

# Responding to Cyberhate

*Table Talk: Family Conversations About Current Events*

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## **Note to Parents/Family Members**

*Because this topic deals with online hate—which young people may see, observe or experience—it is important that you talk with your child about safety and responsibility in their digital lives. You may want to review and consult our **Navigating a Digital World: Tips for Youth**, which includes suggestions for rule setting, limitations, privacy, respectful posting, maintaining caution with strangers, reporting inappropriate content and more.*

## **Topic Summary**

Online hate speech, or “cyberhate,” is often in the news. There have been two recent news stories which highlight two very different responses to cyberhate.

Old Navy recently posted an advertisement on Twitter that featured an interracial family. Within hours of posting the ad, there were extreme negative reactions to it, with people using hashtags such as #BoycottOldNavy and #WhiteGenocide in addition to messages such as “Stop promoting miscegenation or else I’m taking my \$\$\$ elsewhere!!!” and “I don’t shop at stores that are anti-White and promote race mixing.” However, another set of responses surfaced soon thereafter, with people expressing their rejection of the biased messages and many posting photos of their own interracial families using the hashtag #LoveWins.

During the same time period, it was announced that Malia Obama chose Harvard University as her college and decided to take a gap year (a year off in between high school and college which students take to travel or work) before attending Harvard in 2017. This news was published in print and social media, but when a story about it was posted on Fox News’ website, the comments section of the article got overrun with racist comments to the extent that Fox News felt obliged to shut the comments section down altogether.

Cyberhate is defined as:

*Any use of electronic communications technology that attacks people based on their actual or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability or disease to spread bigoted or hateful messages or information. These electronic communications technologies include the Internet (i.e., websites, social networking sites, user-generated content, dating sites, blogs, online games, instant messages and email) as well as other information technologies.*

There are a variety of ways to deal with cyberhate, including: responding directly to the person, talking with family and friends about it, reporting it, being an ally to a person being targeted, applauding positive content and speaking out about it.

The strategy of promoting positive hashtags such as #LoveWins, posting photos and other comments in response to the Old Navy ad is called counterspeech.

Counterspeech is a process of exposing hate speech for its dishonest, false and hurtful content, setting the record straight, and promoting the values of respect and diversity.

Because of the enormous volume of content online, companies rely on users to bring problems to their attention. Many Internet companies (Facebook, Twitter, Amazon, YouTube, etc.) have cyberhate policies where users can register a complaint. See the link below for ADL's Cyber-Safety Action Guide for more information.

## **Age**

12 and up

## **Questions to Start the Conversation**

- What is going on with these two news stories?
- How are the two responses to cyberhate different? In what ways are they similar?
- Do you think one response is better or more effective than the other? How so?
- Have you ever seen cyberhate and if so, was there any response to it?
- Have you ever responded to cyberhate and if so what did you do?

## **Questions to Dig Deeper**

- What do you think would happen if no one ever confronted cyberhate?
- What are your thoughts about the counterspeech that people used in response to the Old Navy ad backlash?

- What do you think is the responsibility of Internet and social media companies to do something about online hate?

(The "Related to this Resource" provides articles and information that address these questions.)

### **Ideas for Taking Action**

Ask: What can we do to help? What actions might make a difference?

- When you see hate speech online, report it so you can bring attention to the Internet companies. Use ADL's Cyber-Safety Action Guide to learn how to report.
- Learn more about different ways people have responded with counterspeech to address cyberhate and consider using it to confront hate online.
- Educate others about the topic by sharing information on social media, having individual conversations with other students or organizing an educational forum in school.