

Responding to Negative Comments or Misinformation

Social Media Best Practices

Responding to negative or false engagements on social media can feel challenging. It is always [best practice to respond](#) because

- ✓ it helps build trust and credibility and
- ✓ provides your champions and partners with the information necessary to respond to similar comments in the future.

By validating the user's concerns and providing evidence-based information, you can keep the post from gaining momentum and help educate others who may have the same incorrect perception or knowledge. Use a common risk communication practice called the truth sandwich method to help you write tailored responses.

1) PERSONALIZE YOUR RESPONSE

Each comment and commenter is unique. Begin with something fresh (e.g., thanking them by name/username) and avoid responding with the same message each time. Stock answers can sound insincere and can escalate a situation.

Example: Thank you for sharing your concerns, [insert name].

2) VALIDATE CONCERNS OR FRUSTRATIONS

To build trust and rapport, validate their concerns or frustration and applaud their courage if appropriate.

Example: We share your concerns about [insert point of conflict] and appreciate your interest in the science.

3) TAILOR THE MESSAGE USING A TRUTH SANDWICH

Start with the Truth

Always begin by stating the truthful, evidence-based information that is applicable to the misinformation. The first message frame gets the advantage.

Example: Avoiding any alcohol use throughout pregnancy is the safest thing to do.

Indicate the Misinformation

Identify what the misinformation is without repeating the specific false information. To do this, compare the false information to the truth by highlighting the differences and indicate why the differences are important. A note about transparency: If research has not yet found the answer to the question, do not be afraid to say so.

Example: We know that every pregnancy is different, and some babies may not be affected by alcohol exposure during pregnancy while others may have lifelong behavioral, intellectual, and physical disabilities known as fetal alcohol spectrum disorders. However, it is impossible to know which babies will be affected.

Restate the Truth

Repeat the truth so it is the information that the audience retains. Always repeat the truth more than the false information.

Example: This is why there is no known safe amount, so safe time, and no safe type of alcohol use during pregnancy.

4) INCLUDE A RELEVANT LINK

Share a truly relevant link if appropriate (i.e., no general links that will make them search for the relevant information).

Example: For additional information about prenatal substance use exposure, visit [insert webpage about the topic].

ADDITIONAL TIPS

- **Stay Professional**

When possible, take it to a private conversation. Ask them to email or direct message you through the platform. Always stick to the facts and stay respectful. Don't bring your own opinion into it.

- **Consider Health Literacy**

Use plain language to improve the reader's understanding of your reply. Avoid using health jargon by [identifying and utilizing plain language alternatives](#).

- **Reinforce the Positive**

It can be easy to forget about the positive comments – responding is a great way to reinforce such messages. Replying to positive comments allows you to express gratitude and build communication champions who can help increase your campaign reach.