



Identify conspiracy theories



A definition

Conspiracy theories are “the belief that certain events or situations are secretly manipulated behind the scenes by powerful forces with negative intent” (European Commission, 2023).



Why is this important?

Conspiracy theories can be dangerous because they polarise the world into white and black. They can be based on sensible concerns but are twisted with misinformation and rumours. They can create hateful ideologies and violent extremist ideas. Social media facilitate the spread of misinformation because of the social effects of sharing conspiracy theories (UNESCO, 2022).



Tips and tricks

- ➔ Being critical of social media content is very important but pay attention not to go extreme. Don't start over suspicions: Try to identify when information is overreactive.
- ➔ The spreading of conspiracy theories is based on the worst fear of people. They can seem like absurd theories, but spread very quickly and as soon as there is a tiny suspicion and question. Being the one refuting the theory can make you appear to be part of the conspiracy.
- ➔ Improve your skills to identify misinformation, fake news, disinformation and hate speech. You can pay attention to the author of a theory, who it is benefiting from, and check the source. You can also do your own research on the subject, cross sources and compare information. To improve these skills, you can see the safety resources linked to these topics.
- ➔ To avoid being part of conspiracy theories, ask yourself questions about your beliefs, your fears, values, prejudices, and stereotypes. Ask what is benefitting you or not, and if you feel like you need to blame someone to reassure you.



Useful resources and tools



A UNESCO document, “[Addressing conspiracy theories, what teachers need to know](#)”, Education 2030 (2022), provides some explanations and definitions of conspiracy theories, their consequences, how they are created and how to avoid them.



SAFETY RESOURCES



[What are and how to identify conspiracy theories article](#) by the European Commission, (2021). It talks about how conspiracy theories are flourishing and how to spot them.



Article on "[How to protect yourself from mind control techniques and cult recruitment \(it's not as far-fetched as you think\)](#)" by Murra. W. for the Thriveworks website (22 July 2022). This article is about how to spot and step back from people who try to recruit you into cults or influence you on conspiracy theories.



A UNESCO document on violent extremism on social media called "[Youth and violent extremism on social media: mapping the research](#)". Everything will not be useful but some parts can help you.



[Short guide](#) created by the Department of Educational Projects of the Anne Frank Stichting (AFS) and the School & Veiligheid Foundation (SSV) on conspiracy theories in March 2020. This document is for teachers.