



DIGITAL CIVIL COURAGE

The internet and social media hold great potential for the good of society. At the same time, they are home to negative trends, such as hate speech and fake news, that can undermine social cohesion. What can each of us do to promote the good on the internet and in social media? And how can we learn civil courage?

#TAKEPART-Stories – an initiative of Deutsche Telekom AG
Facilitator's guide for a workshop (approx. 25 minutes)



LIFE IS FOR SHARING.

IMPRINT

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FURTHER INFORMATION

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NOTES ON THIS GUIDE

This workshop is about “Digital Civil Courage.” It is aimed at helping participants to understand what digital civil courage is, what each person can do in this area and why it is important to take an active role.

The workshop emphasizes the following key points:

1. The internet needs people who are willing to stand up for what is right, in the interest of our cohesion as a democracy. We must not allow people to be abused and to lose sight of what is true and what is fake.
2. Online hate speech keeps increasing, and it is not going to go away by itself.
3. There are various ways to take action against this negative trend, including enacting laws, counter-speech, reporting hate speech and showing solidarity.
4. Each of us can find ways to resist exclusion and support democracy!

This guide is intended as a support for you in your role as a facilitator. It can enable you to conduct a workshop, even if you have little experience in facilitating such events and/or you don't consider yourself an expert on the subject of digital civil courage. This guide is also available in longer versions, for workshops of 45 and 90 minutes.

In the sections entitled “STRUCTURE” we offer recommendations on how to present and discuss each passage.

In the sections entitled “WHAT TO SAY”, we offer suggestions on things to say and questions to ask.

In the sections entitled “ADDITIONAL INFORMATION,” we offer background information that can help you in your preparation.

To conduct this workshop, you will need:

- a laptop or other device with which you can present the workshop images, and various links and clips on the internet
- a projector or monitor connected to your laptop or other device
- Internet access/Wi-Fi
- speakers connected to your laptop or other device.

Also:

The image pages provided in the module work best in full-screen mode. Full-screen mode is available in virtually all internet browsers (check settings).

The image pages include links – for example to audio files. In most cases, the links open in a new window. To return to the module from a link, switch back to the original window. You may then need to reactivate the full-screen mode.

Some image pages include links to additional information and resources, etc. These links are not intended for workshop presentations; they are included for the participants' benefit for further study.

Under “Downloads” you'll find a template for invitations to participants, and a draft of an email, with the link to the module, that you might want to send out after completing your workshop.

Enjoy!



DIGITAL CIVIL COURAGE

WHAT TO SAY



“Welcome to our workshop on digital civil courage!
(introduce yourself and explain the purpose of the workshop)

These are the topics we will be discussing in the next 25 minutes:

- The internet and social media hold great potential for the good of society.
- At the same time, they are home to negative trends, such as hate speech and fake news, that can undermine social cohesion.
- What can each of us do to promote the good on the internet and in social media?
- Is civil courage something that we can learn?

Cyberbullying is a serious problem. Most often, it affects people younger than 25 years of age. Our focus today is not on cyberbullying, however, but on hate speech. In most cases, cyberbullying is directed at a single person, and comes from people with whom the victim is in direct contact. Hate speech, on the other hand, is viciousness implemented to strategic ends. Hate speech is about manipulating opinion and people, and even about working toward the exclusion of entire groups. Consequently, it is important to see how hate speech relates to democracy.

We need to face the fact that we are currently experiencing a swing to the right in our society. Unfortunately, we are seeing this in many countries around the world. Only about half of all Europeans are happy with their countries’ democratic system.

The objective of fake news is to influence people’s opinions – which in turn often leads to hate and exclusion.”



IMAGE 2

DEFENDING DEMOCRATIC VALUES (1/2)

WHAT TO SAY



“ Supporting a friend who is bullied on the internet because of her headscarf. Exposing a picture on Facebook as fake. Programming an app for reporting hate posts.

All of those are examples for civil courage on the internet. What do all of them have in common?

They go beyond pure helping behavior! Basic democratic values are defended courageously.

Civil courage is about refusing to tolerate injustice. It's about mustering the courage to speak your mind, even when it runs counter to what others – even persons of higher rank or seniority, or the majority – are saying. Civil courage plays out in public, not in secret. And it takes negative consequences into account.

These principles apply to civil courage in any sphere, whether in the digital or in the real world.

That said, we need to remember certain key ways in which the internet differs from the real world:

- Coverage: Way back, you would tell a person about something, and then, a day later, that person would tell it to someone else. Now, because of the possibility of following each other on social media, your message can reach huge groups of people, around the world, in seconds.
- Speed: Bots – robots working online – play a major role in the spread of hate speech. Bots today are able to autonomously write messages and post them, using false identities, to large numbers of groups. Nowadays bots are thought to be responsible for up to 30 percent of all hate posts. The reactions to their posts come from people – or from other bots.
- Anonymity: Because of the anonymity that often prevails online, users are often unable to know who the other users really are, or what those users' real motives and aims are. In addition, users often underestimate the real impacts of the things they post online. Roles start to blur: Politicians often communicate online as private individuals, and not in their official capacities. Private individuals, on the other hand, become journalists. This kind of role-changing can be very difficult to recognize.



IMAGE 2



DEFENDING DEMOCRATIC VALUES (2/2)

WHAT TO SAY



- Legislation: The legal situation on the internet differs from that in the real world. The internet lacks key supervisory bodies such as Press Councils, which monitor compliance with accepted ethical rules for journalists. But we'll come back to the issue of the legal situation later on!
- Information overload: When people are online, they often read little more than headlines, simply because the online world is flooded with information. And people often like or share content, simply because they like the person who posted the content, and because they want to belong to that person's group. Often, they don't bother to actually read the content or try to understand it."

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



A definition of digital civil courage: Courageous, public actions, in the digital world, aimed at defending basic democratic values or human rights. This includes actions that can entail negative consequences for the person showing civil courage – consequences such as exposure to attacks. Digital civil courage can play an especially important role in social media, in which hate speech and fake news are spread.

Civil courage is diametrically opposed to apathy and ignorance.

Examples of basic democratic values and human rights, in this context, include:

- human dignity
- the right to life in liberty and security
- the right to adequate living conditions
- the rejection of any and all discrimination based on gender, background, race, language, nationality, origins, beliefs, or any religious or political opinions
- freedom of speech

Examples of social media:

- social networks (such as Facebook)
- microblogging services (such as Twitter)
- photo / video platforms (such YouTube, Instagram)
- messenger services (such as WhatsApp/Telegram)

Unfortunately, hate speech and ultra-right slogans are also increasingly appearing on gaming platforms used by children and adolescents.



#NOHATESPEECH

STRUCTURE



You can play the clip without making any introductory remarks.

For this, you will need speakers. We strongly recommend that you do a sound check before the workshop begins!

Recommendation: Watch the clip prior to the workshop. It is a short clip produced in connection with Deutsche Telekom's #TAKEPART #NoHateSpeech campaign, and was shown in soccer stadiums, movie theaters and on TV. It presents various life situations of a young man who belongs to a group that suffers a great deal of discrimination and victimization: transgender people. He was born as a girl and then underwent a sex change operation. This section is not about the topic of transgender people per se, however; it focuses on the following general questions: What kinds of negative treatment do members of minorities suffer? What sorts of people make a point of insulting and vilifying other people? How does such behavior relate to social cohesion based on democratic rules?

After running the clip, ask the participants to voice their immediate reactions. Voicing a provocative reaction such as "He probably brought it on himself!" could be a way of promoting lively discussion.

The clip runs for about 1 minute.

WHAT TO SAY



(Questions you can ask after running the clip:)

- "What is your reaction to what you have just seen?"

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



The main character is a real person who actually experienced the hateful posts shown in the clip.

Examples of best practices are shown at the end of the clip.

These best practices are discussed and explained in the course of the workshop.



2 MIN

IMAGE 4

ONLINE HATE AND FAKES ARE ON THE RISE!

WHAT TO SAY



“Hate speech and fake news affect society as a whole.

Hate speech ranks highly among the types of illegal content people in Europe report encountering on the internet. In addition, most Europeans say that they see fake news at least once a week.

While hate can manifest itself on both an individual and a group level, hate between groups is often especially strong and relentless.

Populism plays an important role in the inciting of hate. It drives hate by emphasizing and dwelling on the differences between groups. In the process, it eliminates virtually all space for factually based discussion. People who fall victim to populism often repeat and spread slogans without really thinking about it. Contrary opinions are experienced as a threat, even on a personal level.

Such actions and views can reinforce cohesion within groups and lead to vilification of the opinions of other groups and their members. Misunderstandings often occur when people fail to actually read content and try to understand it – i.e. when people simply believe they know in advance what another person is trying to say. In populistically oriented groupthink, the question “are you for us or against us?” is never far away. Any contradiction is perceived as betrayal.

At the same time, algorithms in social networks ensure that people see more and more of the kinds of content they have liked or commented on in the past. This hampers people’s chances of forming balanced opinions. It eliminates many of the important perspectives that people need in order to be able to weigh and challenge arguments.”

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



The term “populism” refers to a certain political style. It employs identity politics which happen to relate directly to the issue of hate speech. Populist demagogues exalt the members of their own group and work to disparage and exclude members of other groups. In general, populism is not tied to any specific political orientation. Some political parties tend to favor a populist style more than others do, however.



3 MIN



IMAGE 5

THERE ARE MANY REASONS NOT TO ACT ...

STRUCTURE



Read „What to say“ out loud.

We recommend opening the discussion after the next image, so that certain points can come into sharper focus.

WHAT TO SAY



“Why should I put myself in the line of fire? Maybe I'll come under attack myself...”

Let's take a look at the potential risks involved in pushing back online and in intervening when others are being attacked:

- **Shitstorm:** A person who intervenes can suddenly become the focus of ire and attacks on the internet. The mood online can suddenly shift against them. And then they receive a storm of negative posts. In social media, it is not uncommon for the attention of people involved in discussing a certain subject to suddenly shift completely away from that subject.
- **Blaming:** A person can be made out to be a perpetrator of some kind, and then get attacked on that basis. Example: In a discussion on human rights, a person states that everyone has a right to be free in their lives. The person then gets attacked for not offering any solutions to the refugee crisis and for supposedly supporting illegal immigration. The person even gets attacked for supposedly aiding and abetting illegal migrants.
- **Silencing:** Vilifying people with the aim of pushing them out of social media. Journalists and politicians are often the targets of hate speech. Strategically implemented hate speech becomes especially frightening when it includes threats of real-world repercussions. This happens often. Such threats can take the form of publication of the victim's private address or telephone number. There is a special term for publication of such private information:
- **Doxing:** Publication of a victim's address and contact data, with the aim of making the victim a target in the real world.

When you see such things happening, is it maybe better to stay out of it?”



3 MIN



IMAGE 6

... ALL THE MORE TO TAKE ACTION. (1/2)

WHAT TO SAY



“When no one speaks out against hateful messages or fake news aimed at social exclusion, the people behind the posts often feel confirmed in their efforts!

It is vitally important to ensure that hate speech does not become the norm. Unfortunately, hate speech is already trending in that direction. The problem is that if certain types of normally unacceptable language are used often enough, many people will start considering them acceptable. If an absurd argument gets repeated often enough, many people will no longer find it absurd, and may consider it to contain a grain of truth.

Language affects our attitudes and actions. Later on, we will discuss a project that is working to help people become more respectful of others in their use of language.

Can some pushback ever convince online haters to change their ways?

That depends on whether they are using hate to strategic ends. If they are, resistance would probably not give them any pause. If they are not, and have simply been caught up in a whirlwind of hate and rumors, then they might be willing to rethink their views.

In any case, there are always many undecided readers out there. Often, the point of pushing back against hate speech online is not to try to change the hater. The real point is to reach the readers out there, many of whom may be still be unsure of what to think. The idea is to offer those people a different perspective. One that can get them thinking and talking about the issue. In other words, the idea is to re-open the door to constructive dialog.

It is also very worthwhile to act on behalf of victims of hate speech. A lack of solidarity can be as bad and painful as the hate itself. Civil courage is also about standing up for those who will not, or cannot, defend themselves. Give a voice to those people who are afraid to speak their mind.

You feel great when you overcome your own shock and paralysis and take action! People who get involved, and take action gain a sense of belonging and feel less helpless than they otherwise would.

Just remember that hate has never conquered hate or solved any social problems. Often hate has caused new problems.”



IMAGE 6

... ALL THE MORE TO TAKE ACTION. (2/2)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION



Shitstorm & co.: How likely are you to become a victim yourself when you stand up for something online?

Many people who regularly practice counter-speech online find that while they may get some angry responses, they'll usually get at least as much agreement as irate disagreement or attacks. Of course, you can simply have the misfortune of coming across a truly aggressive person. When that happens, remember that while a bot will not spend a lot of time firing back, a strategic hater or troll may simply be relentless. It can then make sense to ask others for help or simply to back out of the fray.

Those most often targeted include journalists, politicians and other people with similar public exposure. Haters often seek to marginalize such people.

When things get really nasty, report what's going on, bring in groups such as #IAmHere or file a police report.

Fortunately, such nastiness is still the exception and is unlikely, especially when you consistently argue in constructive ways.

In the case of cyberbullying, it's always a good idea to offer your assistance to victims.



5 MIN



IMAGE 7

EVERYBODY CAN TAKE ACTION! (1/3)

STRUCTURE



Explain the ideas given on the slide. This is a collection of recommendations that are effective and can be employed by everyone.

Recommendation: Select 3 examples in advance that you can explain more closely.

WHAT TO SAY



“Here are some ideas on ways anyone can get involved:

Support victims – demonstrate solidarity!

- When posts are not acceptable – because they are untruthful, hurtful, or defamatory – then say so! But always use clear, objective language, to ensure that your message – even if it is very short – will be properly understood.
- Try to set a good example! In chats, speak up early, or even first, before the discussion goes off the rails.
- Support victims. That can include contacting them (and not the haters) outside of the chat framework and offering them consolation and encouragement. Contacting haters in such ways is not recommended. Often, people will use chats as an opportunity to post other people’s personal messages and emails, for purposes such as ridicule. Such practices can include posting other people’s email addresses without permission.

Seek and accept help!

- One way to seek out help is to directly address other people reading the chat, and to ask them, “What do you think about this?”, Or “I would be interested in learning your opinion about xy.” or “I am sure that there are experts about xy here among us. Who knows more about xy?” As in the real world, it is a good strategy to get others involved – don’t try to do it all yourself.
- #IAmHere, for example, offers to help out in cases in which problematic posts are being reported and users are joining forces in order to respond collectively.

Strengthen supporters!

- This complements “seeking help”. It’s important to back up those who are standing up against hate. That can take the form of likes, or of useful added comments – for example, comments you have added because you’re an expert on the subject.
- Show solidarity with (potential) victims, yes, but also with other helpers. That reinforces your cause, and it shows passive readers that the person who is coming under fire is not alone in their views. By the way, this is a strategy that haters use very effectively ...



5 MIN



IMAGE 7

EVERYBODY CAN TAKE ACTION! (2/3)

WHAT TO SAY



Do not allow yourself to be provoked

- Admittedly, that's easier said than done! Often, people try to provoke others into reacting negatively, simply so they then can say, "You see, you're not one bit better!"
- Call on others to stick to the rules for the discussion, or to the rules in force for the group.
- It is good to answer promptly, but it's not always necessary. If you find yourself taking something too personally, it is definitely a good idea to take a few deep breaths and turn your attention elsewhere for a little while. You can jump back in once you have calmed down and are seeing things a little more clearly.

Do not answer hate with hate.

- As we have already seen, answering hate with hate often just escalates the discussion emotionally and even generates solidarity for the haters.

Set limits and recover!

- When you get involved, remember that tried-and-true general rule: enough is enough. It's also important to protect your own feelings. One good exit strategy can be to inform your readers that you plan to leave the discussion. When you do that, however, be sure to follow through! Other options include disabling notifications, blocking the group or the hater and, of course, reporting violations.
- Discussions with people who don't really want to discuss often lead nowhere. Some experts advise that you answer twice, make your point clearly, and then exit the discussion.
- Make use of the advantages inherent in the digital world: Retain your ability to disconnect!

Be prepared – practice counter-speech!

- Many of the groups that work against online hate speech, and against hatred aimed at specific groups, offer free online courses with practice in protected (offline) settings and with opportunities to try out new strategies. Such courses are offered regularly and are open to anyone.

Use fact-checking – publish sources!

- People seeking to marginalize and exclude certain groups often make use of stereotypes and fake news. In the process, their stereotypes and fake news often go unchallenged, and then get adopted by others.
- It's a good idea to draw on reliable sources and use them in your own arguments. If you fail to find any useful sources, do not be afraid to ask, "How do you know that? What exactly are you referring to?" Important: Be sure not to let absurd claims go unchallenged, even if the best challenge you can muster is "I can't believe that!"



5 MIN



IMAGE 7

EVERYBODY CAN TAKE ACTION! (3/3)

WHAT TO SAY



- Fact-checking is easier than many people would assume. Often, you'll find the same fake news items coming up again and again in chats. In such cases, the items have often already been checked by experts, and their findings and sources are available on the internet (the Duke University Reporters' Lab offers a database of local fact-checkers, for example).
- A word of caution: Never introduce made-up results, and never try to combat prejudice and fake news with hearsay. If you lack facts, pose counter-questions and ask for pertinent background information.

And remember: Often, in your answers, you will be speaking to all the silent readers out there, and not to the haters!

- As explained a little earlier, this is a good strategy to ensure that you do not get pulled into a negative discussion.

Report violations!

- The simplest – but not always the most successful – way to report hateful posts is available on many social media platforms, for example on Facebook: Click on the three dots at the upper edge of the post and then answer the questions about the reasons for the report. Facebook will then look into the matter and give you at least one answer.
- Report hateful or harmful content to the police: Take a screenshot or save the link – ideally, along with the pertinent name and the date/time. You can file reports either online or at any police station.

Here is a tried-and-true basic perspective to adopt:

- Human diversity includes a diversity of opinions – and just because someone disagrees, or is a little eccentric, that does not mean they are a hater.
- Do not always assume the worst.
- When someone indicates they are willing to communicate, then make constructive use of that willingness. The aim is not to shout people down, but to encourage and inspire them to think. Always work towards a constructive dialog!
- Avoid cynicism, because it only angers people.
- Expose hate speech and fake news, and call attention to negative posts, if you can see a real point in doing so.
- You are not responsible for what others write, but you certainly are responsible for the way you answer!"



DIGITAL CIVIL COURAGE: TAKE PART!

STRUCTURE



Offer a brief summary. Use either your own or the text on the slide. Then ask and discuss some final questions.

WHAT TO SAY



“We’ve now come to the end of our workshop. We have heard a great deal about hate speech online and about how each of us can stand up against it.

We have also learned why this is such an urgent issue: Because hate speech destroys many of the great benefits we find in social media and online in general.

It is needless to say that the battle against hateful behavior online is not just an issue for civil society. Policymakers are called to pass clear laws in this area. Platform providers need to establish and enforce democratic rules for the interactions on their platforms. On the other hand, there is no reason why we should wait until all these things have happened. Each of us has some responsibility for the things that happen in our society. When our democratic rules get broken, it’s not just the rule-breakers who are responsible. All of us who allow the rules to be broken are responsible, too!

When we stand up against hate, we gain the opportunity to help shape our society for the better.

After you’ve taken a first-aid course, you may suddenly find yourself having to put your new knowledge into practice. And now you may suddenly find yourself needing to get involved online and take action against hate. In any case, our discussion today will probably help you be more aware, and willing, to try out one or two of the strategies we discussed.

Be courageous!

(Possible questions for the final discussion:)

- What did you learn from this?
- What was new for you?
- What are you going to tell your family and friends?”
