

A young boy with dark hair is looking down at a red smartphone he is holding with both hands. He is wearing a light-colored, patterned shirt. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a window or a bright light source. The overall tone is focused and contemplative.

**URBAN
SAINTS**

SCROLLING FOR TRUTH

A leader's article to help discern truth in an online world of misinformation and support young people to live out their faith with wisdom and discernment.

For many young people, exposure to questionable content begins even before they get to school in the morning. A quick scroll on a phone can expose them to a flood of information; rumours on Snapchat, AI edited images that look completely real, Tik Tok videos explaining world events in 30 seconds, conspiracy theories, hot takes and half-truths.

And the thing is, young people aren't just consuming this content. They're sharing it, reacting to it, and building their understanding of the world around it. Without the skills to question what they see, hear or read; the consequences can be damaging.

As youth leaders, we're used to helping young people think about faith, identity and relationships. But increasingly we're also helping them navigate something else: Truth.



Here are just a few of the challenges young people face online.

Damaging Spread of Gossip

Rumours and false information can spread at incredible speed online. For young people, this can quickly escalate into social fallout, damaged friendships and emotional distress that can affect both school and home life.

Algorithmic Echo Chambers

Social media algorithms feed users more of the content they engage with. For teenagers this can quickly create an echo chamber where harmful ideas, unhealthy behaviours or dangerous trends are repeatedly reinforced, making them seem normal or even desirable.

Deepfakes and Distorted Identity

The sharing of intimate deepfakes and AI-generated abuse images is increasing, disproportionately affecting girls (Children's Commissioner, 2025, p.24). At the same time, young people are constantly exposed to filtered and highly edited images online. When every photo appears flawless, it can distort how teenagers see themselves and others. Over time, the line between real life and digitally altered images becomes harder to recognise.



Misinformed Faith Development

Social media has opened up incredible new opportunities for young people to encounter the Christian faith.

Testimonies and conversations about God are now only a few taps away, and many teenagers are exploring spiritual questions online in ways previous generations never could.

However, the internet also exposes young people to teaching and voices that may not be biblically grounded or spiritually healthy. Influencers can present confident answers to complex faith questions in short videos that lack context or accountability. In some cases, Christian language or imagery is even used to promote conspiracy theories, political and religious extremism, or far-right ideologies. Without guidance, it can be difficult for teenagers to recognise when faith is being used to manipulate or mislead.



Young people themselves are not the problem. For many, online spaces reduce isolation, support mental wellbeing, and connect them with peers who understand their experiences, offering a sense of safety and belonging. The challenge comes when the online environment is complex and often misleading. With the right tools, however, young people can learn to navigate it wisely and confidently. As leaders, we also have a voice and a role to play in helping them do so.

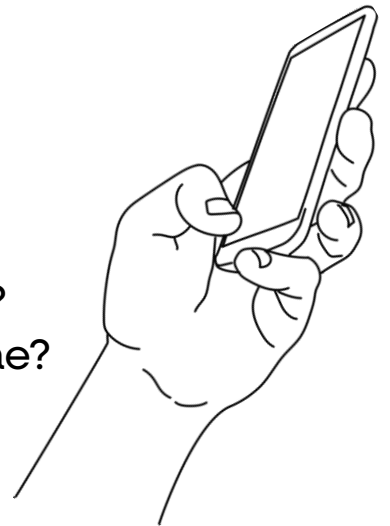
SIFT METHOD

When conversations with young people drift into things they've picked up online, it can help to have the SIFT method in mind. Pioneered by digital literacy expert Mike Caulfield, SIFT offers a simple framework for asking thoughtful questions, helping young people reflect on what they've seen, and guiding conversations that provide both support and gentle challenge. This can apply to anything they encounter online, whether secular or Christian in content.

S - STOP

Before reacting or sharing content with others, take a moment to pause and reflect.

- How confident are you that it's actually true?
- Could this be hurtful or damaging to someone?



I - INVESTIGATE

Look at who created the post, video, or article. Are they someone who knows a lot about this topic? Is it a real organisation, news company, or expert, or just a random account? Sometimes people online pretend to know things when they actually don't, or they might not be correct in the information they are sharing.

- Do you know anything about the person or organisation sharing this?
- Are they qualified to talk about this topic, or are they just sharing an opinion?

F - FIND

Encourage young people not to rely on a single post, video, or influencer. Try looking to see if other trusted and credible places are talking about the same thing. If something is really true or important, other reliable sources will usually report it as well.

- Do other trusted and credible sources agree with the information stated?
- How might you check this out?

T - TRACE

Sometimes pictures, quotes, or stories are shared without the full context. Try to find where the information first came from. Was the photo edited? Was the quote said in a different situation? Going back to the original source can help you understand what really happened.

The same applies to the Bible, it's easy to find Bible verses online that have been interpreted differently to what the wider context of the passage is all about. This is something we should be mindful of as we help young people grapple with faith questions.

- Where did this information come from in the first place?
- If I check the information against the where it came from, does it still hold the same truth?

HELPFUL LINKS

These websites and tools are great for practicing the SIFT Method:

- **Snopes** - snopes.com
A well-known fact-checking site for viral rumours and misinformation.
- **Media Bias/Fact Check** - mediabiasfactcheck.com
Helps assess the bias and factual reporting level of media sources.
- **Wayback Machine** - web.archive.org
View previous versions of web pages or trace deleted content.
- **Google Reverse Image Search**
Useful for checking where an image first appeared online.
- **Reuters Fact Check** - reuters.com/fact-check
Focuses on debunking false claims and viral misinformation.

BONUS ACTIVITY

This site provides fake or fact quizzes for ages under 11 and 11+. internetmatters.org.

REFERENCES

De Souza, R. (Children's Commissioner for England, 2025), 'One day this could happen to me!'

Children, nudification tools and sexually explicit deepfakes.
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