

## Growing Up Online



# Recognizing Fake News

By Carolyn Jabs

Learning to distinguish between reliable and bogus information is a crucial skill in the 21st century. For a brief time, it seemed search engines might help people to zero in on accurate, well-researched information. Instead, social media has made it easy to share “news” that has no basis in fact.

The proliferation of fake news has accelerated because of websites that exploit the pay-per-click feature of online advertising. Nothing gets more clicks than an outrageous or too-good-to-be-true headline. When people share such stories without thinking, they ricochet around cyberspace, encouraging people to mourn celebrities who aren't dead, worry about risks that aren't real and feel outrage over things that never happened. The problem has become so serious that Google is reportedly investigating ways to rank its results to factor in accuracy as well as popularity.

Now that nearly a third of Americans get their news from Facebook according to the Pew Research Center, that company is also making efforts to stem the tide of fake news. To report something problematic, users can click the downward arrow in the upper right corner of the post. Select “Report problem.” Select “I don't think this belongs on Facebook.” Choose the option that explains why the story shouldn't be shared.

Of course the success of this tactic depends upon people being able to recognize fake news when they see it. Parents can help their children become part of the solution rather than the problem by routinely talking about news and encouraging kids to ask the following questions, especially about stories that seem true because they've appeared so often in social media.

Why was the story written? Even elementary age children can think about why someone is telling them something. Are they trying to be helpful? Are they self-serving? Are they joking? Are they lying? Help children understand that, in general, journalists and scientists are trying to help people understand things better. They may get things wrong sometimes but most do objective research and

present their findings fairly.

Is it a joke? A number of websites make fun of the news in order to expose foolish policies and corrupt behavior. *The Onion*, for example, is famous for its satire but not everyone gets the joke. A website called Literallyunbelievable shares posts from gullible people who have posted an *Onion* story as though it were true. Since satire can be a difficult concept for kids, teach your child to check websites for disclaimers. Lightly Braised Turnip, for example, says simply, “The LBT retains the right to invent facts for its own financial health.” When you can't find a clear statement about what the website does, do a search that includes the name of the site and the word satire, hoax or fake.

Who wrote and published the story? Some of the most notorious fake news sites include *World News Daily Report*, *The Daily Carrant*, *National Report*, *Empire News* and *The News Examiner*. Despite their newsy names, these sites regularly fabricate stories simply because they will earn more money if they can get people to click and share. In contrast, legitimate news organizations make a distinction between news, editorial opinion and advertising. Professional journalists take pride in their work, so stories will have a byline and often it will be possible to contact the reporter. To help your child understand some of what journalists do to get to the bottom of a story, check out the informative videos at [thenewsliteracyproject.org/learn-channel](http://thenewsliteracyproject.org/learn-channel). Among other things, there's a fascinating explanation of how editors confirm the reliability of a photograph.

Has the story been confirmed by other news organizations? Stories that are true will quickly show up on websites for major news organizations. To find out whether a story has been picked up by other news outlets, check a news aggregator like Google news. ([news.google.com](http://news.google.com)). Kids can also make use of websites that specialize in uncovering hoaxes. Snopes.com debunks a wide variety of urban legends and false stories. Factcheck.org investigates

the reliability of statements by politicians. *The Washington Post* runs a weekly column about what was fake on the Internet. (Go to [Washingtonpost.com](http://Washingtonpost.com) and search for what's fake.) Hoax-Slayer.com and Thatsnonsense.com also try to keep people informed about the latest viral foolishness.

What's the source? As kids get older, they need to know how to evaluate sources so they can put their faith in people who deserve it. A media literacy program developed by professors at Stony Brook University uses the memorable acronym I'M VAIN to help students judge the reliability of news sources.

- I – Independent. A source that tries to be objective is better than a source that is trying to sell a product or an idea.
- M – Multiple. A story is more reliable when it's confirmed by multiple sources rather than a single person.
- V – Verify. Sources who can back up a story with facts are preferable to sources that simply have opinions.
- AI – Authoritative and Informed. A story is more reliable if it comes from an expert who has the respect of peers.
- N – Named. Sources that are willing to go on the record are better than anonymous sources.

Of course, adults know that information is never perfect. New facts are always coming to light, and people can have legitimate differences about how to interpret facts. Still, helping kids recognize blatantly fake news means that, at the very least, they won't be misled or embarrassed by sharing something foolish. Better yet, they will become adults who are able to form opinions and make decisions, confident that they are based on the most reliable information they can find.

*Carolyn Jabs, M.A., raised three computer-savvy kids including one with special needs. She has been writing Growing Up Online for ten years and is working on a book about constructive responses to conflict. Visit [www.growing-up-online.com](http://www.growing-up-online.com) to read other columns. @ Copyright 2015, Carolyn Jabs. All rights reserved.*



## Kids' Nutrition: Simple Changes = Big Rewards

By Merilee Kern

A wise man—or woman—once said that “it's the small things in life that matter.” This philosophy could not ring more true than when applied to the health and well-being of our nation's children. There is no one thing that, no matter how consistently done, will assure good health. Rather, it's the culmination of many single, relatively small behaviors that, all together and over time, will help children foster a healthy body.

When asked what choices ‘my’ family makes relative to nutrition and fitness that keep us all healthy and fit, a specific answer often varies, but it always conveys easy ways to make healthy options the norm in a family's daily routine rather than the exception—and without the family feeling any sense of loss or deprivation.

With this in mind, here are a few sure-fire, yet simple, success strategies to help children eat more nutritiously:

First and foremost, require that your child finish his or

her healthy meal before any “treat” type foods are made available. Simply put, the child can NOT have that even occasional cupcake if (s)he has not eaten those veggies. End of story.

We live in an age where food manufacturers are the most health-conscious in history. Take full advantage of these healthy alternatives. It's simply not an option to choose those refined sugar-loaded gummy bears when dried fruit and trail mix snacks of every sort are a mere aisle or two away.

Make fresh fruit an exciting dessert. Yes, dessert. Low-fat and low-calorie whipped cream with just a touch of colorful sprinkles atop sliced strawberries or other berries can make children squeal with delight. Rainbow Jell-O jam packed with citrus fruit is always a crowd pleaser. When it comes to nature's dessert, get creative, build the anticipation in advance, and offer it up with as much

excitement and reverence as you would a chocolate cake.

Don't expect utter perfection of yourself as you work toward your family's collective health goal. Do what you can to make healthy changes, as doing “something” is better than doing nothing. No time to make homemade oatmeal? Go for those instant bags instead. Any oatmeal is better than no oatmeal, and it's certainly better than skipping breakfast or opting for any of those sugary cereals. You can't get all the way there if you never get out of the starting gate.

Don't ask if your family wants a certain veggie or fruit with dinner. Make an executive [chef] decision and just serve it up. Knowing that such choices are not an option per se removes the possibility that your family may choose not to eat a healthy item. Praise the child who enthusiastically eats his or her healthy fare or at least

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(650) 477-2579