comments to harassment and even threats.

Youth will likely face casual exposure to hate and racism merely by getting online, listening to music, reading comments under a YouTube video or group chat, or looking up a definition for a school assignment. The growing intensity and frequency of this and the idea some have that "it's just part of life" make it critical to talk to youth about it. By doing so, they will be better able to handle what comes their way and help stop the hate.

One national report showed that one quarter, or around 11 million, of black Americans have been the target of online harassment due to their race or ethnicity, and 23% of the LGBT community report having been exposed to comments they

considered hateful over the past year.

While hate speech may be lawful under the First Amendment, it crosses the legal line when it includes threats and harassment, specifically targets someone or creates a hostile environment. Often, when hate speech goes unchecked, it can quickly escalate into violence.

The internet didn't invent hate speech, but our online world, and particularly social media, provides a venue to express thoughts and feelings, both good and bad. For most people, it is much easier to share hurtful words online than it is in person, looking at another human face-to-face. Children are exposed to all kinds of information that is easily created, distributed and believed by those who want their hateful ideas and information spread and accepted.

Though it's not a comfortable topic, hate speech should be discussed regularly. Consider these tips for talking with your youth.

1. Ask what they know about it. Look up the definition of hate speech and ask if they have witnessed or experienced it online or in-person. Discuss how it affects people.

2. Report it. Most websites have "terms of service," and hate speech, intimidation and threats are generally a violation of these terms.

3. Block it. Most social media sites have an option to block people, including those who use hate speech, racist language or post something you find offensive. Blocking people can be socially tricky for some youth, so discuss it and empower them to make responsible decisions, balancing the need to belong with exposure to hateful or hurtful posts.

4. Refuse to share the hate. Forwarding any type of hate speech is wrong, plus, in many cases, it can be traced back to you, which will lead to more difficulties.

5. Nurture empathy and compassion. Have children consider how other people feel. Talk about the Holocaust, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, racism, social justice, tolerance and diversity. Ask them to think of a time when someone said something that hurt them. Discuss how it might feel if you were the person or member of a group that was targeted by cruel language or actions. You can use current events as a moment to teach.

6. Explain your personal values. Explain that each of us is born with a need for attachment—a longing for belonging and acceptance, whether it's a team, a group of friends, a club or a religious community. These groups help fill an inner need to belong and contribute. It's natural for tweens and teens to want to join groups. Sometimes passionate groups dedicated to putting others down and even hurting others make kids feel more powerful, protected and united. Ask your youth if they know about groups like this and why they think kids participate. Let them know your views on groups that promote hate.

7. Start the discussion early. This will give your children the skills to think critically about what they see and read and will help them know how to react when they come across hate speech. Let them know that while you may disagree with other's positions and values, you can do so in a kind, respectful way. In the end, as a human race, we have so many more similarities than differences, and the differences we have should be appreciated and celebrated. We can all do our part to stop the hate.

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