



PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID TOOLKIT

~~HATE~~ BEYOND BORDERS TRACKERS



Agenzia Italiana
per la Gioventù



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WHAT IS IN THIS TOOLKIT?

This psychological first-aid toolkit is intended for anyone experiencing and/or exposed to online hate speech.

It provides an overview of where hate speech can be detected, its negative effects on mental health, and best practices for ensuring one's well-being. This guide sets out to simply outline practical tips and basic information for self-care.

This toolkit is to be used together with the national map of psychological services, prepared by each partner for its implementation area for users seeking psychological help at the local level.



WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF HS IN THE ONLINE CONTEXT?

01

ANONYMITY

It can embolden people to be more outrageous, disrespectful or hateful in what they say than would be the case in real life.

02

ECO-CHAMBERS

Being in an environment that only encounters information/opinions that reflect one's own can fuel online hate speech.

03

FAKE NEWS

Misinformation and disinformation contribute to the development and dissemination of online hate content.

HOW CAN HS BE SPREAD ONLINE?



HATE SITES, BLOGS AND/OR ONLINE FORUMS



EMAILS AND PERSONAL MESSAGES



ONLINE GAMING



SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES



MUSIC AND VIDEOS

WHO CAN SPREAD HATE SPEECH?

A SINGLE INDIVIDUAL

A comment by a single person.

COMPUTER PROGRAMMES

Artificial intelligence can generate Hate Speech, either as a result of a prompt or data that the programme was fed.

MOVEMENTS OR COMPANIES

When supporting a given agenda, companies or movements might make statements that are harmful.

ASTROTURFS

The practice of masking the sponsors of a message or organization (e.g., political, advertising, religious or public relations) to make it appear as though it originates from and is supported by grassroots participants.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES IN COUNTERING HS?

Visual and multimedia forms can have a greater impact at conscious and subconscious levels and the longer hate speech online is underestimated, the wider it can be propagated and amplified.

Specific challenges of countering online hate speech include:

PERMANENCE

Expressions stay online and are visible much longer.

ITINERANCY

Content is spread more widely and even when removed, it can find expressions elsewhere under different names or different platforms.

ANONIMITY

The possibility of being anonymous can accelerate destructive behaviours and perceptions by users of not having to deal with consequences.

TRANSNATIONALITY AND CROSS- JURISDICTIONALITY

Both resulting in greater challenges identifying the perpetrators and possible interventions.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND IDENTIFY ONLINE HS?

Expressions which are merely offensive cannot automatically be categorized as hate speech.

It is important to have in mind the following principles:

- **Identify the hate component** of the content;
- **Observe the context** in which HS has been used;
- **Understand the aim** of hate expressions;
- **Note how the audience perceived and reacted** to the hate content.



WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN ENCOUNTERING ONLINE HS?



PAUSE.

Refrain from making any hateful comments yourself and/or sharing such content. It is important to pause before sharing content online – whether you are forwarding a message, retweeting a story or watching a video in your feed.



FACT-CHECK.

Detect false and biased information – be sure to check the content's origin with the help of search engines, fact-checking tools and other reliable sources.



REACT.

When possible, do not remain silent, even when it is others who are targeted. Make clear that you do not agree with the content of the statement.

WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN ENCOUNTERING ONLINE HS?



CHALLENGE.

Spread your own counter-speech to make sure hate is not the dominant narrative. Undermine hateful content with positive messages of tolerance. Part of modelling what we don't want to see is modelling what we do want to see.



SUPPORT.

Taking a public stand for people who are the targets of hate speech demonstrates that rejecting hate is the responsibility of everyone.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF HS?

- People exposed to hate speech in their environment can become prone to use derogatory language and engage in other forms of intergroup discrimination due to normative, emotional, and behavioural transitions caused by frequent exposure to such language;
- Exposure to hate speech can lead to prejudice, dehumanization, and lack of empathy towards members of outgroups;
- Hateful speech exposure can have negative effects on students' academic lives and performance leading to poorer task quality and goal clarity;
- Exposure to online hate among young social media users is associated to heightened distancing from family members;
- Possible adoption of an "us vs. them" mindset in relation to those in other groups.

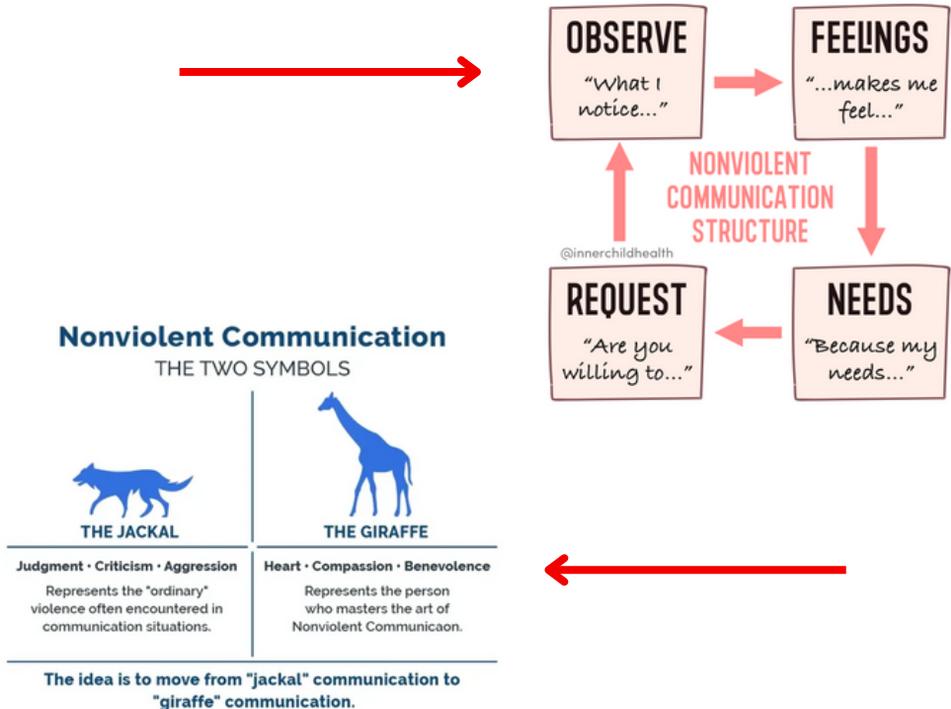
AND, SPECIFICALLY ON MENTAL HEALTH?

- Victims of hateful speech can experience psychological symptoms, like post-traumatic stress disorder, such as pain, fear, anxiety, nightmares, and intrusive thoughts of intimidation and denigration;
- Lack of self-confidence, lower self-esteem, disturbed self-image, depression, suicidal thoughts and/or suicide;
- Emotional changes and outbursts of anger, shame, disgust and/or suppression of emotions;
- Deep sense of powerlessness, hopelessness and helplessness;
- Emotional outbursts because of low psychological endurance.

It is important to keep in mind that these effects may be visible even in cases where the person was not directly affected by the hate speech, but is a member of the targeted group or was present when a person was targeted.

HOW TO REACT TO HS?

SPEAK UP: If you choose to react and challenge hate speech, remember to always adopt a **non-violent communication approach**.



HOW TO REACT TO HS?

- **TAKE ACTION/REPORT:** If HS continues, take a screenshot of the content, report/block the person and/or report their posts/content. In case the content is not removed and/or the social media does nothing about it, you can search support services for victims in your country. With all the information gathered, you can initiate criminal prosecution.
- **SEEK SUPPORT:** Share your experience with friends, family, or a support network. Sometimes, talking about it can help you cope with the emotional impact of HS. In the framework of HTBB, each partner organization mapped local organizations where you can seek help, and that can support you in filing a complaint. Check the relevant section of the App to access these resources.
- **CREATE AN ONLINE SAFE SPACE:** Promote environments where hate speech is not tolerated and encourage non-violent and open communication where diversity is accepted.

HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF IF EXPOSED TO HS?

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

- Remember to **meet your basic needs** like eating, drinking, and sleeping;
- Make time for yourself and **practice something that you enjoy**. For example, you can read your favourite book, write, listen to a podcast or music, meditate, call a friend, or just chill where you feel safe and protected.
- **Allow yourself to feel whatever you are feeling**. It's fine to experience negative emotions and feelings.

GROUND YOURSELF

- **Focus on the present moment**.
- Pay attention to your senses to ground yourself: What do you see, hear, smell, and feel in this moment?

COUNTER NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

- Remind yourself of who you are, your **values, strengths, and achievements**.
- Remember who and where your **safe space** is.

HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF IF EXPOSED TO HS?

CHALLENGE IRRATIONAL THOUGHTS

Put your thoughts on trial following these three easy steps:

- **Choose a thought that contributes to your anxiety** (e.g. one related to the Hate Speech you have received);
- **Gather evidence in support of this thought, and evidence against it;**
- **Compare the evidence** and determine whether your thought is accurate or not.

You can use the following table to help you challenge these irrational thoughts:

Irrational thought/ interpretation of an event:	
Evidence in support of the thought/interpretation:	Evidence against the thought/interpretation:
New, balanced thought/interpretation of the event:	

USE SOCRATIC REASONING ASKING YOURSELF THE QUESTIONS

- Are my thoughts based on facts or feelings?
- How would a close friend see this situation?.
- How likely is it that my fear will come true?
- What is most likely to happen?
- If my fear comes true, will it still matter in a week? A month?
A year?

IMAGERY TECHNIQUE

Your thoughts have the power to influence your feelings. Just as a negative thought can make you feel sad, a positive/calm thought can make you feel relaxed.

Sit or lie quietly and think of a place that you find calming and safe. It could be your bedroom, a quiet beach, the peak of a beautiful mountain, or even a loud concert. **For 5-10 minutes, use all your senses to imagine this environment in detail.**

What do you see around you? What do you notice in the distance? Look around to capture everything around you. Look for the small details that you usually miss out on.

What sounds can you hear? Are they soft or loud? Listen carefully to everything around you. Keep listening to see if you notice any sound far away.

Are you eating or drinking something that you like? What does it taste like? Taste all the flavours of the food or drink.

What fragrances are present? Are they strong or weak? What does the air smell like? Take some time to appreciate the scents.

What is the weather like? Think about how the air feels on your skin and how the clothes feel on your body. **Enjoy all these sensations.**

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

By tensing and relaxing the muscles throughout your body, you can achieve a powerful feeling of relaxation.

This will also help you **identify where anxiety is in your body**, teaching you to recognize the sensations of muscle tension.

FOLLOW THESE SIMPLE STEPS:

- **Sit/lay down in a quiet space** and in a comfortable position.
- For each area of the body listed below (see next page), **tense the muscles strongly**, but not to the point of straining them.
- **Hold the tension for 10 seconds** and pay close attention to the sensations you feel.
- Then **release the tension** and notice how the sensation of relaxation differs from that of tension.

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

- **FEET:** Curl your toes tightly into your feet, then release them.
- **CALVES:** Point or flex your feet, then let them relax.
- **THIGHS:** Squeeze your thighs together tightly, then let them relax.
- **TORSO:** Suck in your abdomen, then release the tension and let it fall.
- **BACK:** Squeeze your shoulder blades together, then release them.
- **SHOULDERS:** Lift and squeeze your shoulders toward your ears, then let them drop.
- **ARMS:** Make fists and squeeze them toward your shoulders, then let them drop.
- **HANDS:** Make a fist by curling your fingers into your palm, then relax your fingers.
- **FACE:** Scrunch your facial features to the centre of your face, then relax.
- **FULL BODY:** Squeeze all muscles together, then release all tension.

*Should you need further guidance, please refer to this [Video](#)

ENHANCE YOUR SELF-ESTEEM

Experiencing HS has been shown to affect the receiver's self-esteem. Consequently, engaging in activities to boost self-esteem is crucial for maintaining a healthy mind and life.

Positive journaling has been proven to enhance self-esteem and well-being.

STEPS: Record three daily statements about your achievements, positive qualities/strengths, and positive experiences (check the table in the next page).



ENHANCE YOUR SELF-ESTEEM

POSITIVE JOURNALING

MONDAY	SOMETHING I DID WELL TODAY... TODAY I HAD FUN WHEN... I FELT PROUD WHEN...	
TUESDAY	SOMETHING I DID WELL TODAY... TODAY I HAD FUN WHEN... I FELT PROUD WHEN...	
WEDNESDAY	SOMETHING I DID WELL TODAY... TODAY I HAD FUN WHEN... I FELT PROUD WHEN...	
THURSDAY	SOMETHING I DID WELL TODAY... TODAY I HAD FUN WHEN... I FELT PROUD WHEN...	
FRIDAY	SOMETHING I DID WELL TODAY... TODAY I HAD FUN WHEN... I FELT PROUD WHEN...	
SATURDAY	SOMETHING I DID WELL TODAY... TODAY I HAD FUN WHEN... I FELT PROUD WHEN...	
SUNDAY	SOMETHING I DID WELL TODAY... TODAY I HAD FUN WHEN... I FELT PROUD WHEN...	

DRAW BOUNDARIES

- Carefully **choose the channels/accounts/people you follow.**
- **Double check privacy settings** on social media, such as: who can see your posts/comments, who can share them, and who are your friends/followers.
- **Limit the time you spend online** and learn **how to turn off your devices** by silencing notifications or deleting some apps. You can also try unfollowing or blocking accounts, muting notifications that upset you and engaging with uplifting content.
- Try to **stop engaging with people who clearly do not enter discussions with good intentions** or who are unwilling to read.
- **Surround yourself with like-minded people and people who respect you.** You can try joining groups, movements or organizations that advocate for societal change according to your ideas, which can help you feel empowered, appreciated, and confident.



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