

# Breaking the Cycle: 8 Tips for Avoiding the Misinformation Trap



The impact of misinformation on society can be seen across the information environment. Misleading, false and unverified narratives related to politics, the environment, health and dozens of other issues of public concern are on the rise. As the misinformation phenomenon grows, our ability to engage in informed decision-making, build meaningful relationships, and participate in civil dialogue within our communities decreases. Identifying and thoughtfully exposing misinformation is an essential first step in reducing the negative effects on society. Here are eight tips that can help.

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## TIP 1: KNOW THE MISINFORMATION LANDSCAPE

As consumers of news and information, we need to actively stay informed about the prevalence of misinformation related to topics of interest. This includes understanding the risks associated with being receptive to misinformation and to spreading it to others.

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## TIP 2: EXERCISE SKEPTICISM AS A RULE

False information in all forms is designed to look and sound credible, sometimes even more credible than the real thing. As a result, news and information consumers have to question the legitimacy of any information that may shape or reshape attitudes, beliefs or behavior.

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## TIP 3: BE AN INFORMATION SEEKER

Information seeking starts with asking basic questions designed to validate what we read, hear, and ultimately decide to believe. This includes questions like: Is the content paid for by an organization or individual with an agenda? Is the evidence presented consistent with other evidence on the topic? Are numbers and claims presented in full context?

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## TIP 4: LEARN TO RECOGNIZE THE INDICATORS OF MISINFORMATION

Most online misinformation will have some easily recognizable indicators that the content may lack legitimacy. News consumers should look for key signs like unusual URLs and website design that appears to mimic reputable news sources. Content that appears to be largely skewed towards a particular ideology and claims without a source or verifiable evidence are also red flags. Finally, some of the most common indicators that the information is questionable include writing and journalistic errors and poorly functioning websites.

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## TIP 5: THINK BEFORE YOU SHARE

Misinformation often results from fact-based, legitimate content being shared and discussed with insufficient or manipulated context. Legitimate news articles from reputable news sources will often use provocative headlines that become the basis for misinformed online commentary. Only sharing news and information we have thoroughly read and understand and committing to provide proper context will help thwart the spread of misinformation.

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## TIP 6: ASK THE PROS

When misinformation picks up steam, it can feel like we are being inundated from every angle with questionable narratives. Often times, the information may be partially true or being shared out of context. In those cases, getting to the truth is not always easy. Turning to fact-checking organizations is often a great way to cut through the uncertainty and get to the facts.

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## TIP 7: PICK DIVERSE BUT REPUTABLE SOURCES

The growing tendency of news and information consumers to identify one or two ideologically consistent sources of information and to allow those sources to disproportionately shape their attitudes and beliefs contributes to the spread of misinformation. Avoid the pitfalls of selective exposure by identifying three to five reputable news and information sources that are committed provide multiple perspectives on issues of concern.

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## TIP 8: CORRECT MISINFORMATION WITH GRACE AND CLASS

Remember that misinformation is false information that is spread regardless of intent to mislead. Although individuals and organizations can and do knowingly spread false narratives, it is often difficult to immediately know the intent or motivation. When we become aware that someone in our circle is spreading objective falsehoods, it is important to be humble and to avoid assuming malice or stupidity. Opening a private dialogue with genuine curiosity and a willingness to listen without judgment will provide the best opportunity for receptivity to accurate information.

**For more on misinformation contact:**



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