When Online Spaces Glorify Violence

A Guide for Parents and Caregivers

ADL®

Understanding Targeted and Mass Violence Involving Youth

What's going on? Young people's online experiences can shape what they talk about, create, and share at home, at school, and with friends. Some online spaces can normalize content that glorifies violence, hate, or cruelty. This content can surface on social media, gaming platforms, group chats, and other spaces where young people already spend time.

Exposure to harmful content does not mean a young person will cause harm. But for some young people who are already struggling, these communities can deepen isolation, distress, or an unhealthy fixation on violence. In some cases, that combination can contribute to a pathway toward targeted violence.

Parents and caregivers know their child(ren) best and are often among the first to notice changes in a young person's mood or behavior. Being present, listening, and seeking support when needed can make an impact.

Understanding the Online Landscape

True Crime Community (TCC): An online subculture where some people admire, glorify, or imitate mass killers. It differs from mainstream interest in true crime, which often focuses on victims or justice.

The Com and 764: Loosely connected online networks that target young people for exploitation, including sextortion and pressure to harm themselves and others.

Gore sites: Websites and forums that share real footage of violence and death, often alongside extremist content.

Memetic violence: ADL's term for violence carried out mainly to gain attention or status within these online communities.

Keep it in Perspective

Many young people come across disturbing content through social media, gaming platforms, group chats, or peers. Seeing or discussing violent or hateful content does not mean a young person agrees with it or poses a risk. In fact, curiosity about dark topics can be common. The broader pattern matters more: how a young person's behavior changes over time, signs of distress, and a growing preoccupation with violence.

Why Speaking up Matters

Sharing a concern early can help connect a young person with support before a situation becomes a crisis. Parents and caregivers do not need to have all the answers. Raising a concern gives trained professionals an opportunity to respond with care and support.

When to Seek Additional Support

No single interest, statement, or behavior means a young person intends to harm anyone. Look for patterns and changes over time. Consider reaching out for support when you notice:

- Direct threats, statements, or "jokes" about hurting oneself or others.
- Collecting, creating, or sharing content that celebrates mass attackers or violence.
- A strong fixation on weapons, and/or admiration for mass killers or school shooters.
- Use of hateful language or symbols, including antisemitic, racist or misogynistic content.
- Significant withdrawal from family or peers, or sudden changes in mood or behavior.

What You Can Do

Be curious and proactive. Start the conversation and ask open-ended questions about what the child sees online, who they interact with, and how that content makes them feel. Try to listen and avoid reacting with shame or judgment.

Keep the door open. Young people often stay silent out of fear or embarrassment. Let them know they can come to you and won't be in trouble for it.

Continue the conversation. As the child gets older, their relationship to online communities and spaces will change. Develop a practice of communicating about trends and questions openly.

Set clear digital expectations. Talk about privacy settings, appropriate online behavior, and what to do if someone makes them feel unsafe and how to report it to the platform they are using.

Don't carry it alone. Contact your child's school counselor or a mental health provider if you are concerned. You don't need to be certain there is a risk before asking for support.

If you're concerned

Immediate danger
Call 911

Online exploitation of a child
NCMEC CyberTipline
report.cybertip.org

Crisis, self-harm or suicide
Call or text 988

Antisemitic or hate incident
adl.org/report-incident

Anonymous tips
FBI tip form: tips.fbi.gov

Sandy Hook Promise
Say Something tipline
1-844-5-SayNow

Scan to learn more
Research, warning signs & resources

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