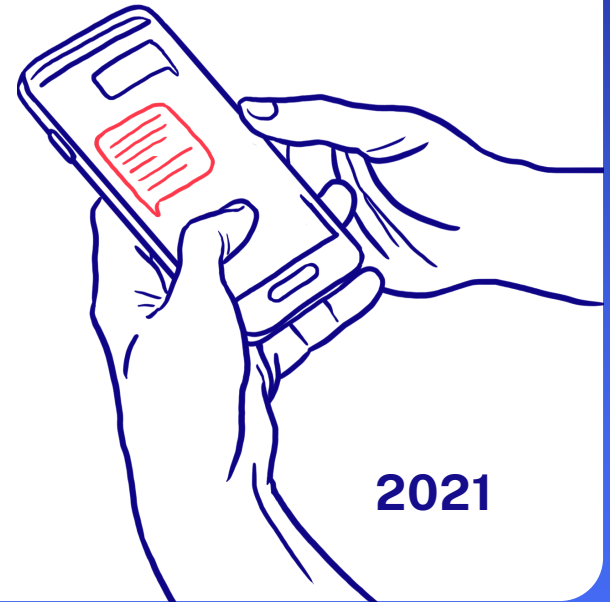


A Community Toolkit for Addressing Health Misinformation



**Office of the
U.S. Surgeon General**

2021

First, we'll **learn** about...

1. What Is Health Misinformation?

2. Why Is It So Tempting to Share Health Misinformation?

What's in This Toolkit?

... then we'll **apply** what we've learned.

1. What Would You Do? A Comic Strip
2. How to Talk About Health Misinformation with Your Family, Friends and Community
3. Common Disinformation Tactics
4. If You're Not Sure, Don't Share!

What Is Health Misinformation?

1. What is Health Misinformation?

Misinformation

Information that is **false, inaccurate, or misleading** according to the best available evidence at the time



1. What is Health Misinformation?

Health misinformation is often posted on the internet or shared via text messages or emails



1. What is Health Misinformation?

Health misinformation can also come in

- Speeches
- Pamphlets or posters
- News outlets
- Advertisements



1. What is Health Misinformation?

Mostly shared by people

- who do not know the claims are false or misleading
- because they want to help others



1. What is Health Misinformation?

Many people who share misinformation may be

- Raising a concern
- Making sense of conflicting information
- Seeking answers to honest questions



1. What is Health Misinformation?

All of us are vulnerable,
and all of us can help.



1. What is Health Misinformation?

Notes from the Surgeon General

"**Misinformation** can sometimes be spread intentionally to serve a malicious purpose, such as to trick people into believing something for financial gain or political advantage. This is usually called "**disinformation.**" But many people who share misinformation aren't trying to misinform. Instead, they may be raising a concern, making sense of conflicting information, or seeking answers to honest questions."

Can you tell the difference between **misinformation** and **disinformation**?



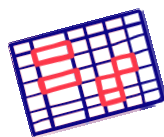


5-min Activity

Find These 7 Common Types of Health Misinformation.



**What types of health misinformation exist?
Go online and see if you can find any of these
common types of health misinformation.**



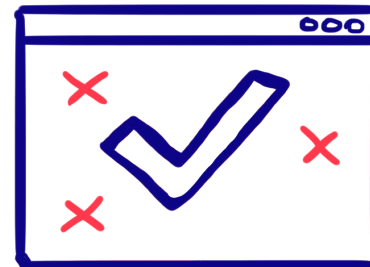
Find These 7 Common Types of Health Misinformation.

Memes (fun, colorful images or graphics) that were created as a joke, but people started re-sharing thinking it was true.



Find These 7 Common Types of Health Misinformation.

Websites that look professional (often designed to look like news sites) but the stories are all false or misleading. They have sensational headlines designed to make us click on them.



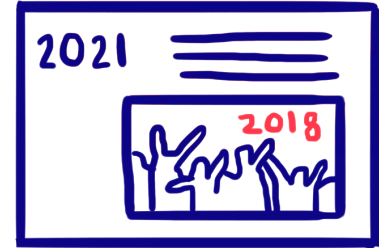
Find These 7 Common Types of Health Misinformation.

Quotations where the beginning or end have been deleted to change the meaning. The person did say that, but without the full context it's not a fair representation of what they said.



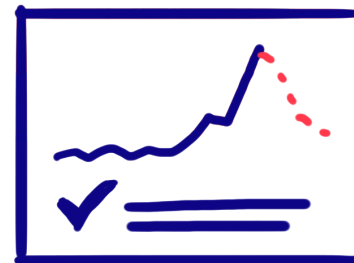
Find These 7 Common Types of Health Misinformation.

Old images that recirculate as if they are actually very recent.



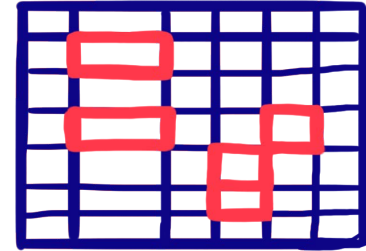
Find These 7 Common Types of Health Misinformation.

Misleading graphs or diagrams
that look official but don't tell the
whole story.



Find These 7 Common Types of Health Misinformation.

Cherry-picked statistics. Too often we see people choosing the number that supports what they want to argue, but without all the data, they haven't provided all the context.



Find These 7 Common Types of Health Misinformation.

Videos that have been edited to change the meaning.



As you can see, a lot of misinformation isn't completely false or 'fake', it's actually information or imagery that lacks context. **Something that has a 'kernel of truth' to it is much more believable.**



Reflect & Discuss

Can you think of an example of health misinformation you've seen recently? Where did you see or hear it? Who shared it with you? Did it fit into any of the 7 categories we've described?

Why Is It So Tempting to Share Health Misinformation?

2. Why Is It So Tempting to Share Health Misinformation?

1. We like to feel that we have new information that others don't know.

The doctors are hiding important information about the virus! Listen to what this one nurse has to say about it...



2. Why Is It So Tempting to Share Health Misinformation?

2. We want to protect the people we care about.

Often when people are asked about their online sharing habits they will say things like:

I admit it. Sometimes I share things I see without checking first, but honestly, I feel that it's better to be safe than sorry.



2. Why Is It So Tempting to Share Health Misinformation?

3. We may be seeking explanations or wanting to share information that helps us make sense of events.



2. Why Is It So Tempting to Share Health Misinformation?

4. We want to feel connected to others.

Hey there Parker, Claire, Hanna, Kyla, Jacob, Ann! How's everyone?



Reflect & Discuss

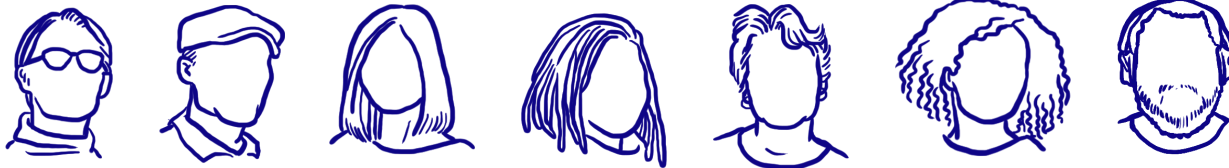
Can you think of another example of harmful misinformation you've seen? If you can't think of anything, maybe scroll through your social media feeds and see what is being shared with you today. Is there anything you're not sure about?



5-min Activity

Understand Why People Create or Share Harmful Information.

Understand Why People Create or Share Harmful Information. Which of these examples have you seen in your community?



Understand Why People Create or Share Harmful Information.

Note from the Surgeon General

Sometimes, we may not be able to fully understand why someone shares or creates harmful information. Their intentions can be mixed, unclear, and even change over time — they might not fit nicely into these categories. Because of this, **rather than quickly jumping to conclusions or calling them out, try to listen first and engage in an open conversation.**



Understand Why People Create or Share Harmful Information.

“Disinformer”



I deliberately create harmful disinformation.

“Mischief-Maker”



I create false or misleading information to see if I can fool people for the fun of it.

“Hoaxster”



I create hoaxes to fool people, sometimes to make money.

Creators



Sharers

Understand Why People Create or Share Harmful Information.

“Enthusiast”



I post misinformation frequently in support of a person or cause.

“Believer”



I am deeply connected to an online community that is pushing false, misleading claims. I believe the information being shared by the community is true and I want to share with others.

Creators

Sharers

Understand Why People Create or Share Harmful Information.

“Oversharer”



When I see something online that seems helpful or worrying I like to share without checking because I'd rather people have as much information as possible.

“Casual Sharer”



I tend to spend a lot of time online, and can sometimes share carelessly while waiting in line, or scrolling late night in bed.

Creators

Sharers

Which of these examples have you seen
in your community?





Apply – Practice 1

What Would You Do?

Your family member is diagnosed with a serious illness. Find out how your loved ones can be misinformed and how you can help.



Practice 1

What Would You Do?

1

I'm really sorry to let you know that your result came back positive. We'll closely monitor your condition.

But...



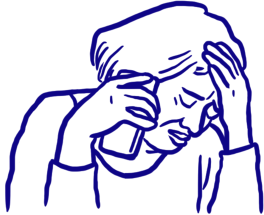


Practice 1

What Would You Do?

2

I'm so scared.
What should I do?



Hmm, I think my neighbor
got better after taking
Supplement XYZ. Maybe
try looking that up?



The nephew
who knows a lot
about health



Practice 1

What Would You Do?

2

Pause and Ask:
Who do you go to for health information and why?

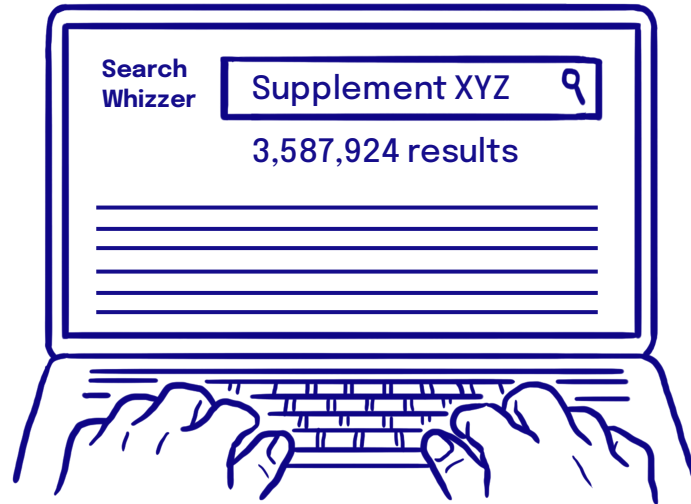




Practice 1

What Would You Do?

3





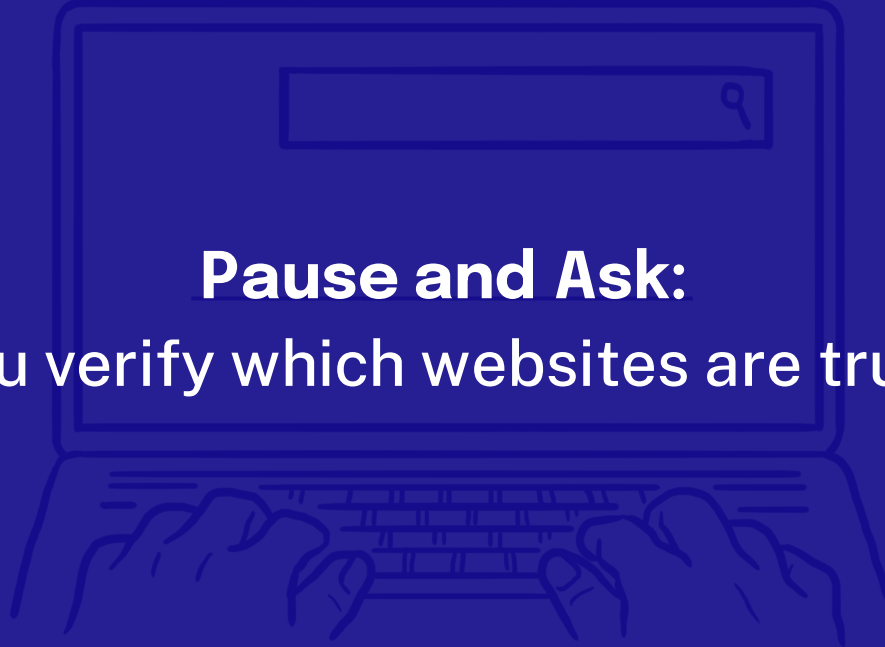
Practice 1

What Would You Do?

3

Pause and Ask:

How do you verify which websites are trustworthy?





Practice 1

What Would You Do?

4

I don't even know where to start!



My neighbor mentioned "Dr. Conway." I'm not sure but maybe it's something?

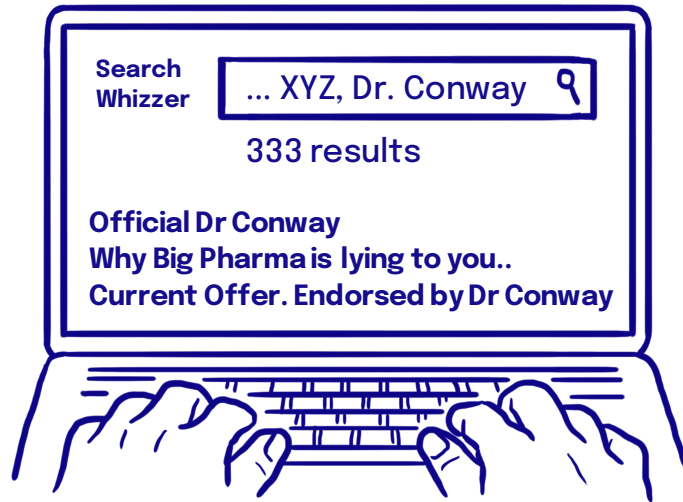




Practice 1

What Would You Do?

5





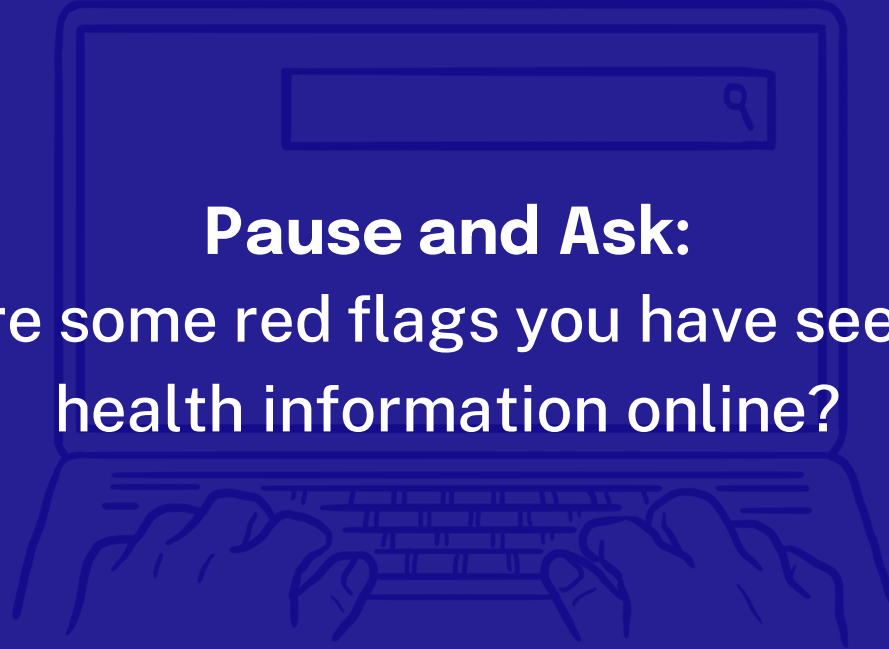
Practice 1

What Would You Do?

5

Pause and Ask:

What are some red flags you have seen about health information online?



Practice 1

What Would You Do?

6

I know we're all scared, but I'm already starting to find some useful information online. I think there might be some hope. Look at this video of Dr. Conway. He seems to know what he's talking about.





Practice 1

What Would You Do?

7



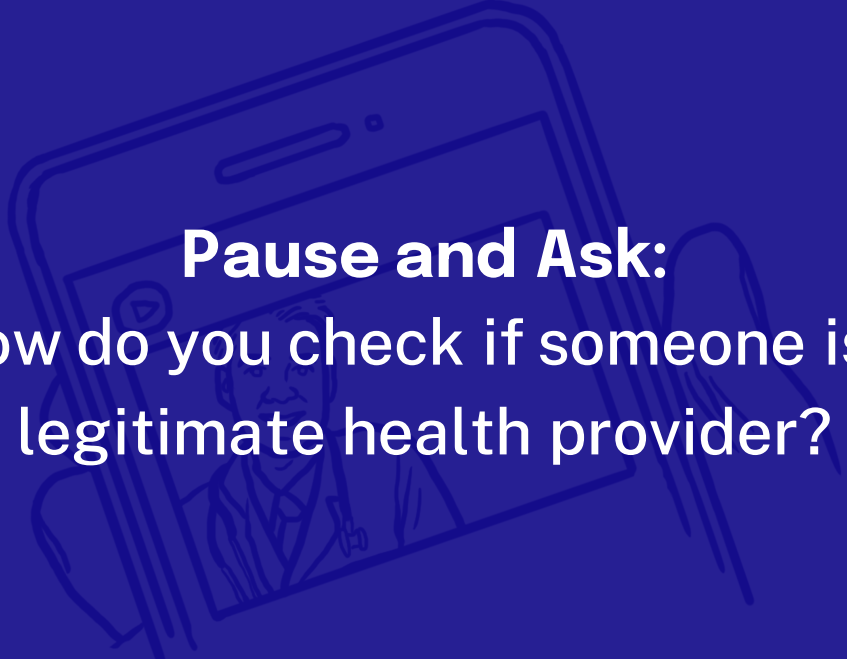


Practice 1

What Would You Do?

7

Pause and Ask:
How do you check if someone is a
legitimate health provider?

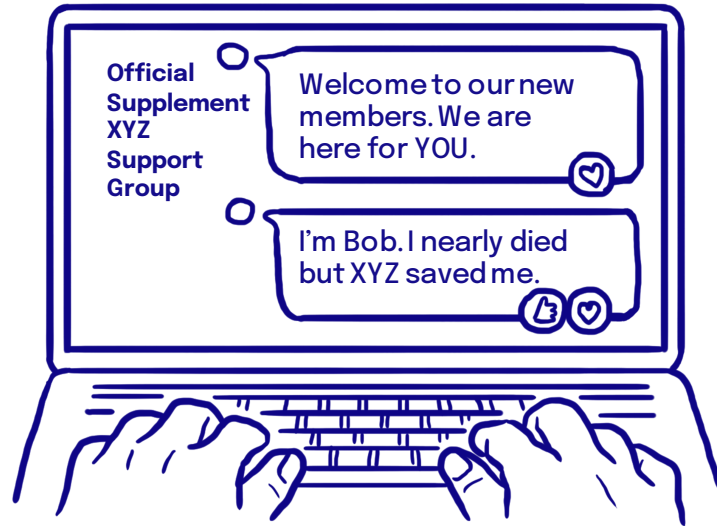




Practice 1

What Would You Do?

8





Practice 1

What Would You Do?

9

I've found a site that ships Supplement XYZ overnight. I'm going to buy it.

Mom, I read some things online that say Supplement XYZ can be really dangerous. It hasn't been tested for people with your condition.



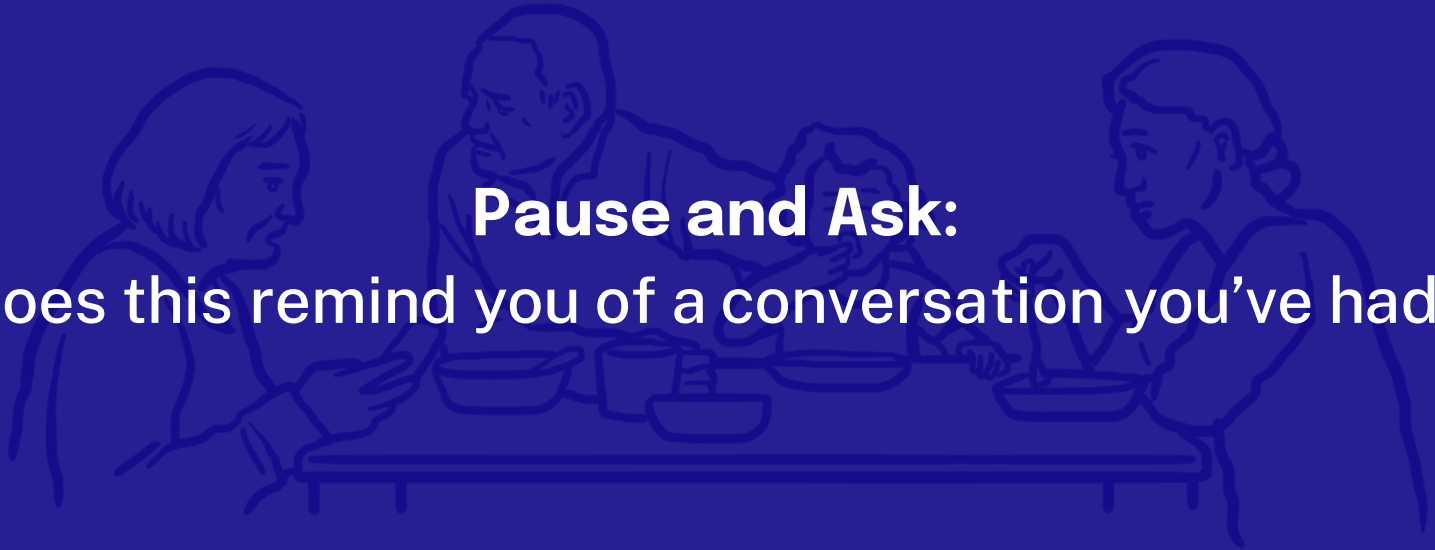


Practice 1

What Would You Do?

9

Pause and Ask:
Does this remind you of a conversation you've had?

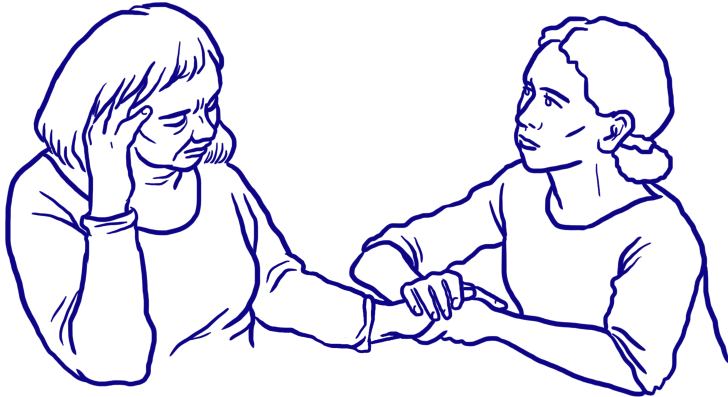




Practice 1

What Would You Do?

10



Pause and Ask:
How would you talk to your loved one about their concerns? How might you encourage them to seek professional advice before seeking treatment?



Reflect & Discuss

1. What is the motivation for Dr. Conway?
2. Who is he targeting?
3. Why are people susceptible?
4. What are some of the tactics used by Dr. Conway?
5. Why do people start believing it?



Apply – Practice 2

How to Talk About Health Misinformation With Your Family, Friends and Community



Practice 2

How to Talk About Health Misinformation With Your Family, Friends and Community

1. Listen

Listen to their fears and beliefs

Focus on the wider issue and how they feel

Remember that 'fact-check' can often shut down a conversation

TRY THIS:

Imagine your friend is worried about potential side effects from a flu shot. How might you talk to her about her fears?





Practice 2

How to Talk About Health Misinformation With Your Family, Friends and Community

2. Empathize

Emphasize the fact that you understand why people find it difficult to trust

Ask questions to understand

Admit that you have struggled

Talk about times where you have fallen for misinformation

TRY THIS:

Imagine your uncle has just been diagnosed with a serious illness and is convinced that an obscure cure being sold online will help him. How could you talk to him about the potential harm that he could be causing?





Practice 2

How to Talk About Health Misinformation With Your Family, Friends and Community

3. Point to Credible Sources

Underscore that finding accurate information can be hard

Emphasize the need to find credible sources

Remind them that an expert on one topic might not be the best in another topic

TRY THIS:

Imagine your neighbor seems to have started following conspiracy communities online and is beginning to believe increasingly outlandish claims. How might you talk to them about this?





Practice 2

How to Talk About Health Misinformation With Your Family, Friends and Community

4. Don't Publicly Shame

Try to have conversations one on one

Having conversations in the comments under a post has the potential to backfire

Be gentle in your replies; be empathetic

TRY THIS:

Imagine an old friend from your friend group from high school is sharing misinformation about a new diet. What might you do?





Practice 2

How to Talk About Health Misinformation With Your Family, Friends and Community

5. Use Inclusive Language

Use language that makes it clear that you see yourself being impacted

Show how you sometimes struggle

TRY THIS:

Imagine you're talking to someone you often see at your local community center. They are worried about getting their new baby vaccinated. How would you talk to them about their fears?



Reflect & Discuss

Have you tried to talk about health misinformation with someone you know? How did it go? What could you have done differently? Think about ways you might approach a conversation based on these techniques. How do you think it might go, remembering you can rarely change people's minds quickly?

Learn These Common Disinformation Tactics.

Go online and see if you can find any of these common disinformation tactics. Discuss why they are effective.



Practice 3

Learn These Common Disinformation Tactics.

Note from the Surgeon General

We normally rely on these kinds of mental cues to quickly make sense of the world. **But those who are trying to mislead us use these same cues to fool us.** It's a really good idea to learn these tactics, so you can spot them and protect yourself and those you care about.





Practice 3

Learn These Common Disinformation Tactics.

Including the logo of an established organization





Practice 3

Learn These Common Disinformation Tactics.

Using visual cues like someone wearing a white coat or holding a stethoscope

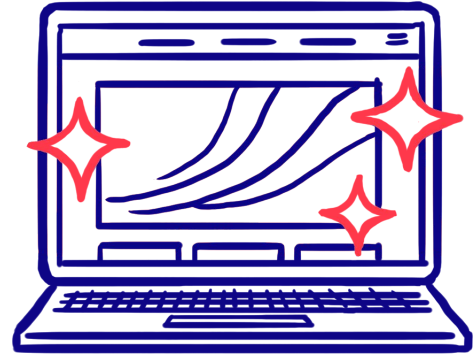




Practice 3

Learn These Common Disinformation Tactics.

Creating a professional,
slick looking website





Practice 3

Learn These Common Disinformation Tactics.

Including in a post: “My brother works for the government and has inside knowledge. He just told me that...”





Practice 3

Learn These Common Disinformation Tactics.

Using unique or rare terms

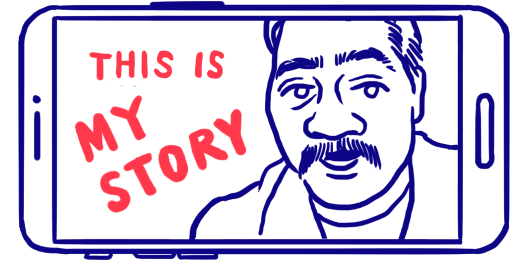




Practice 3

Learn These Common Disinformation Tactics.

Creating content that looks like a first person experience

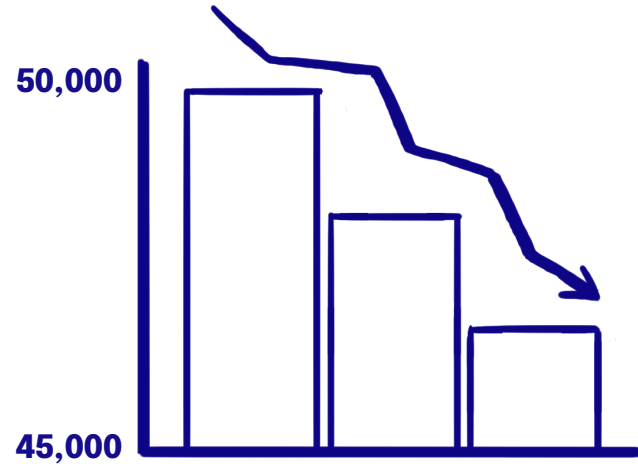


If You're Not Sure, Don't Share!

Misinformation can often be hard to detect. Try to identify the common types of misinformation below. What might you consider before sharing with others?

EXAMPLE A

A stark decline in flu vaccine uptake in University students over three months





Practice 4

If You're Not Sure, Don't Share!



This is a graph that misrepresents the data.

EXAMPLE B

**Are they crazy?
A maskless
crowd spotted at
a music festival
last weekend**





Practice 4

If You're Not Sure, Don't Share!



**This is an old image that is recirculating
as if it's current.**

EXAMPLE C

*Health News
Now: The most
cutting edge
health news in
the country*

*8 herbal recipes to
cure skin ailments*

*Boost your natural
immunity with
this easy trick*

*How to lose 30lbs
in a week*





Practice 4

If You're Not Sure, Don't Share!



**This is a website that looks professional
but the stories are all false or misleading.**

Note from the Surgeon General

Now that you've seen these common types of misinformation, would you do any of the following before sharing? What else might you do?

Remember — if you're not sure, don't share!





Health Misinformation Checklist

Did you check with the CDC or local public health department to see whether there is any information about the claim being made?



Health Misinformation Checklist

Did you ask a credible health care professional such as your doctor or nurse if they have any additional information?



Health Misinformation Checklist

Did you type the claim into a search engine to see if it has been verified by a credible source?



Health Misinformation Checklist

Did you look at the “About Us” page on the website to see if you can trust the source?

Practice 4

If You're Not Sure, Don't Share!



Health Misinformation Checklist

If you're not sure, don't share!

Thank you from The Surgeon General

We all have the power to shape our information environment, but **we must use that power together**. Only then will we be able to work toward a better information environment — one that empowers us to build a **healthier, kinder, and more connected world**.

By putting these lessons into practice, we can understand, identify, and stop misinformation!



Further Resources

Access the toolkit(pdf), infographics, and other social media graphics that you can easily share with your community at [SurgeonGeneral.gov/HealthMisinformation](https://www.SurgeonGeneral.gov/HealthMisinformation)



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