wikiHow

How to React to Upsetting Posts Online

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Both the real and digital worlds are filled with uncertainty and discord, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. You may stumble across upsetting posts online. There are plenty of ways you can respond and engage with this kind of content—however, it's most important to prioritize your mental health in any situation.

Method 1

Method 1 of 4:
Reacting to Misinformation

1 **Pause before you share or reply.** Misinformation can be really emotionally triggering, and you might see posts that make you feel mad, sad, or even scared. Plus, news and social media sites make it super easy to share posts and articles—all you have to do is click a button. Even if you have a strong reaction to something you see online, slow down and take some time to analyze the content before you share it or respond.[1]

- The UN Verified initiative urges people to "Take Care Before You Share."

- This is especially important when sharing information about the COVID-19 pandemic.

2 **Fact-check the information.** Misinformation is designed to look appealing and accurate, so it can be tempting to trust the content you see in a high-quality graphic or post. That makes it especially important to fact-check the info! Look into the source and the website, the author and their credentials, and check the publication date. Don't forget to check for bias, too.[2]

- You can also cross-reference the content on a fact-checking website, like the ones listed here: https://reporterslab.org/fact-checking/#

This post is not true. Please
check this link for proper info.
https://bit.ly/fce656

3 **Let others know if posts or articles contain misinformation.** If you see an upsetting post, then dig into the claims and find out they're not accurate, speak up![3] Comment or reply with a kind, polite message that explains what's false about the content. Add a few links to solid sources that debunk the information so others can get the facts.

- Avoid sharing any posts with misinformation. People often miss the qualifying information and take the article title, graphic, or meme as fact.

- Many social media sites also let you report posts that contain misinformation or fake news.

1 **Craft an informed reply if you think you can make a positive change.** Some posts, however upsetting, come from a point of genuine ignorance. While it's not your responsibility to educate and inform each and every person on the internet, especially the people you know personally, you can write a response that possibly clarifies and rebuts the person's negative points. Don't feel like you have to reply to an upsetting post—what matters most is your mental health, and what decision makes you feel safest and most empowered while you're online.[4]

- For instance, if someone posts that masks are useless to prevent the spread of COVID-19, you can say something like this: "Many experts state that masks can protect yourself and others from COVID-19. I understand that they're a bit inconvenient to wear, but you shouldn't be posting blatantly false information like this online."[5]

- A well-researched and well-sourced reply is a great option if you're responding to someone making unfounded claims, like supporting a conspiracy theory.[6]

- This may be a more worthwhile option if you're responding to someone you're acquainted with. However, don't waste your time on a troll who's obviously trying to get you upset.
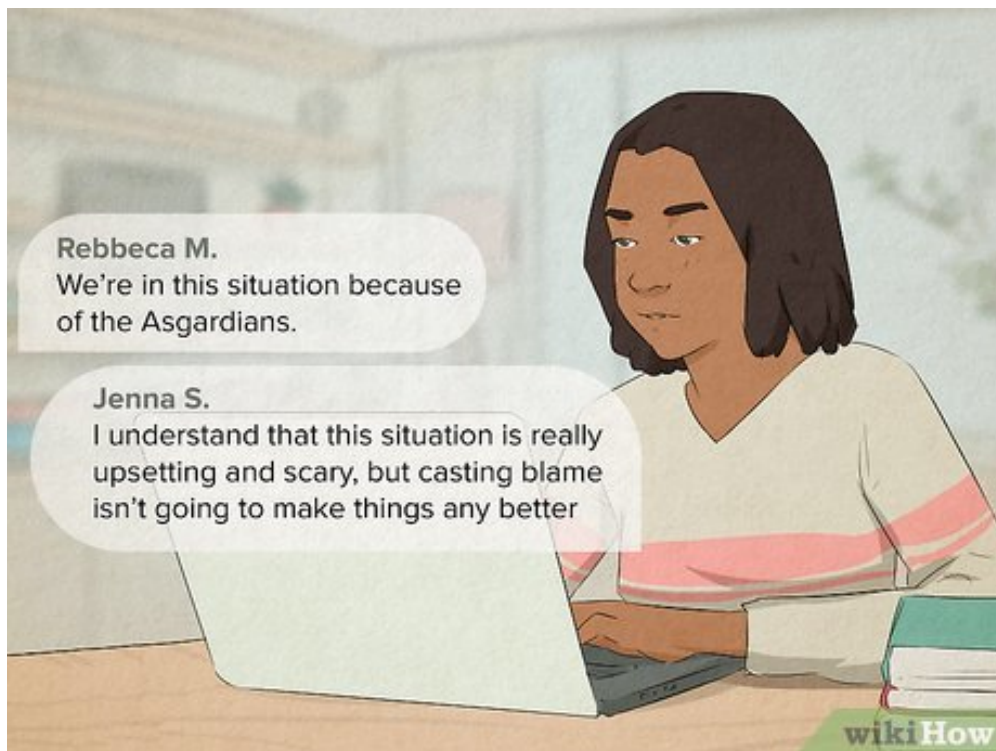
2 **Write an empathetic reply so the poster feels heard.** It can be hard to set your own biases and emotions aside when you see a really upsetting post online. If you feel up to it, try being the bigger person and really listening to what the poster has to say. Even if their content is worded in a harmful way, they may simply be feeling scared or hurt themselves, and lashing out online. Write out a response that addresses those negative feelings instead of the post itself.[7]

- For example, if a person's post is based on a stereotype, give yourself a moment to break down the emotions of the original poster. For instance, you can say something like: "I understand that this situation is really upsetting and scary, but casting blame isn't going to make things any better."

- If someone is advocating for a conspiracy theory, try framing the subject in a personal light. For instance, if someone is posting about unproven and unverifiable COVID-19 cures, you can ask them something like: "Are you confident enough in this treatment that you'd get it for yourself and your loved ones?"[8]

3 **Take the high road if you're replying as an organization.** Social media can be a tough balancing act, especially if you're representing an organization or brand. Since you're usually dealing with customers, make an effort to respond to as many comments and questions as you can, even if they're negative. If an individual is obviously belligerent and rude, don't waste too much of your time and energy.[9]

- If you choose to engage with angry customers, do your best to be mature and take the high ground.

- For instance, if a customer uses a lot of expletives in their response say something like: "We're sorry to hear that you didn't have a good experience."

1 **Pick your battles carefully.** It can be really tempting to dive into a debate, but online arguments aren't usually worth the time or stress that they cause. Instead, think about your own mental health, and whether or not your efforts will be worth it. While some online arguments may be worthwhile, many are not. Choose whichever option is best for you in the long run.[10]

- For instance, you might choose to engage if a family member shares a bogus science article on their wall.

- If a troll is obviously trying to bait you with harsh wording, it's probably best to take a step back.

2 **Skip over the post if you don't think it's worth your time.** Your time is just as important as the person who shared or wrote out the upsetting post. More often than not, interacting with inflammatory content simply isn't worth your time and energy. There's nothing wrong with taking a step back and logging off the day. Sometimes, the best way to react is by choosing not to react at all.[11]

3 **Type out an angry response without actually sending it.** It's perfectly valid and normal to be upset by the things you see online, whether you're dealing with someone you know or a perfect stranger. Write out your initial thoughts, then take a step back. Give yourself some time to cool down, then read over your message again. Check with a friend or family member to see if the message is worth sending, or if you're better off leaving the situation alone.

- You can use the acronyms SPACE and THINK as you mull over your options. SPACE stands for Stop Pause Assess Confirm and Execute, which can help you sort out your thoughts and feelings in a healthy way.

- The THINK acronym consists of a few questions that help you determine whether your reply is worth sending or not. Consider whether your response is True, Hurtful, Illegal, Necessary, or Kind. If your reply doesn't meet these criteria, it probably isn't worth sending.

1 **Unfriend or block people who are having a negative impact on your mental health.** You don't have any obligation to stay connected online with people who cause you any kind of stress and anguish. The "unfriend," "unfollow," and "block" features exist for a reason, so don't be afraid to use them![12]

- For reference, it's a good idea to unfriend and block people who intentionally post upsetting content with willful ignorance.

2 **Mute words or phrases that upset you.** Some platforms, like Twitter, give you the option to "mute," or blacklist certain phrases that come up on your feed. This process can be a bit time-consuming, as you need to input every version of the word that you're trying to block. If you feel up to the task, this may help limit the number of upsetting posts you see online, so you won't have as much upsetting content to even react to.[13]

- For instance, if you want to mute the phrase "COVID-19" on Twitter, you'll also have to mute words like "COVID," "coronavirus," and such to eliminate the topic from your feed for good.

3 **Report the post or poster if it's actively harmful.** While some online content is just annoying and ignorant, some is downright harmful and threatening. Hold people online accountable for their actions by reporting any harmful content you see online, whether it's on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.[14]

4 **Talk to a loved one about how you're feeling.** It's okay to feel really upset or angry about something you see online. Sit down with a friend or family member and let them know how the content made you feel. You'll probably feel a lot better after venting your feelings.[15]

- Chances are, your loved ones will likely share the same feelings that you have on the topic!

(?) Community Q&A

Question

What if my online friend is secretly talking bad about me behind my back? She said mean things about me on someone else's public profile.

Elanna Lindo
Community Answer

That's a sign of toxic behavior. Block and delete her on all social media, and ignore her. People who talk badly about others are insecure as well. You don't need someone like her in your life anymore. Its time to let go.

Helpful 17   Not Helpful 3

Question

What if the person I need to block is my stepsister? What happens if she notices?

Community Answer

Try having an in-person conversation with your stepsister about what she is posting and why it is upsetting. If you're unhappy with how she responds, tell her that you're going to block her because what she's posting is upsetting you.

Helpful 5   Not Helpful 1

☀ **Tips**

- If you find upsetting comments or posts on a website, blog, or forum that you manage, you can always just delete them.

- You can try coming up with a witty reply if you're dealing with a troll. Many online conflicts or posts don't need paragraphs of debate to get settled. In fact, a funny or sarcastic quip can be more than enough to shut down online trolls from sowing more discord. Think of something clever that can shut down the troll without escalating the conflict further.

- Create a moderating and reply system if you're managing a site.[16]

- You can occasionally use facts to reason with a troll, especially if they're spreading a false narrative about yourself or your organization.

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About This Article

Co-authored by:
The Verified Initiative of the United Nations
COVID-19 Information Resource

This article was co-authored by The Verified Initiative of the United Nations and by wikiHow staff writer, Janice Tieperman. Verified is an initiative of the United Nations, to provide content that cuts through the noise to deliver life-saving information, fact-based advice and stories from the best of humanity. Led by the UN Department for Global Communications, the initiative also invites the public to help counter the spread of COVID-19 misinformation by sharing UN-verified, science-based content with their communities through articles, videos, and associated media. The initiative is a collaboration with Purpose, one of the world's leading social mobilization organizations, and supported by the IKEA Foundation and Luminate. This article has been viewed 21,003 times.

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