

# Beyond NewsGuard

Top tips for supporting older people to stay safe online



A GUIDE FOR CARERS, SUPPORT STAFF, AND VOLUNTEERS



# What is misinformation?

Misinformation is false or inaccurate information that can be found both online and offline, and can range from news reporting to guidance and advice.

It can be shared and spread by news outlets, friends and family, and even by ourselves. Misinformation has become widespread on the internet in recent years, often due to the lack of regulation and due diligence of information outlets or platforms.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was lots of health misinformation about vaccines that circulated online, for example, myths suggesting that the vaccine caused infertility or that the vaccines contained microchips spread widely across the internet in 2020.

There has been an increase in misinformation on major global issues, from the war in Ukraine to climate change, to name a few examples, due to the 24/7 news cycle and the rise in use of social media to access news content.

This resource will focus on how carers, volunteers and support staff can help support older people to stay safe online and avoid misinformation.







## Why is it important to be aware of misinformation online?

When we don't know what information we can trust online, this can create confusion and fear.

Misinformation can hamper our ability to understand current affairs and important news. It can also impact serious decisions we make in our lives, such as who to vote for or what health advice to take.

Sharing misinformation with family and friends can put them at risk too, like false health advice or becoming more susceptible to an online scam.

Misinformation can be quickly and widely shared online, so whenever it is shared, it can quickly reach more people and ultimately cause more harm.

# How can I help an older person to avoid misinformation online?

**Be aware of common misinformation sources.**

Some places where misinformation is common include:

- WhatsApp and messaging groups
- Internet forums e.g. Reddit
- Social media e.g. Facebook
- YouTube and other video hosting sites

**Encourage the older person you are supporting to think critically about the sources of information they read.**

Encourage them to ask themselves questions like: do these headlines sound realistic? Are they written in a way designed to sound controversial or to cause fear?

Asking these questions helps older people recognise when something's not quite right.

They should consider things like whether the source of information, for example a news website, makes a distinction between news and opinion, or whether headlines are written in a misleading way.

**Help older people to build good habits such as “lateral reading.”**

“Lateral reading” involves researching the publication or the author at the same time a reader is consuming information from it, such as with a NewsGuard Nutrition Label, which includes all the necessary information about the credibility and transparency of the news website in question.



## **Encourage older people to pause before sharing information.**

Before sharing a link or information with friends, family members, or on social media platforms, older people should be confident that the information they are sharing is from a credible source. Remember: a credible source avoids deceptive headlines and gathers and presents information responsibly.

Keeping this in mind before they share a link helps keep the spread of misinformation to a minimum.

## **Encourage older people to trust their instincts.**

When they come across a new website, encourage them to ask themselves: does this website look similar, design-wise, to other websites they know to be credible? Does it present them with a balanced view of both sides, or does it seem to be pushing one agenda?

If something doesn't feel quite right, it's always a good idea to search for the same topic on a different website that they know to be credible, to see if the content is comparable. Credible news sites will avoid deceptive headlines and distinguish between news and opinion, which can be key things to look out for when they are trying to work out whether to trust a source or not.

## **Reassure older people that they can always ask for help.**

Telling them to ask a trusted friend, family member or community member about something they have read online can help reassure them, or give them a different perspective.