What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

**ECHO CHAMBERS**

Digital echo chambers have become increasingly prevalent over the last half decade. Formed by a combination of social media algorithms designed to promote engagement and the basic human urge to be correct, these online environments reinforce the opinions that people already have – such as particular political ideologies – in a perpetual loop. The danger is that exposure to this constant bias can gradually nudge users towards more extreme views. That’s certainly a potential hazard for young people, who tend to be more impressionable and easily influenced by things they see and read online – especially if it reflects a view they already agree with.

### What Are the Risks?

#### Extreme Ideologies

Echo chambers can offer routes to harmfully extreme worldviews. A typically teenaged, youth of authority, such as, could spiral into a full-blown belief in conspiracies theories – sometimes rooted in ideas which are antisemitic, racist or misogynistic. For impressionable individuals who may be feeling disillusioned with life, echo chambers can often function as a gateway to radicalisation.

#### No Critical Thinking

While critical thinking skills are sometimes taught in schools, they are rarely domain specific. A lack of experience in thinking critically – for example, about things we see on social media, or in the news – leads to young people at risk of falling prey to misinformation, untruths and false narratives, which are sometimes deliberately designed to mislead them and influence their thinking.

#### A Values Vacuum

If schools struggle to deliver on a clear ethos, founded in British values as outlined in the national curriculum, it leaves a space within which other ideologies have potential to flourish. Teaching about British values in more social experiences, such as PSHE lessons, doesn’t always effectively convey the key patience, tolerance, democratic values, individual liberty and the rule of law.

Advice for Parents & Carers

### Talk About Challenges

It could be helpful to explain to your child that, in general, people like to find evidence to strengthen their existing beliefs and prefer to ignore anything which supports an opposing perspective. For example, if someone (politically) challenges what they think occasionally, and that any criticism of their view is purely that – a criticism of their opinion, not them as a person.

### Debate Can Be Great

Encourage any interest your child shows in debating – whether at home, at school, or in clubs or societies. Debating requires people to assess the merits of an opposing argument, so they can counter it. Putting both sides of the shoes of someone who has a different point of view is a useful way for children to approach new ideas that may contradict what they previously believed.

### Discuss ‘Unhealthy Feeds’

Help your child understand how online algorithms shape which information is presented to them, and how this can affect their understanding and attitudes. Explain why the content they see in their feed on platforms like TikTok, Instagram or Snapchat. Explain why the way they see their ‘feed’ is selected to match their interests, and how this can influence what they think is true. Help them understand the importance of regularly checking a wide range of online sources.

### Vary Their Digital Diet

Sitting down to read online news stories with your child is an excellent way to demonstrate to them why it’s important to always get their information from just one place. Comparing how the same story is reported across popular mainstream publications – and talking about the political biases each may have – will highlight the importance of regularly checking a wide range of online sources.

### Meet Our Expert

**A former director of digital learning and currently a Head of Digital Innovation at DfE, Helen Peck, shares her experience and expertise on how to safely navigate online and discusses how digital literacy impacts the safety and well-being of children, staff and parents – and which strategies help to ensure digital safety online**

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