

Helping Your Community Navigate Information During a Crisis

Introduction

This toolkit is designed to help you, as a community leader, guide your community through times of crisis or uncertainty. It will help you and your community members identify and stop the spread of false information and communicate effectively during difficult times.

1. Helping your community spot false information

What is false information?

False information, or "misinformation," is incorrect or misleading information which has been shared, often accidentally. It can cause – or be caused by – confusion and fear. This sometimes leads to harmful actions. It can often spread because of a combination of widespread anxiety and a lack of information (sometimes referred to as an 'information vacuum').

How to help your community build resilience to misinformation

If you are approached by a concerned community member:

a) Encourage individuals to ask themselves questions, such as:

- "Where did this information come from? Is this a credible news source?"
- "Does this sound too good (or bad) to be true?"
- What are the motives of the people who are creating or sharing this information?

b) Identify trustworthy sources:

- Make a list of reliable local and national news websites, radio stations, and TV channels
- Share official government websites and social media accounts where accurate updates are posted
- Explain why these sources are trustworthy (e.g. they have professional journalists, they correct mistakes openly, they have obligations to present balanced information to readers)

c) Recognise warning signs of false information:

- Warn about posts that use very emotional language to induce anger or fear, or eye-catching headlines that seem unbelievable or too simplistic
- Explain that messages which say: "Share this with everyone you know!" are often unreliable
- Point out that misinformation often spreads through WhatsApp or text message chains, as well as on social media.

For example, you could say: "Dear community members, in times of uncertainty, false information can spread quickly. Before sharing news, please ask yourself: Where did this information come from? Is it from a trusted source like the BBC or Welsh Government? Does it sound too alarming to be true? If you're unsure, it's best not to share. Stay informed, stay safe!"

Some useful resources which can help community members to understand how misinformation spreads:

- [Fake News - Teaching Resources - BBC Teach](#)
- [Find the fake quiz - Internet Matters](#)
- [Fake news and misinformation advice hub - Internet Matters](#)
- [Bad News – Play the fake news game!](#)

2. Stopping the Spread of False Information

a) Think before sharing:

- Encourage everyone to take a moment to pause before sharing something which looks like important news. Always read the full article before sharing something based on the headline or initial paragraph.
- Use the mantra: "When in doubt, check it out!"
- Explain that it's okay to say to other community members, "I'm not sure if this is true, so I won't pass it on"

b) Report hate and false information:

- Show step-by-step how to report false posts on social media
- Create a simple way for community members to tell you about suspicious information they've seen
- Signpost the [Hate hurts Wales](#) website for community members to report hate experienced online or in the community

c) Check the facts:

- Introduce websites like FullFact.org which often check if news stories are true
- Promote a simple fact-checking method: "If you see a story, get a second opinion. Try to find it on at least two trusted news websites before believing and sharing it"
- Encourage people to ask you or other community leaders if they're concerned about some information they have seen.

d) How to challenge effectively

- If you are talking to someone who has been misinformed, it is often not helpful to simply tell them they are wrong
- Start by focusing on listening with curiosity, asking open questions and reflecting what you have heard so they know you have understood their perspective
- If you would like to correct something, first ask them whether they would be open to contrasting information, and once you have provided it, ask them what they think about this information. (This is known as the Ask-Offer-Ask technique)

Example message: "Important reminder: Think before you share! • Take a moment to verify information • Check trusted news websites • If in doubt, check it out! Help stop the spread of false information. Together, we can keep our community well-informed."

IMPORTANT TIP: DO NOT REPLY TO FALSE INFORMATION

The content we see on our social media newsfeeds is determined by algorithms which select which posts are likely to generate the most engagement (for example, comments and shares).

This means that if we directly reply to misinformation, we are telling the algorithm to promote the misinformation into more users' newsfeeds. We also directly expose our followers or friends to false information which they would not have otherwise seen.

Instead, you can try:

- Messaging the individual privately (if safe to do so and you feel that the post has not been shared to deliberately mislead) explaining that their content is inaccurate and asking them to take it down
- If you believe they are spreading it deliberately, block and report them to the social media platform.
- If you believe the information may be hateful or harmful, you can also report this to [the Police online](#).
- Share accurate information instead, without attaching this to the original false information. Encourage others in your network to safely do the same

e) What to do if you get trolled

- Trolling is a form of online abuse, where one or multiple (often anonymous) social media users target an individual or organisation with negative and offensive messages.
- Guidance from the Center for Countering Digital Hate can help you and your community members mitigate the impacts of being trolled on social media:
 - Resist the urge to respond
 - Block trolls immediately
 - Switch off your app notifications
 - Do not post saying that you are being targeted
 - Get some space from social media and show yourself some compassion
 - If you feel like a message is potentially criminal or defamatory, screenshot it
 - Report the posts to the platform
 - Reach out to your network for support

Useful resources:

- [World Health Organisation - How to report content on social media](#)
- [Latest fact checks – Full Fact](#)
- [Ask-Offer-Ask! | Motivational Interviewing Blog](#)
- [Hate hurts Wales | GOV.WALES](#)
- [Don't 'Feed the Trolls' - CCDH](#)
- [For the Record – Factual Information on Welsh Government policies](#)

3. Communicating Clearly with Communities During Uncertainty

a) Be honest and responsive:

- Promise to share important news as soon as you can. Providing a regular, reliable flow of information is critical to building trusted relationships.
- If you don't know something, say "I don't know yet, but I'm working to find out"
- Provide clear tips about when and where updates can be found.

Example message: "Update on local situation: • There are reports of disturbances in the town centre • Police are on site and investigating • We don't have all details yet, but will update as soon as we know more • Please avoid the area but otherwise continue your normal daily routine. We're working to get accurate information. Stay tuned for updates. Contact 999 if you feel threatened and it is an emergency."

b) Use simple words:

- Avoid jargon or complicated terms - use words that everyone can understand
- Use short sentences and bullet points to make information easy to read
- If you must use jargon, explain what it means

Example message: "Important health update: • A new virus is spreading in our area • Symptoms include fever, cough, and tiredness • If you feel unwell, stay at home and call your doctor • Wear a face covering when you go out • Wash your hands often with soap and water These steps will help keep you and others safe. Questions? Ask us!"

c) Tell people exactly what to do:

- Give clear instructions like "Avoid the area" or "Wear a mask when you go out"
- Explain why these actions are important, e.g., "This will help keep you and others safe"

Example message: "Action needed: Flood warning. Heavy rain expected tonight. River levels rising quickly. If you live near the river: move valuables upstairs, prepare a bag with essentials, be ready to leave if told to do so, stay away from riverbanks and flood water. We'll keep you updated. Stay safe!"

d) Show you understand how people feel:

- Say things like "It's normal to feel scared or worried right now"
- Offer comfort: "We're all in this together, and we'll get through this"
- Share information about mental health support if available

Example message: "Dear community, we know these are scary times. It's normal to feel worried or stressed. Remember: • You're not alone • We're here to support each other • It's okay to ask for help If you need someone to talk to, call our community helpline: [number] We'll get through this together. 🤝"

e) Use many ways to share information:

- Post updates on preferred communication channels used by your community. This could be social media, WhatsApp, or by holding community meetings
- Make sure information is available in different languages if needed
- Provide information in ways that work for disabled community members (e.g., large print, audio messages)

Example message: "Stay informed! 🔔 Get crisis updates through: • This WhatsApp group • Our Facebook page: [link] • Community radio: 98.5 FM • SMS alerts: Text 'SUBSCRIBE' to 12345 • Town hall meetings: Every Monday, 7 PM Information available in [list languages]. For large print or audio, call [number]."

f) Listen to your community:

- Set up a phone number or email where people can ask questions. Make clear that this is not an emergency service and people should still call 999 if threatened.
- Hold regular Q&A sessions where you answer common worries
- Show that you're listening by addressing the concerns you hear in your messages
- Build strong relationships with organisations who can answer the concerns of community members. Work collaboratively with those organisations and hold them to account.

Example message: "Your questions matter! Join our weekly Q&A session: this week [Organisation A] will be joining us • Every Thursday at 8 PM • On Zoom: [link] • Or call: [phone number] Can't make it? Send your questions to [email/number]. We're listening and here to help!"

Good communication during a crisis is about being clear, honest, and caring. By following these guidelines, you can help your community stay informed, feel supported, and avoid the dangers of false information. If you need more help, don't hesitate to reach out to official government communication channels.