



# What Parents & Educators Need to Know about Clickbait

At The National College, our WakeUpWednesday guides empower and equip parents, carers and educators with the confidence and practical skills to be able to have informed and age-appropriate conversations with children about online safety, mental health and wellbeing, and climate change. Formerly delivered by National Online Safety, these guides now address wider topics and themes. For further guides, hints and tips, please visit [nationalcollege.com](https://nationalcollege.com).

## What Parents & Educators Need to Know about CLICKBAIT

Clickbait is a controversial online marketing strategy which uses sensationalist (and frequently misleading) headlines to encourage engagement with an article, image or video – often playing on users' emotions and curiosity, while much of the actual content is of questionable accuracy. Clickbait is also sometimes used to disguise scams, phishing sites and malware.

### WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

- HARMFUL MISINFORMATION**  
Clickbait tends to play fast and loose with the truth, opting for eye-catching content over objectivity. This is particularly dangerous for younger internet users, who are generally more susceptible to this type of material. A child could be presented with false news, misleading articles and – in some cases – outright lies without fully understanding what they're viewing and why it's harmful.
- INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT**  
Due to the misleading nature of many examples of clickbait, what may seem to be innocuous and child-friendly could actually contain age-inappropriate material such as extremist political views or violent, pornographic or sexually explicit content. This is clearly a hazard for young people, who could be upset, disturbed or influenced by exposure to such subject matter.
- HIDDEN MALWARE**  
While most clickbait is simply trying to promote engagement to earn companies additional revenue, some of it does redirect to dubious sites with the potential to infect devices with viruses or malware. This could put a child's sensitive data – such as their name, their location and their date of birth – at risk of being accessed and exploited by malicious hackers.
- PRIVACY PROBLEMS**  
Some clickbait leads to sites which could cause a child to inadvertently share their personal data – using pop-ups to ask them for their email address and phone number, for example, in exchange for accessing additional content or subscribing to various services. Ultimately, this harvested information is then sold to third parties, who often utilise it for targeted adverts and other sales schemes.
- A DRAINING DISTRACTION**  
Clickbait encourages spiralling consumption of online content, which could easily result in a young person spending hours scrolling aimlessly instead of doing something productive or interacting with family and friends. This can leave them tired, stressed and lacking focus – and, in the long term, can negatively impact their social skills, education and mental wellbeing.
- IMPACT ON BEHAVIOUR**  
Depending on the type of clickbait a child is interacting with, you might notice negative changes in their behaviour. Weight loss, for example, are common among clickbait and have the potential to influence eating habits and body image – while deliberately inflammatory 'rage bait' articles can leave impressionable young people feeling hostile, restless or argumentative.

### Advice for Parents & Educators

- START A CONVERSATION**  
The sheer volume of clickbait can make protecting children against it quite challenging. It's vital to talk to young people regularly about the types of content they encounter online, so that they understand the risks of engaging with clickbait. If you're still concerned, it may also be wise to keep an eye on children's online activity to ensure they're not being tempted by clickbait headlines.
- PROMOTE CRITICAL THINKING**  
Encouraging children to question the legitimacy of sensational headlines and too-good-to-be-true promises will help them to become savvy online – and far less likely to be drawn in by clickbait content. These critical thinking skills will also serve to protect them in other areas of the digital world where misinformation is becoming increasingly common.
- SPOT THE TELLTALE SIGNS**  
There are certain common elements in clickbait, including headlines and images that are click-bait to give people a false impression – as well as numbered lists, such as '9 facts you won't believe are true'. Some clickbait combines several of these tactics to snag users' interest. Learn to recognise these techniques for yourself so you can teach children to notice them as well.
- TAKE CONTROL**  
Many parents opt to place limits on how long their children can spend online each day, which obviously reduces the chance of exposure to clickbait. Alternatively, most internet-enabled devices have built-in controls that allow parents to manage what sort of online content their child can access – including filtering by age, which can screen out a percentage of inappropriate material.

### Meet Our Expert

Carly Hage is an experienced technology writer with more than 10 years in the industry. Previously the editor of tech hub The Inquirer, she is now a freelance technology journalist, editor and consultant who writes for Forbes, TechRadar and Wired, among others.

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Around one in five headlines online are clickbait 📰👀 That's an estimate from experts at Stanford University, who conducted a study into this phenomenon which has gradually extended its reach to almost every corner of the internet – powered by a strategy of snagging users' attention by any means necessary rather than a legitimate desire to inform or enlighten 🧠

As that statistic indicates, this manipulative marketing strategy is difficult to avoid online. There's still plenty that can be done though to limit its influence – especially in relation to young people, who are often more susceptible to sensationalist headlines. Today's #WakeUpWednesday guide details the potential hazards around clickbait and has expert tips for avoiding them.

Please [click here](#) to download the guide