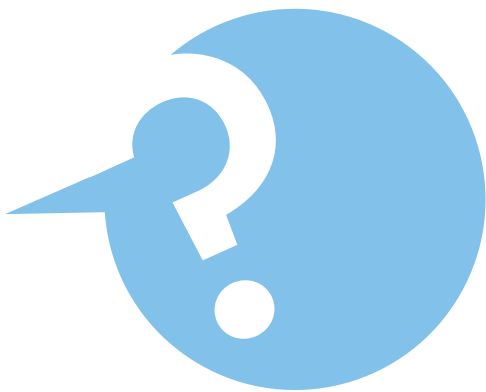




**Subject: Fwd: Fwd:
SCARY! SHARE!!!**

How to react when
people close to us
share conspiracies and
misinformation



Conspiracy theories, alarming messages, and deliberately spread false information (disinformation) have become an integral part of the information space. Are you worried that disinformation is spreading fear, anger, and panic among your friends and family? Are you bothered by alarming messages spread via e-mail and the internet? We have a few suggestions for you on how to respond to them without damaging good relations, if you care about the feelings of those who send you such messages.



If the sender is someone important to you

(emails with questionable messages are sent by a person close to you with whom you want to maintain a good relationship)

→ RESPOND BUT WITH TACT

There is no need to react hastily and emotionally in the style of: *“What kind of nonsense are you sending me?”* If someone close to you spreads an alarming message, it will seldom be out of bad intent. Rather, it will be an attempt to pass along information that the person thinks is important or they want to share something that corresponds to his or her opinion. If you want to react, try to do so like this: *“This really sounds like a crucial finding and disclosure. I assume you have this information from a trusted source and verified, right? If not, please don’t send me such information again. Thanks.”*

→ ARGUING NOT ADVISED

There are various motivations for spreading false information. It often stems from deeper feelings of frustration, insecurity, a desire to go against the flow, or, conversely, to show an affiliation to some view of the world and the group that shares it. Our first reaction to disinformation may be to try to refute it with the help of facts and counterarguments. But the power of disinformation is not in the information presented, but in the emotions it evokes and the belief in a certain version of events. Our response should pay attention to that. Don’t just try to win arguments, but attempt to unmask the real motivation through a series of questions. Be empathetic. *“Why is this information important to you? On what basis do you decide what information to believe and what not? Do you believe it because you have thoroughly verified it, or because it supports your opinion?”*

→ DON’T CRITICIZE

Never criticize a person for expressing an opinion or sharing questionable information. Focus on the message itself and the credibility of the originator. Always leave a person the possibility of a dignified change of opinion without reproach or ridicule. We are not infallible.

Sure, you trust your family, friends, acquaintances, and neighbors, but remember that in the case of chain emails or messages spread via social media and messengers, those close to you are not the original sources of information. They most probably received the information from someone else and passed it on. If you want, check the original source. However, this will often not be possible because it is anonymous. Believe in the good intentions of those close to you, but question the intentions of the originators.

If the sender isn't someone important to you

(emails with questionable messages are sent to you by an unknown person who found your email address somewhere)

→ MARK THE MESSAGE/SENDER AS SPAM

Your email provider (seznam.cz, gmail.com, etc.) gives you the option to mark the email or its sender as “spam.” Once you do this, other emails from that address will immediately go to your spam folder, where they will be automatically deleted over time and they won't bother you at all. At the same time, your email provider will teach itself to recognize that similar messages are likely to be spam in the future. In this way, you also let the email service provider know that the sender's address is problematic. If other users mark it this way, the email service provider will be able to better set up their automatic filters to protect others from unsolicited messages.

→ DEFEND YOUR RIGHTS

Your email is your private business. Your privacy is protected by law. You have the right to be protected from unsolicited messages. If someone collects email addresses without the consent of their owners and uses or misuses them to spread commercial offers or disinformation, the rights of the owners of those e-mail addresses have been violated. If you find yourself in a situation where someone you don't know gets your email address and sends you unsolicited messages, don't be afraid to let them know, like this: *“I no longer wish to receive the messages you are sending me. Please remove me from your address book.”* If the sender does not respect your wishes, remind him that he is acting illegally: *“Allow me to warn you that you are violating my personal rights and privacy. I trust that you will respect my rights.”* If the author puts your address openly in the copy so that others can see it, be more emphatic: *“Immediately stop disseminating my address!”* If nothing helps, we recommend using the following formulation: *“Please stop using my email address to send these unverified messages, because this violates my personal rights and privacy, which is enshrined in Section 81 (2) of the Civil Code. If you continue to send me these messages, I will defend my rights in court.”*

→ RECOGNIZE AND EXPOSE THE “FRAUDSTERS”

Just as some “fraudsters” sell overpriced pots, others sell (spread) deliberately misleading information. The motivations for creating and disseminating intentionally false information are many: ideology, propaganda, political marketing, or earnings from advertising. If someone close to you inadvertently sends you false information, act reasonably with them, but be uncompromising toward the actual originator of the disinformation. Don't get involved in their unfair game. On the contrary, you can become a “detective” who, thanks to methods for verifying information, uncovers disinformation and conspiracies and alerts his loved ones to them. We will advise you how to do it.

DO NOT SEND IT ON

If you have doubts about the credibility of the information and its source, do not forward it to anyone else. The authors of disinformation abuse our lack of time and capacity to verify information and our tendency to often react spontaneously – and we prefer to send shocking information without verification to people we are close to and care about.

VERIFY

If you want to help stop disinformation, start verifying information and then send this verification to the person who sent you the original information. Don't know how to do it? We can help! – Write to us at: transitions@tol.org