

RESPECT...YOUR DIGITAL RIGHTS AND FOOTPRINT

4. BUILD A THEORY⁸



OUTCOME:

Learn to identify conspiracy theories.



MATERIALS:

Conspiracy theory example, components of conspiracy theories & pieces of information (See Tool below), papers and pencils for the groups, 4 containers or bowls



BE PREPARED:

Select an example of conspiracy theory, that is interesting for your group. Have the theory and the components written for everyone to see.

Group the pieces of information separately and put them in the 4 containers.

WHAT HAPPENS:

1. Start by letting the group know that you have something important to tell them that not many people know. Use a low voice and a meaningful tone to share the example theory with them.

Ask the group what they think about it and then let them know that it is not true, it was a conspiracy theory. What do they know about conspiracy theories?



DISCUSS: What do you know about conspiracy theories? Why do you think conspiracy theories emerge?

When big events happen in our society, they might make the world seem uncertain, unsafe or chaotic. Often our human spontaneous response to these kinds of extraordinary situations is to assume there can only be extraordinary explanations.

For example it is hard to digest that a disaster was just an accident. Or that a deadly virus emerged naturally and became stronger through natural selection. We tend to think 'How can something so important be accidental or have such a simple explanation?'

That is when conspiracy theories tend to arise: 'to explain an event or set of circumstances as the result of a secret plot by usually powerful conspirators' (Definition by the Merriam-Webster dictionary).

They are so appealing to us because they fundamentally proclaim: nothing happens by accident, nothing is as it seems, and everything is connected.

2. But how can we actually tell? Explain that usually conspiracy theories are formed by 4 components. They mention:

- i. A group (maybe one that is different than 'ours' in terms of religion, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation etc.), all governments in the world...
- ii. Is acting in secret, ...have secretly agreed with big tech companies to put chips in medical masks...
- iii. Trying to change 'our' institutions/take the power/hide the truth, ...which send subconscious messages for obedience...
- iv. At the expense of 'our' group, another group or the common good, ...to anyone who might have different political views.

⁸Source: Adapted from Tower Hamlets' Secondary [School Prevent resources](#), 'Conspiracy Theories Lesson'

4. BUILD A THEORY (CONTINUED)

3. Then split into smaller groups. Have each group choose 1 piece of information from each bowl of components:
1. a group, 2. a public figure or entity they are meeting in secret with, 3. what they are trying to do and 4. at whose expense?

With these 4 pieces of information and 10 minutes to prepare, the group that can come up with the most convincing theory, wins. They can add some evidence to back up their theory – maybe something they have heard about or if possible by searching online.

Present theories. Which one was the most convincing and what were some of its strengths and weaknesses?



DISCUSS: what are some risks from spreading conspiracy theories?

Conspiracy theories can promote feelings of helplessness, disillusionment, mistrust, suspicion, and fear leading to the destabilization of the whole of a society. Even among people who don't believe it, the conspiracy theory can damage trust to government services, institutions, organizations, groups of people etc.

TOOL ★ **CONSPIRACY THEORY EXAMPLES**

Select one of the following conspiracy theories to open this activity. You can use other conspiracy theories you know that resonate with your group:

1. 'Big bread' industry paid toaster manufacturers to put in a setting that is too high so that people would burn their toast, meaning that they sell more bread.
2. The recommended food pyramid, that is created by the Food & Drug Administration and shared in most parts of the world, is actually created by the food industry that funds them. So it is not based on a well-balanced diet but it is made in a way that it promotes the food industry's products and they get simple people to spend their money on them.

3. All government secretly experiments on the mentally insane because no one will believe someone with that kind of medical history. Experiments are mostly physical but also mental.
4. Scientists and NASA tell people the earth is a spinning sphere hanging in space, to make people feel small and helpless. But the truth is the earth is flat and immobile.
5. Smartphone batteries: Phones used to have removable batteries and now almost none of them does. This is because law enforcement agencies want to make you think that your phone is powered off when in reality it's just displaying a black screen. That way they can still track you, listen to your conversations and take pictures.

Pieces of information per component

We recommend reviewing these and making any necessary changes in order to include things and people that your group is familiar with.

1. a group: Google, a local or international news agency, the government, Amazon, the food industry, an international airline, teenagers
2. meeting in secret with a public figure/entity: Beyonce, Jacinda Arden, Robert Baden-Powell, pharma industry, Bill Gates, video game industry
3. trying to: get rich from..., take the power from..., hide something..., make use of something..., change..., make a group do something they wouldn't otherwise do.
4. at the expense of: children, businesses, vegans, family men, our nation, our religion/beliefs