



**A GUIDE FOR PARENTS**

**HEADSPACEINVADERS.NZ**

**Headspace Invaders** is an interactive learning platform for 12 to 16-year-olds. It is designed to help them recognise risky or harmful online content and feel more confident about how to respond.




The platform supports early intervention skills and critical thinking in a way that is engaging and relevant to young people.

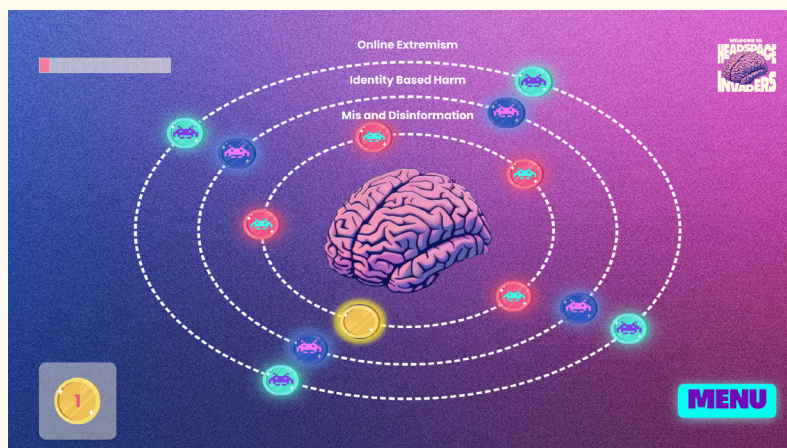
Your child may be using Headspace Invaders as part of their learning at school. It aligns with the curriculum and supports important competencies around digital citizenship and wellbeing.

Headspace Invaders was co-designed by Netsafe with young people, teachers, academics, and contributors from organisations with experience in prevention and digital influence. It was created in response to consistent feedback from rangatahi who told us they were seeing content that felt emotionally manipulative, isolating, or extreme. They often said they didn't know how to make sense of it or what to do next.

This resource was designed to open up meaningful, low-pressure opportunities for young people to reflect, build judgement, and take early action. Rather than focusing on what is rare or extreme, it helps them explore everyday moments that feel off or confusing and equips them to respond before harm escalates.

### It's made up of three short, self-guided modules on:

-  Misinformation and how false content spreads
-  Identity-based harm
-  Early signs of online extremism and what to do



Instead of tests or lectures, your child will explore real examples, play quick games, and watch short videos that help them think more critically and reflect about what they see online.

This guide gives you an overview of what your child is exploring, where the risks can start to show up, how you can help support conversations and early action.

**| You don't need to be an expert; just someone they can talk to.**

# MISINFORMATION

# & DISINFORMATION

This module helps young people unpack how false information spreads online and why it can be hard to spot.

It looks at how emotional content, repetition, and familiar formats (like memes or short videos) can influence beliefs, even when the information is not accurate.

## What it covers:



How misinformation and disinformation work



Why emotional content spreads faster



The role of algorithms and echo chambers

---

## Activities include:



Sorting real and fake headlines



Exploring how AI and deepfakes distort reality



Reflecting on how belief and emotion are linked



## Talk about it at home:

“Have you ever shared something online and later found out it wasn’t true?”

“How do you decide if something feels believable?”

“Why do you think people create or share fake content?”

---

## Try this with your child:

- Ask them to show you one example they explored, maybe a fake post or meme, and have them explain what made it feel real or suspicious.
- Talk about whether you’ve ever been fooled by something online, and how you figured it out.
- Ask them to teach you one of the skills they used in one of the activities
- Try spotting signs of false information in something you see together. Explore how it feels when something turns out to be misleading or fake

**You do not need to explain the content. Just showing curiosity and asking how they approached it can spark great conversation.**

---

## You could also ask:

“If something online ever made you feel unsure or upset, or if a friend was confused about what was real, would you feel okay talking to someone about it?”

**Let them know support is always there. You can help them think about who they trust and where they could go if they ever need advice or help.**

# HARMFUL ONLINE BEHAVIOUR: IDENTITY, IMPACT & RESPONSE

This module helps young people explore how language and behaviour online can hurt, isolate, or target others, especially when it relates to someone's identity, beliefs, or background. It gives them space to reflect on what crosses the line from being offensive or unfair into something that can cause real harm.

It also introduces key ideas about emotional impact, the role of bystanders, and the power of early, respectful action. While the term "hate speech" is commonly used online, this resource focuses on helping children and young people build awareness and judgement, not on applying labels.

## What it covers:



Recognising harmful patterns in posts, comments, or jokes



Understanding how bias or prejudice can show up in digital spaces



Exploring the emotional and social impact of being targeted



Building confidence to respond safely and support others

---

## Activities include:



Exploring examples of online comments and how they can affect others



Challenging excuses like "it was just a joke"



Practising early, safe ways to respond when something does not feel right

## Try this with your child:

Ask if any examples surprised them.

- Did they change their mind about what is okay to say or post?
- Explore how small comments or jokes can sometimes build into something more serious.

Look at an example together and talk about how different people might feel reading it

- Share a time you saw something unfair or hurtful online and what you did or wanted to do.
- Ask what they might do if they saw a friend being targeted or made to feel excluded.

**You do not need to give answers.  
Just listening and being open to their  
views can create a powerful conversation.**

---

## You could also ask:

**"If you or a friend were ever on the receiving end of something like this, who do you think you could talk to?"**

**Let them know it is okay to speak up, even if something feels small or uncertain. Reassure them that they do not have to figure it out on their own and that there are people who want to help.**



## Why it matters:

Online content can have real impact, even when it does not break the law.

In New Zealand, everyone has the right to freedom of expression including the right to express their opinions. This right is protected by the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990. However, this freedom is not unlimited. In some situations, the law places limits on speech to protect others.

For example:

- **Section 131 of the Human Rights Act 1993** makes it a criminal offence to publish or share written material that is threatening, abusive, or insulting with intent to excite hostility or ill-will against any group of persons based on their colour, race, or ethnic or national origins.
- **The Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015** provides both civil and criminal options for addressing serious emotional harm caused by digital communications, such as a court order requiring the removal of that content if posted online.

These legal protections are there to support people who are harmed by serious online abuse or discrimination. But many harmful experiences begin well before the law becomes relevant.

That is why early awareness matters. Recognising when something feels off, isolating, or emotionally manipulative helps prevent further harm before it escalates.

These issues are grounded in what young people experience online. Many told us they often see content that feels emotionally charged, targeted, or suspicious, but they are not always sure how to process or respond to it.

Headspace Invaders supports them to build confidence and judgement in these moments. It offers a safe space to explore tricky content and learn how to ask questions, seek support, and make choices that reflect their values.

You do not need to be an expert. Just showing curiosity, listening, and being open to talking about what they are seeing can make a real difference.



# VIOLENT

# EXTREMISM ONLINE

## Defining Extremism

Headspace Invaders uses the term 'extremism' to describe views or ideologies that exist on the fringes of society and seek to create division, reject others, or justify harmful action. These views may be political, religious, or social in nature, and often involve pressure to pick sides, prove loyalty, or act against others. This framing aligns with the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS) 'Know the Signs' guide, which outlines how subtle changes in belief, language, or behaviour can signal a growing risk.

This module helps your child understand how violent extremist messages often start subtly, through emotional posts, edgy humour, or content that claims to reveal hidden truths. It shows how these messages can gradually shift how someone sees the world and who they trust. Your child will learn to spot early warning signs, like pressure to pick sides, blame others, or take extreme actions before things escalate.

## What it covers:



What early signs of violent extremism can look like



Why it often starts with content that seems emotional or exclusive



How persuasive posts and loyalty language can pull people in

---

## Activities include:



Spotting examples of 'us vs them' thinking



Exploring how persuasive messages try to hook emotions



Practising what to do when something feels wrong or pressuring



### **What to look for:**

The NZSIS 'Know the Signs' guide offers practical, early warning indicators that someone may be moving toward harmful beliefs or actions.

These signs do not automatically mean someone is in danger, but they can be early clues that something is not right, especially if they appear together or become more intense over time:

- Talking about violence as the only way to fix a problem or injustice
- Sharing or supporting content that encourages violence to promote an idea
- Becoming strongly attached to a group that talks about fighting or revenge
- Using "us vs them" language to blame or target others
- Saying they feel unfairly treated or misunderstood, especially when linked to anger or pressure to act

### **'KNOW THE SIGNS' GUIDE**



## Talk about it at home:

“Have you seen content that says, ‘they’re lying to you’ or ‘we’re the only ones who get it?’”

“What do you think makes someone vulnerable to these kinds of messages?”

“If something online made you feel unsure or pressured, do you think we could we talk about it?”

---

## Try this with your child:

Ask them to show you one of the activities or examples they looked at in this module.

- What made the message feel persuasive or intense?
- Did anything remind them of content they’ve seen elsewhere online?

You can also explore together how pressure to choose sides or adopt extreme views can show up gradually.

- Ask how this kind of content might influence someone who feels isolated or left out
- Talk about what makes a message feel persuasive or emotionally charged
- Explore where they would go or who they might talk to if something started to feel wrong

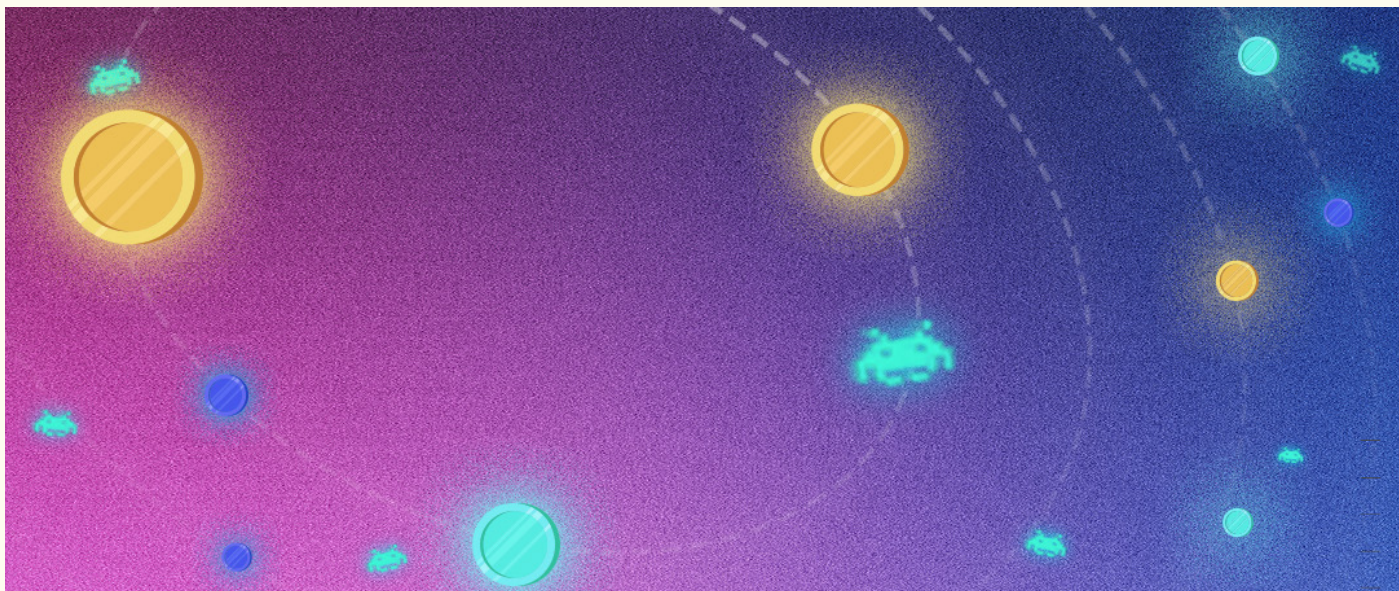
**You don’t need to have all the answers.  
Your interest and openness can make a big difference.**

---

## You could also ask:

“If something like this ever showed up for you or someone you care about, do you think you would feel okay asking for help?”

**Let them know that even when something feels small or confusing, it is always okay to talk to someone.  
Discuss who might be a good option to talk to.**



## What parents should know:

Online extremism doesn't usually start with violence. It often begins in subtle ways, like edgy humour, emotional videos, or posts that claim to reveal hidden truths.

Over time, these can shift how a young person sees the world and who they trust, especially if the content encourages them to pick sides, reject others, or see violence as the only solution. Over time, it can grow into isolation, intense identity talk, and ideas

---

## Starting a conversation:

Headspace Invaders is all about helping young people build the skills to recognise when something doesn't feel right online, reflect on their values, and feel confident asking for help.

A helpful tool to support these skills at home is the **'This is Me' profile from Explore Wellbeing**. It's a simple, child-friendly activity that helps young people describe who they are, what matters to them, and how they see the world. Filling it out together can spark great conversations, give insight into what's changed or what they're thinking about, and open the door for kōrero about online situations that might be tricky or confusing.

**EXPLORE THE 'THIS IS ME' PROFILE**

**CHECK OUT 'EXPLORE WELLBEING'**

# REPORTING HARMFUL CONTENT

netsafe's  
got you  
covered.

## Not sure?

Start with Netsafe, they can guide or escalate as needed.

Call **0508 638 723**

Email **help@netsafe.org.nz**

Text **Netsafe** to **4282**

Or visit:

**REPORT.NETSAFE.ORG.NZ**

## Start by reporting in the platform or app if:

- A post makes someone feel unsafe, targeted, or harassed
- You're unsure, but something just feels "off"

## Contact The New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS) if someone is showing signs of radicalisation to violence, including:

- Loyalty to violent extremist groups
- Content that suggests violence is a reasonable or justified way to respond to something a person believes is unfair or wrong.' so it is clearer for parents

### What NZSIS Does (and Doesn't) Focus On:

*The New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS) works to prevent violent extremism. That means they focus on situations where there might be a real risk of someone being harmed because of violent beliefs or plans. They do not get involved in upsetting or offensive posts if those posts are still legal. Even if something feels wrong, NZSIS only steps in when there are signs someone may support or carry out violence.*

## Escalate further and call NZ Police (111 or 105) if someone is:

- Threatening violence (even as a "joke")
- Talking about weapons or attack plans
- Encouraging others to hurt someone
- Sharing how to cause harm

## Contact DIA (Department of Internal Affairs) if content includes:

- Livestreamed attacks
- Beheadings, executions, or suicide videos
- Propaganda designed to radicalise others

Visit Digital Safety Report Online Violent Extremist Material for more information or to report:

**dia.govt.nz**

# WHAT YOU CAN READ,

# WATCH OR SHARE NEXT

## **NZSIS – Know the Signs**

A practical guide from the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service that outlines early warning signs someone might be heading down a harmful path. This resource is written in clear, accessible language for trusted adults who want to better understand the process of radicalisation and when to seek help.

**DOWNLOAD THE PDF**

## **Netsafe – Online Safety at Home**

A practical guide for New Zealand parents and caregivers that covers common online challenges, including bullying, inappropriate content, and risky behaviour. It offers age-appropriate advice, conversation starters, and strategies to support digital wellbeing and resilience at home.

**NETSAFE RESOURCE**

## **OFLC – Content That Crosses the Line**

A research report from the Office of Film and Literature Classification that explores the high-risk content young people encounter online. It includes direct quotes from rangatahi, stats about their experiences, and clear recommendations to help adults guide safer online engagement.

**EXPLORE THE REPORT**

## **Explore – Preventing Violent Extremism**

Practical resources and guidance for parents, caregivers, and professionals. This resource helps trusted adults understand how to recognise early warning signs, open up safe conversations, and take early steps if they are concerned.

**EXPLORE PARENT'S RESOURCE**