



**A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS**

**HEADSPACEINVADERS.NZ**

# WHAT IS

# HEADSPACE INVADERS?

**Headspace Invaders** is a classroom-ready resource built to spark honest, thoughtful conversations about the online world students actually experience. It's about helping students understand what is shaping their thinking online and how to respond early. Headspace invaders was developed by Netsafe with support from the DIA and in collaboration with young people and expert partners

It's a fast, flexible, self-guided resource for 12–16 year olds that uses interactive prompts, short videos, and online examples based on real content students are likely to see, helping them:



Spot misinformation and understand how false content spreads



Explore how online comments, posts or jokes can target people based on identity, and why that matters



Learn how extremist ideas can be introduced gradually, and practise safe, early ways to respond or get support

The focus isn't on finding the right answer. The activities are designed to prompt reflection, build awareness, and open up conversations that matter. Students explore, notice, and respond in ways that feel relevant to them.

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## Why this resource was created:

Headspace Invaders was co-designed with young people, teachers, academic researchers, and contributors from organisations with experience in prevention and digital influence. It was developed in response to consistent feedback from students who told us they were seeing content that felt emotionally manipulative, isolating, or extreme and weren't sure how to make sense of it or what to do. These moments often related to misinformation, identity-based harm, or early exposure to extremist ideas and communities.

The resource was created to open up meaningful, low-pressure opportunities to reflect, build judgement, and take early action. It supports conversations that help students feel more in control and less isolated in how they respond to what they see online. It's built for classroom use, so you don't need to be an expert to deliver it. You just need to create space for reflection, curiosity, and connection.

# HOW IT WORKS

# & WHAT IT COVERS

Headspace Invaders is designed to work across diverse teaching contexts. Whether you teach a form class, a junior Health rotation, a Social Studies inquiry, or a thematic English unit – the programme is flexible and modular. While there is a suggested sequence for the modules, they are flexible and can be used in the order that best suits your teaching. You can dip in and out of different sections depending on your focus, timetable, or student needs.

**Each section is short, interactive, and device based.** Students work independently, earning coins as they progress through a mix of flexible and structured activities. Some tasks have open-ended choices, others require correct answers to unlock the next step, but all are designed to help students think critically, reflect on their decisions, and stay engaged without pressure or scoring.

**Your role as a teacher** is to guide, support, and create space for thoughtful dialogue and reflection. You don't need to be an expert; just someone who helps students slow down and make sense of what they're seeing.

You might prompt quiet reflection before group kōrero or simply give permission to explore tricky questions without pressure to get it right straight away. Some teachers pause during activities to unpack a moment in real time, while others use the post-module reflections to check in, scaffold a group discussion, or introduce a values-based task linked to other curriculum areas.

**There are also excellent external resources**, like those from UNESCO, that can be used to extend learning beyond the platform and support deeper exploration of prevention, digital influence, and critical thinking.

This resource is designed to support the kinds of conversations that often feel too complex to plan for but too important to ignore. It encourages reflection, helps students notice patterns, and creates opportunities to discuss content they may not otherwise bring up; especially when it relates to identity, emotion, or online influence.

## How it works:

When students first visit Headspace Invaders, they see a short pop-up that introduces the platform. From there, they explore a visual space with three orbits, each focused on a key online challenge:



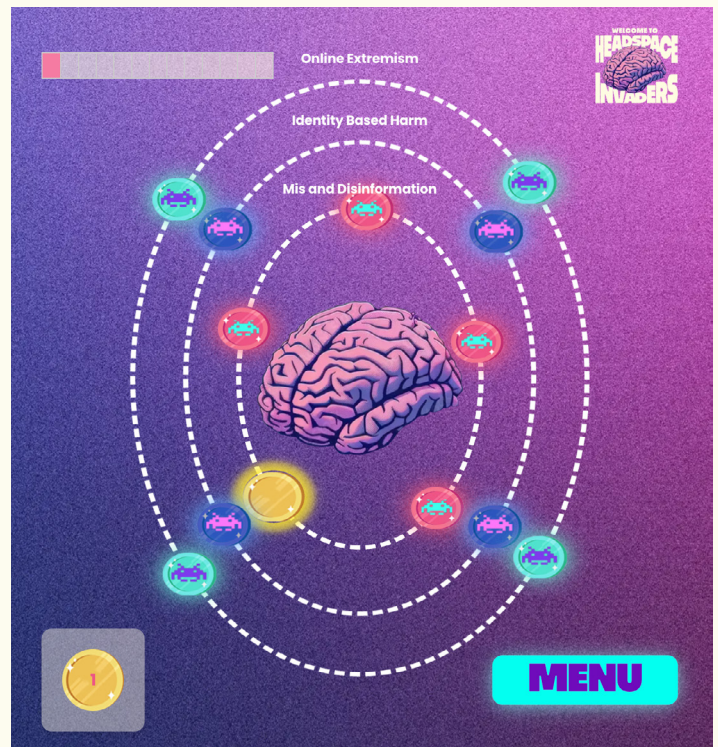
Misinformation and how false content spreads



Harmful behaviour that targets people based on identity



Early signs of online extremism and how to respond safely



Each orbit contains a sequence of invaders that students complete in order. When they hover over an invader, it will pause and show the activity number, the focus, and a short description.

Each invader builds on the one before it to support a clear learning journey. However, activities can also be used on their own or extended through classroom discussion. Each one lasts no more than 10 minutes.

Inside each invader, students complete two or three interactive activities. These might include a couple of multiple-choice questions, a drag-and-drop sorting task, a ranking activity, a short video, or a link to an external quiz. After the activities, short information screens reinforce key ideas. Students earn coins for completing the activities and also for reading the follow-up content.

**There are no formal tests. The goal is to help students recognise early signs of harm, think critically about what they see online, and practise safe, practical ways to respond.**

**A one-pager is also available at [netsafe.org.nz/headspace-invaders](https://netsafe.org.nz/headspace-invaders)** with tools students can use to check whether content or images have been AI-generated or manipulated. This can be used to extend learning during the misinformation module or as a prompt for deeper classroom discussion.

# WHAT THE THREE SECTIONS COVER

## SECTION 1

### Misinformation and Disinformation:

- The internet lies to you... sometimes
- Mis vs Disinformation
- Is this even real?
- Are AI and deepfakes messing with reality?
- Who decides what you see? (Algorithms)

## SECTION 2

### Identity based harm:

- When Language Online Becomes Harmful
- The impact on Mental Health
- What can you do if you see Hate online?
- Does reporting actually work?

## SECTION 3

### Online extremism:

- What is online extremism (and why should I care)?
- How extremist ideas spread in chats, games, and feeds
- Why extremism can be hard to spot
- What to do if extremism shows up in your feed

# CURRICULUM FIT,

# COMPETENCIES &

# CLASSROOM RELEVANCE

This guide is aligned with the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC 2007), with a focus on Years 7–10. It also supports key directions in the Curriculum Refresh, particularly the emphasis on critical thinking, wellbeing, identity, and digital citizenship across learning areas.

## Health and Physical Education (Years 7–10)

*Strands: Personal Health and Development, Relationships with Other People, Healthy Communities and Environments*

- Mental health and resilience
- Personal identity, self-worth, and values
- Relationships with others and online behaviour
- Strategies for managing difficult or unsafe situations

## Digital Technologies / Hangarau Matihiko

- Understanding how content is created, shared, and amplified online
- Recognising ethical issues in digital environments
- Evaluating the impact of algorithms and digital tools on wellbeing

## English and Social Studies (Years 7–10)

- Critically evaluating media and messages
- Understanding bias, influence, and audience
- Exploring ethical responses to harm and injustice
- Analysing systems of power and inclusion

## Key Competencies Strengthened:

- **Thinking:** Interpreting content, identifying bias, asking better questions
- **Managing self:** Choosing when and how to respond online
- **Relating to others:** Understanding impact, building empathy
- **Participating and contributing:** Acting safely and constructively in shared spaces
- **Using language, symbols, and texts:** Deconstructing media and digital influence



### **Why this matters:**

These issues are grounded in what students say they encounter online; not just occasionally, but regularly. They told us they often see content that feels emotionally charged, targeted, or suspicious, but aren't sure how to process or respond.

These include:

- Content that manipulates or distorts truth
- Pressure to choose sides or prove loyalty
- Identity-based targeting
- Normalised talk of violence, hate, or "us vs them" language

Headspace Invaders brings these online moments into the classroom in a supported, discussion-based way. It helps students build awareness, notice early signs, and feel more prepared to act or seek help when needed.



# RESPONDING TO

# WHAT STUDENTS SHARE

**Teachers play a vital role in recognising, supporting, and responding to early concerns.**

You are in a trusted position to notice behavioural shifts, patterns of concern, or disclosures that may signal harm. When a student begins engaging with high-risk content or seems affected by it, your support can make a critical difference.

## Watch for serious changes in student behaviour or disclosures such as:



Sharing content that includes credible threats, plans, or references to weapons



Talking about witnessing graphic or violent content repeatedly



Using language focused on blame, enemies, or a need to act



Withdrawing socially or becoming increasingly reactive or emotionally overwhelmed

**These are not typical wellbeing issues; they may point to a serious risk. Escalate through your school's safeguarding, wellbeing, or senior leadership process immediately.**

## What to do next:

- **Netsafe** for advice, reporting, or support – [netsafe.org.nz/report](https://netsafe.org.nz/report) or **text 4282**
- **Police (111/105)** for threats, weapons, or planned violence
- **DIA** for extreme or objectionable content (e.g. livestreamed attacks, beheadings, propaganda)
- **New Zealand Security and Intelligence Service (NZSIS)** for signs of radicalisation (e.g. intense loyalty language, secrecy, repeated targeting of a group)

**You are not expected to investigate or determine intent; you are a critical connector. Trust your instincts, document concerns where appropriate, and don't wait to raise an alert.**



### **The 'Know the Signs' Guide Can Help**

This guide from The New Zealand Security and Intelligence Service (NZSIS) offers a clear, practical overview of early warning signs that someone may be moving toward violent extremism. It helps teachers distinguish between normal adolescent behaviour and concerning shifts in thinking, language, or social patterns.

The guide includes examples of emotional, social, and behavioural changes that may signal someone needs help. It's especially useful for senior leaders, guidance staff, and anyone in a position to notice small but significant changes in a student's worldview.

**DOWNLOAD THE GUIDE**



# BUILD ON IT:

## IDEAS THAT DIG DEEPER

### After the Misinformation Module:

- Use one “Is this even real?” example and ask: what made this believable at first? Add three things that made it less believable on second look.
- From the “AI and deepfakes” screen, ask: what would you check if this was real? Then show a distorted image or claim and ask: what’s missing?
- Ask students: how could this example spread in a group chat or feed? What might someone say to pass it on and what could stop it?

### After the Harmful Online Content Module:

- Choose one “Could this be doing real harm?” example. Ask: what made this hard to decide? Did the pop-up feedback shift your view?
- From the “What can you do?” section, ask: which response felt doable? What might get in the way and how would you overcome it?
- Show a “just joking” excuse. Ask: how would you call it out in a real chat without making it worse?

### After the Extremism Module:

- Revisit “Why Extremism Can Be Hard to Spot.” Ask: which signs felt real or familiar? Why do we miss them?
- Choose one interactive response to “What to do if it shows up in your feed.” Ask: how would this actually play out on your feed?
- Show an “us vs them” post. Ask students to rewrite it with inclusive, clear language and test which version still feels strong.



## Helping Students Engage and Reflect

Students are more likely to speak up and think critically when the learning environment feels open, supportive, and judgement-free. These quick strategies help connect the platform experience to wider classroom conversations:

What you can try:

- Use simple openers like: “Have you ever seen something online that made you pause or think twice?”
- After each module, use a quick prompt: “What stood out or made you think differently?”
- Link one of the reflection questions to a current topic you’re already exploring
- Use a sticky-note exit question like: “What’s one thing you’ll think about differently after this?”



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

While Headspace Invaders opens the conversation, these resources help extend your learning and support your role as an early intervention ally.

## **The Classification Office – Content That Crosses the Line**

people are encountering online, including violent, graphic, or harmful content. Offers insights to guide conversations and build media literacy.

**DOWNLOAD THE RESOURCE**

## **UNESCO – Preventing Violent Extremism Through Education**

A practical guide based on real classroom activities from across the globe, including ways to strengthen critical thinking, inclusion, resilience, and help students question extremist narratives. Many of the approaches can be adapted for New Zealand classrooms.

**READ THE REPORT**

## **Netsafe Educator Kete**

A dedicated hub for New Zealand teachers with templates, harm response guides, and wellbeing supports.

**VIEW THE KETE**

## **Interested in taking your learning further?**

For people who want to build their confidence further, EXPLORE and MySkill have developed a set of e-learning modules designed to support frontline professionals such as teachers, social workers, and counsellors in recognising and safely responding to online extremism. These modules cover key ideas from prevention through to intervention, using realistic scenarios and reflection tools grounded in current New Zealand guidance.

**ACCESS THE MODULES**