

ARENAS

ANALYSIS OF AND RESPONSES
TO EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

Educator OER Resource Pack

World Trade Center 7 and the Spread of “Hidden Truth” Messages

Theme: **Science**

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www.arenasproject.eu



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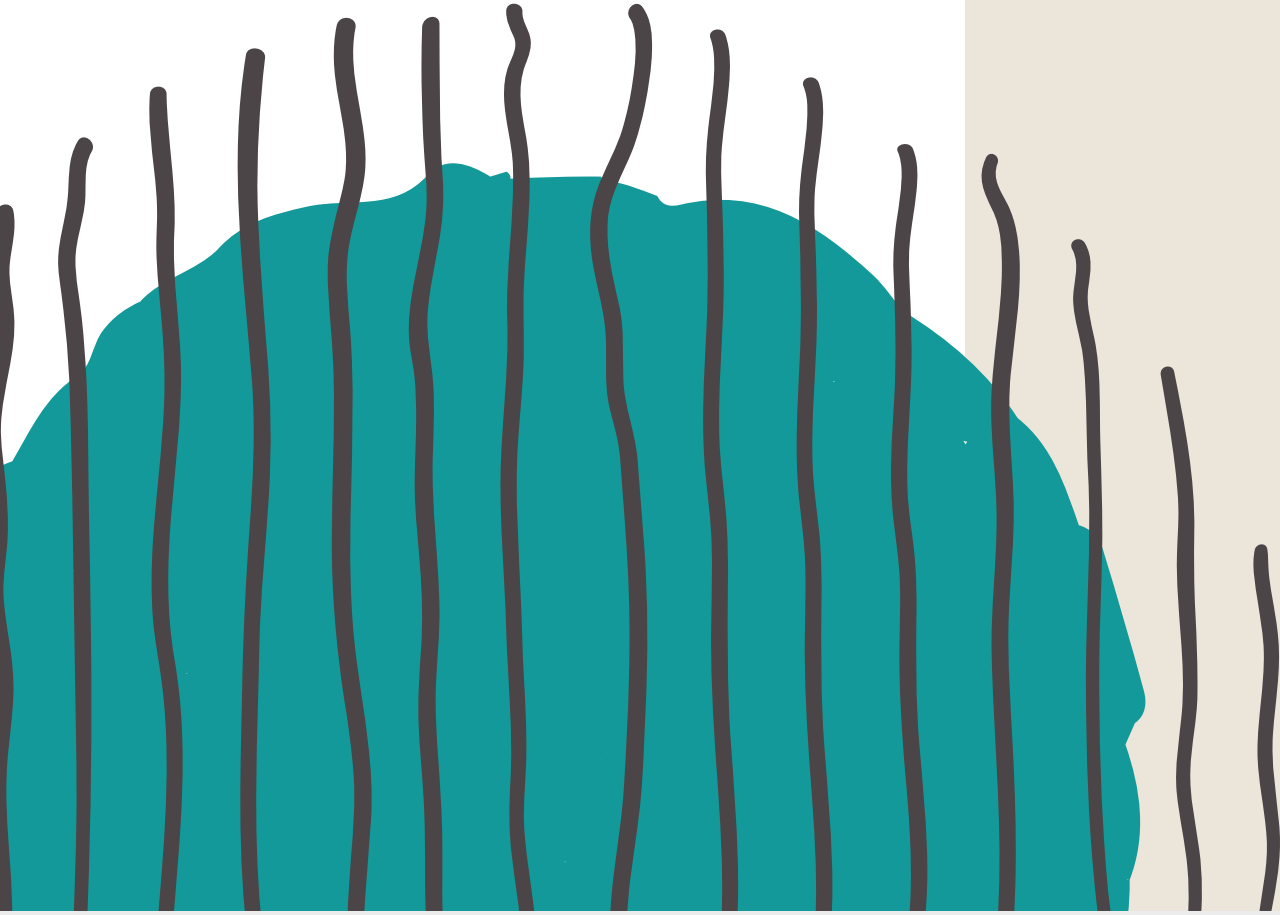


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01

Introduction For Educators

Session set-up and aims





How to use this Resource Pack

Educators can use this presentation as a **flexible teaching resource** by selecting only the slides that suit their class, time available and topic focus.

You can edit the scenario text, examples and discussion questions to match your students' age, confidence and local context, while keeping the same learning process: **notice what the message is doing, check what supports it, decide on a safe response and reflect on what to do next time.**

For a student-facing lesson, duplicate the file, remove the educator guidance slides, simplify language where needed and replace any placeholders (e.g. screenshots, short quotes, links or videos) with materials you are comfortable using in your setting.

The slides work well alongside **pair or small-group tasks, quick whole-class check-ins and short written reflections** and they can also be adapted for homework or blended learning by sharing selected slides and questions online.



How to use this Resource Pack

The Case Study Scenario

World Trade Center 7 was a large office building in the World Trade Center complex that collapsed on the afternoon of 11 September 2001 after being damaged during the day.

Because it fell separately from the Twin Towers, it has often been used online as a case study in how people argue about evidence, trust and “hidden truth” claims.

Use this resource to help students practise

- slowing down when they see a message
- identifying what it claims
- spotting persuasion moves
- deciding what to check
- choosing a safe response
- reflecting on impact

Focus on skills and respectful discussion, not on debating who is right.



How to use this Resource Pack

- This resource pack supports a short classroom session on analysing messages fairly
- It is designed to be used alongside a lesson plan
- The goal is to practise skills: notice → check → respond → reflect
- Students do not need to agree, debate or “solve” the topic



Why this is useful now

- **Students meet fast, emotional messages every day**
- **Some messages simplify issues or blame groups**
- **This session helps students slow down and ask better questions**
- **It builds confidence to respond safely or step away**

What the ARENAS project aims to do

ARENAS is funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe programme and helps people understand how harmful stories spread online, while supporting schools and communities with practical ways to respond. The project focuses on three themes — Science, Nation and Gender — because these are common areas where public debate can become polarised, emotionally charged and vulnerable to misleading or extreme narratives.

Focus for this Resource Pack

The Science theme matters for this case study because claims about WTC 7 are often presented online as if they are “proven facts”, using technical language, selective evidence and confident conclusions to persuade viewers. This scenario lets students practise how to check what's true: separating observation from interpretation, asking what evidence is actually shown, noticing what information is missing and comparing claims with reliable sources before forming a judgement or sharing content.

Gender refers to the roles, expectations and identities that societies associate with being male, female or non-binary, and how these shape people's experiences in school, family life, work and public spaces. Gender is used as a topic area where messages can be framed in ways that rely on stereotypes, create “us vs them” thinking, or exaggerate differences to provoke strong emotional reactions.

The focus for teaching is not on debating identities, but on helping students recognise how language, labels and assumptions influence how people are treated and how groups are portrayed.

Science, in this context, refers to how claims about the world are made, tested and supported by evidence, and how people decide what is reliable or true. We use science as a theme because messages about health, climate, technology and social issues often present certainty without evidence, misrepresent data or create doubt by attacking expertise.

The teaching focus is on helping students practise “truth-checking” habits in an age-appropriate way: identifying the claim, asking what evidence is offered, checking the source, comparing with other reliable information and recognising when a message is designed to trigger emotion rather than understanding.

The nation refers to how people describe belonging to a country or community, including shared stories about identity, history, culture, values, borders and who is seen as “part of us”. The nation is used as a topic area where messages can be shaped to create strong group loyalties, simplify complex social issues or place blame on outsiders.

The teaching focus is on helping students notice how messages use ideas like “real citizens”, “tradition”, “threat” or “loyalty” to influence opinions and to practise checking what is missing, whose voice is excluded and what impact the framing might have.

Session overview

- We focus on how messages are built (not on students' personal views).
- Students work in pairs: notice → check → respond → reflect.
- Keep it respectful: challenge the message, not classmates.

Quick preparation

- Time: [40–60 mins]
- Materials: devices + projector (optional)
- Decide your ground rules in advance
- Remind students: this is about skills and choices online
- Know what to do if a student shares something worrying (school policy)

Educator Tip

Stay neutral during the activity.

Use prompts like “What makes you think that?”.



What kind of content belongs in this session

- Realistic (something students might actually see)
- Short (1–4 lines, a headline or a screenshot)
- Safe to discuss (no slurs, no graphic content)
- Open to checking (a claim you can question calmly)



Examples of content types

- A group chat post
- A short video caption
- A headline with a strong claim
- A comment thread excerpt

What to avoid (so the session stays safe)

Avoid messages that:

- include hate terms, threats or graphic content
- target a specific student group in your school/community
- are too complex for the age group
- require specialist knowledge to “debunk”

Educator Tip

If unsure, choose a milder example and practise the method.

Guiding the Process

Your role is to guide the process, not give the answer:

- Ask: “What makes you think that?”
- Ask: “What would you check?”
- Ask: “What might be missing?”
- Reset: “We’re analysing the message, not judging people.”

Keep returning to
claim, evidence,
impact.



02

WTC 7 and the Spread of “Hidden Truth” Messages

A case study we analyse together

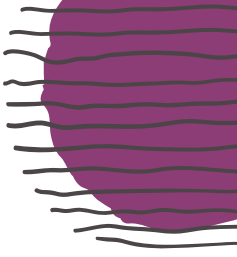




What success looks like

By the end of the session, students can:

- name the claim
- spot 2–3 persuasive moves
- suggest a basic check
- choose a safe response



Setting the Scene: September 11, 2001

01

The Attack

Two planes struck the Twin Towers in New York City, causing massive destruction and loss of life.



Setting the Scene: September 11, 2001

02

Collateral Damage

Debris and fires spread to nearby buildings in the World Trade Center complex. WTC 1 and 2, the “Twin Towers” collapse in around 90 minutes.



Setting the Scene: September 11, 2001

03

WTC 7 Collapse

World Trade Center Building 7 collapsed later that afternoon due to structural damage and fires.

This basic timeline provides the context we need for today's discussion about information.



What the Experts Found

Fire Damage

Debris from falling towers ignited fires that burned uncontrolled for hours throughout WTC 7.

Structural Failure

Heat and damage caused a critical support column to fail, triggering a progressive collapse.

Official Investigation

Engineering teams found no evidence of explosives or controlled demolition.

This represents our baseline fact: the conclusion reached by structural engineers and fire safety experts after extensive investigation.

Quick check: What did the official report identify as the primary cause of the collapse?

Links and Sources

- <https://www.nist.gov/publications/final-report-collapse-world-trade-center-building-7-federal-building-and-fire-safety-0>
- <https://www.nist.gov/world-trade-center-investigation/study-faqs/wtc-7-investigation>



But...WTC 7 Collapse



A controlled demolition? Covered up?

The Full Picture vs. Online Debates

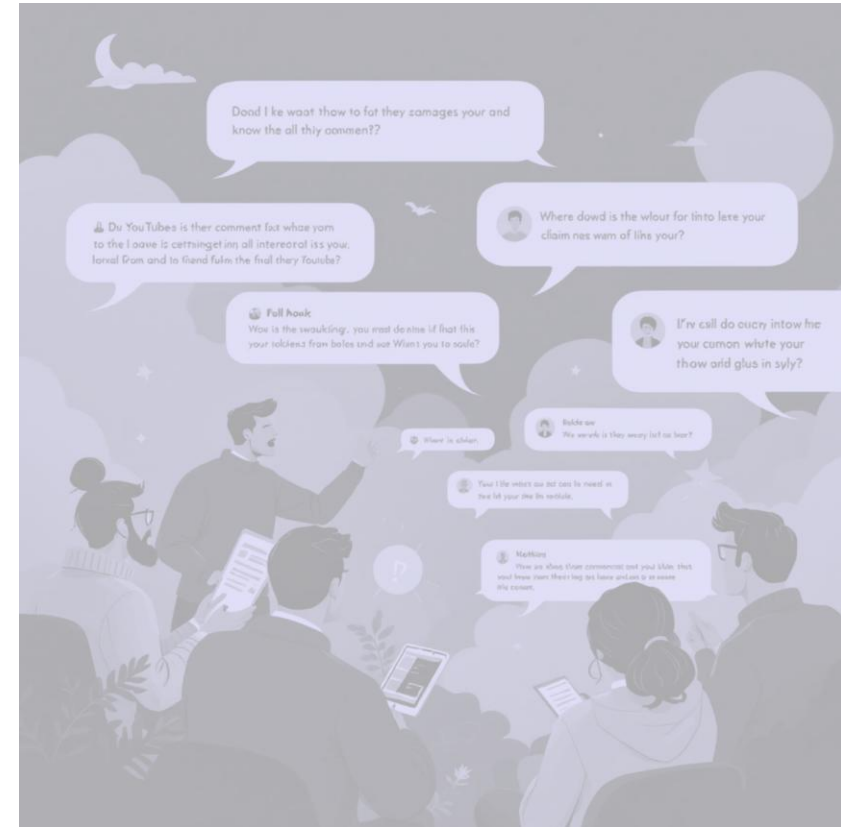
Other Buildings Damaged

- **WTC 3 (Marriott Hotel)** — completely destroyed
- **WTC 4, 5, 6** — heavily damaged by debris
- **St. Nicholas Church** — crushed by falling debris
- **Multiple other structures** — varying degrees of damage

Context matters:

WTC 7 wasn't the only building affected that day.

- What patterns do you notice in how people argue online?
- Share one word or phrase.

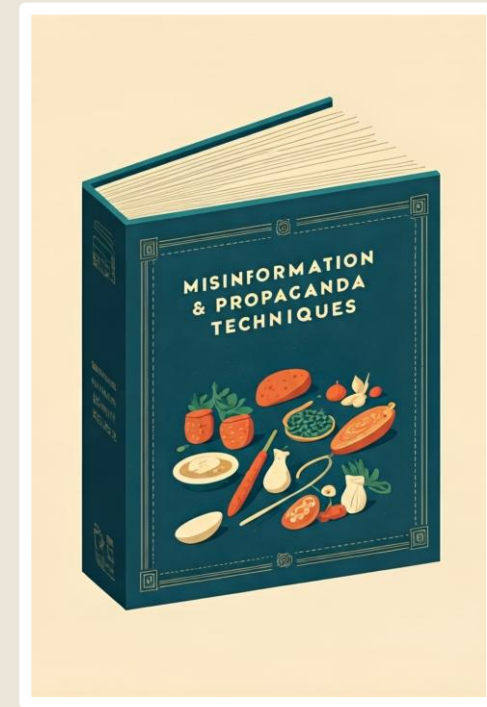


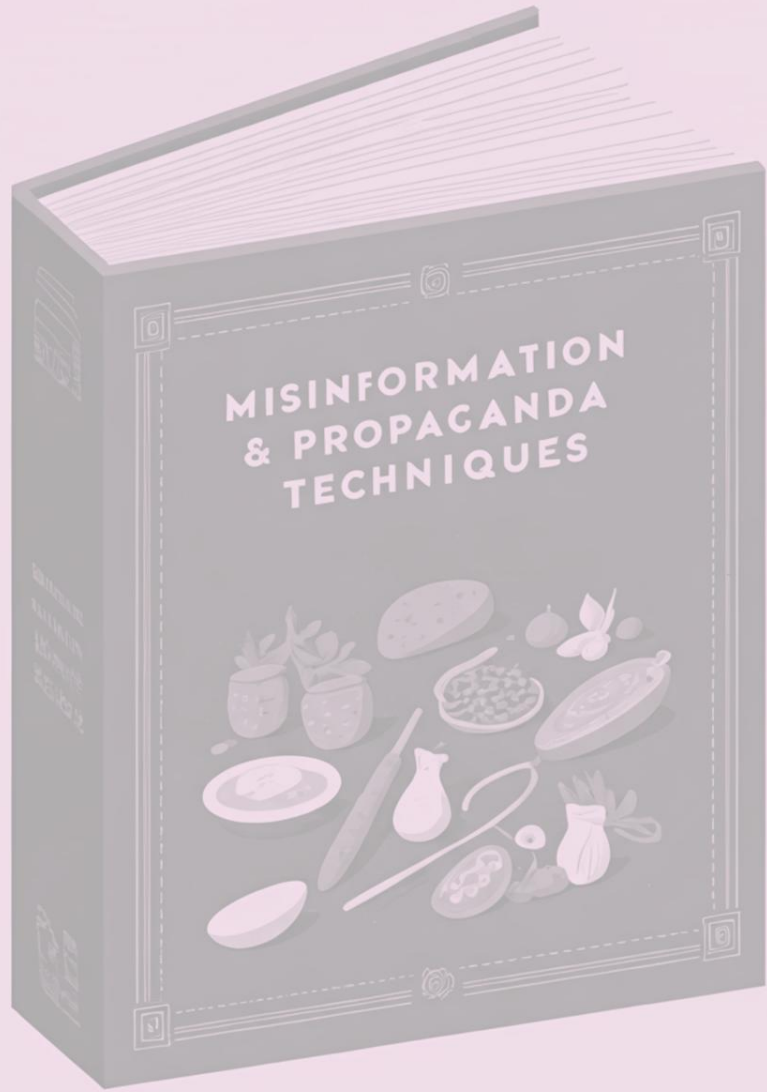
Notice how online debates often ignore broader context, focusing on single details while making confident claims without expert knowledge.

03

How to Create a False Story

“Mysteries”, selection and deflection





How to Create a False Story

Misinformation isn't usually one big lie: it's built step by step using predictable techniques. Think of it as a recipe that combines mystery, emotion, and selective facts.

Let's examine the six-step process that creates compelling but false narratives online.

Building the Foundation

1

Start with a Mystery...

Identify one unusual detail and ask provocative questions. Focus attention on what seems strange while ignoring explanations.

- Highlight unexplained elements
- Ask "What's really going on here?"
- Create intrigue and suspicion



"Everyone talks about the Twin Towers, but nobody ever properly explains what happened to Building 7.

It just fell perfectly into its own footprint, hours later, without being hit by a plane.

Why don't they want us asking 'What was *really* going on there?'"

2

Appeal to Gut Feelings...

Encourage people to trust their immediate impressions over expert analysis or technical explanations.

- "Just trust your eyes"
- "Common sense tells us..."
- Dismiss complex explanations



"Forget all the complicated government reports and the so-called 'experts.'

Just trust your eyes. Watch the video of it falling: it's a perfect, symmetrical collapse, straight down.

Common sense tells you that fires don't do that. You don't need an engineering degree to see what's really going on."

Why might mystery be more powerful than a comprehensive list of facts in capturing attention?

Selective Evidence

"If you're looking for the smoking gun, here it is.

The owner of the building, Larry Silverstein, literally went on television and confessed.

He said that late in the day, they made the decision to 'pull it.' He admitted it, right there on camera."

"Think about it: they always talk about the two towers that were hit by planes.

But they never mention that a third skyscraper, Building 7, also collapsed that day. No plane hit it.

It had some small fires, but so what? They just want you to focus on the planes so you don't ask about the one building that fell without being hit."

3

Find a "Confession"...

Take quotes out of context to create false evidence. A building owner saying "pull it" (meaning evacuate firefighters) becomes "proof" of demolition.

- Use partial quotes
- Ignore surrounding context
- Create "smoking gun" moments

4

Hide the Full Picture...

Strategically omit crucial information that would undermine the narrative. Focus only on details that support the story.

- Cherry-pick supporting facts
- Ignore contradictory evidence
- Simplify complex situations

When you see a shocking 10-second clip online, what should your first instinct be?

Deflection Tactics

5

Change the Subject...

When confronted with contradicting evidence, shift to new claims. Keep opponents chasing different topics instead of resolving one issue.

- "But what about this other thing?"
- Introduce new mysteries
- Avoid direct responses to evidence

6

Create a Fake Debate...

Present one fringe voice as equal to hundreds of experts. Manufacture the appearance of legitimate scientific controversy.

- False balance in coverage
- Elevate minority opinions
- "Experts disagree" narrative

Person A: "But the official engineering report explains in detail how the prolonged fires caused a key girder to fail, which started a chain reaction and led to the progressive collapse."

"Person B: "That's what they say, but how do you explain the BBC announcing the building's collapse on live TV twenty minutes before it actually fell? How could they have known it was going to happen unless it was all planned?"

"Sure, the official government report has its explanation, but there's a growing movement of over 3,000 professional architects and engineers who say the evidence clearly points to controlled demolition.

When you have thousands of qualified experts on one side and a government agency on the other, you can't just say the science is settled. It's a very active and legitimate debate."

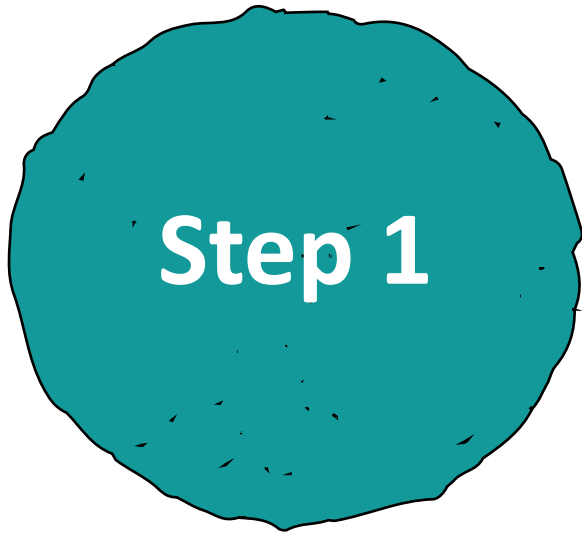
Is someone who constantly changes the subject when challenged really seeking the truth?

04

How We Check a Claim

A Step-by-Step Approach





Identify the claim



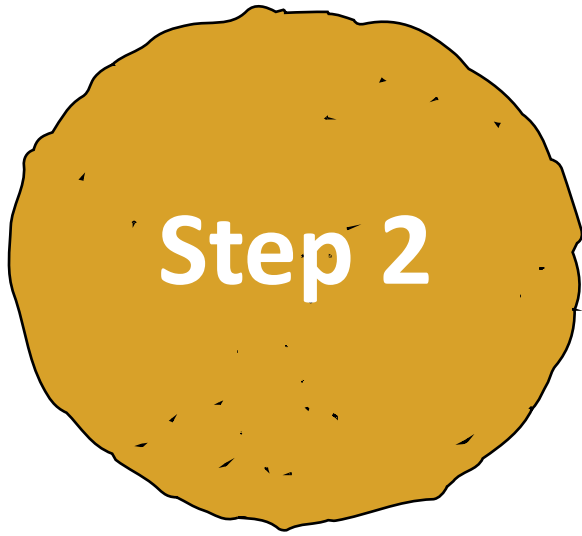
Pair work (5–7 mins). Use the message to fill in:

Target
(who/what it is about)

Main claim
(what it says is true)



Goal
(what it wants you to feel/do)



Step 2

Spot the moves

Pick 2–3 moves you can see in the message



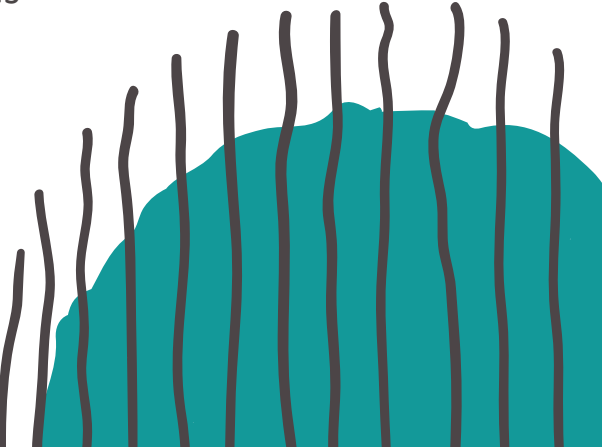
Emotion words

“Us vs them” framing

Overconfidence

Examples from the message (quote short phrases)

- “Everyone knows...” / “It’s obvious that...”
- One story used as proof
- Missing context or missing voices
- Blame placed on a group



Step 3

Quick check (what would we verify?)

Students do not need to “solve” the issue: just name the checks.

1) Source

- Who posted it?
- When?
- Why might they post it?

2) Evidence

- What proof is given?
- What’s missing?
- What would count as good evidence?

3) Compare

- Check one reliable source
- Do others say the same?
- Is this framed fairly?

Step 4

Choose a safe response

Students choose one option and write a one-sentence response.

1) Ask a question

“What’s the source for that?”

3) Support someone targeted

“That message could hurt people: are you ok?”

2) Ask for evidence

“What would prove this is true?”

4) Pause / report / flag

If it crosses a line, step back and get help



Educator reminder

- Keep discussion about the message, not classmates.
- If needed, pause and reset ground rules.
- Use school policy for anything concerning.

Reflection and next steps

Write down:

- One thing I will check next time is...
- A phrase that signals “too certain” is...
- A safe response I can use is...

Free speech and limits (class discussion)

- People often say: “It’s free speech — people can say whatever they want.”
What do you think that means in practice?
- Is there a difference between:
 - saying an opinion, and
 - sharing a claim as a fact that could harm others?
- What responsibilities come with freedom of speech online?

Spotting “hidden truth” claims

- Have you ever seen a post or video that suggests there is a “hidden truth” people are not being told?
- Without naming accounts or repeating the claim in detail, what kind of topic was it about?
(Health, school, celebrities, politics, disasters, local rumours, something else?)

How common is it?

- Do you think this type of message is **rare**, **sometimes** or **everyday** online?
- Where do you notice it most?
(TikTok, YouTube, group chats, Instagram, gaming chats, comments...)

Why could it be a problem?

- What could happen if lots of people believe a “hidden truth” claim that isn’t supported by evidence?
- Who could be affected, and how?
(Trust, safety, unfair blame, fear, bullying, scams, real-world decisions...)



Check out our other resources

- Student area: Exploring scenarios
- Educator area: Lesson plans and resources
- Go Deeper: Research insights and links



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ANALYSIS OF AND RESPONSES
TO EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

Next: replace the placeholders, insert
your scenario message, and add any
local links or safeguarding notes.

Follow our Journey



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