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## Discrimination and hate speech online

Online discrimination and hate speech is any speech that incites violence or prejudicial action against an individual or group on account of features such as race, gender, age or disability.

Online content or behaviour which shows discrimination or prejudice against others includes discriminatory materials or websites online, as well as discriminatory comments which have been made by a group or individual online.

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### WHEN A CHILD MAKES CONTACT DIRECTLY

A young person who has encountered online discrimination may feel shocked or distressed.

Commend the child for making contact and acknowledge their courage for speaking up about their concerns and feelings. Reassuring the young person that they have made the right decision and that you are there to listen and help them is vital. Equally important is making sure that you tell them that they are not to blame in any way for comments or content made by others.

Build a relationship and give the child the time and space to open up further and volunteer more information. Remember to acknowledge the emotional impact of what has happened, and take care not to make assumptions about the situation.

Be supportive. By listening to the child you will be able to better distinguish between children that have seen hate speech / discrimination and those that have had it personally directed at them, and support them accordingly.

As well as gathering information about the nature of the discrimination, try to understand how the child has been affected emotionally, so that you can support them in that and even escalate or safeguard if necessary. Questions should be clear and open-ended, for example:

- Can you tell us how long this has been going on for?
- Has anyone threatened to hurt you?
- Do you know who is posting the content?

Discuss how this kind of behaviour represents the negative views of others, and that prejudice of any kind is often based on ignorance and fear of things that are different. Emphasise to the child that it is not their fault and they are not the one who caused the problem

Discuss practical options (see below).

### WHEN A PARENT / CARER MAKES CONTACT

Commend the parent / carer for coming forward. It is likely that they will feel a range of emotions if their child has received discriminatory harassment online. They may feel angry, confused, scared and may blame themselves for what has happened.

It is important to reassure them that it is not their or their child's fault and they are not to blame for what has happened.

Encourage the parent to try to remain calm, to be non-judgmental and to avoid any panicky solutions. In particular, advise parents not to remove their child's internet access – the most likely consequence of such an action would be that the child would not discuss future problems with the parent for fear of being cut-off from their digital lives.

Offer reassurance, a listening ear and a safe space for the parent to define the issue.

Discuss practical advice (see below) with the parents and remind them that your helpline is available for their child to call for support - but do note that you won't be able to share the content of the call with the parent without the child's consent.

Discuss with the parent whether it might be appropriate to seek support from the child's school if

the online discrimination is linked to experiences there.

Encourage the parent / carer to spend time discussing with their child what they have seen, how it made them feel, and why hate speech is wrong.

Some considerations for parents include:

- **Choose the moment carefully.** Do not make your child feel like they have been put on the spot.
- **Find a quiet place.** If your child has built up the courage to disclose a concern, the last thing that they want is to be disturbed.
- **Ask questions.** Try to be non-judgemental and allow your child the opportunity to answer. Try to keep the conversation flowing.
- **Reassure your child.** Tell your child that you believe them and that you are there to help them.

It is important that you discuss the potential emotional impact of discrimination on the child – this will help the parent be alert to signs to watch out for as well as take a supportive approach to their child. Ask the parent to talk about:

- Any changes they have noticed in their child's behaviour.
- Whether they have any concerns for the child's mental health currently or historically.

Gathering this information will help inform you if any subsequent referral to the support services may be required. You should also ensure the parent is looking out for any subsequent changes in their child's behaviour, even if there have been no visible changes reported by the parent to you at this stage.

### **PRACTICAL ADVICE:**

Take some time with the child to explore practical options that might help for the specific context that is being discussed.

Discuss technical options that the child might consider using – for example, adjusting security and privacy settings to prevent further harassment if they are receiving discriminatory comments directly, or blocking the individual or individuals responsible for the harassment.

Discuss whether the child might report the content or comments. Explore options - whether through the

service provider's safety centre or to another appropriate authority, including the child's school.

Review the potential for creating a support network within their own environment – for example talking to a trusted teacher at school or a parent.

### **RED FLAGS:**

- The child is expressing suicidal thoughts, intentions to self-harm or emotional trauma.
- The child has been threatened.

In the case of red flag issues emerging during your conversation, follow your standard escalation processes for intervention by law enforcement, child protection services, and so on, as appropriate.

