

CLARITY GUIDES

*In a world full of disinformation, get **Clarity**.*

FAKE NEWS · DEEPFAKES · CLONED VOICES

Real or Fake?

A calm, simple checklist for spotting fake news, doctored photos, deepfakes and cloned voices

◆ **FREE guide** · Checks you can do in 30 seconds

FREE

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WELCOME

About this guide

Every day we scroll past hundreds of headlines, photos, videos and posts. Most are genuine. Some are honest mistakes. A few are made to fool us: to make us angry, to make us click, to sell us something or to steal from us. And the fakes are getting better.

This guide is the Clarity Guides tagline turned into a practical toolkit. You don't need to be good with computers. You don't need special software. Most of the checks take less than a minute, and the most powerful one takes no skill at all: **pause before you believe, share or pay.**

The cover picture is a question mark made of pixels, with a few of them out of place. Many fakes are like that: they look right at a glance, but small things don't add up when you look closer. People have been fooling the eye for centuries. What's new is how fast fakes can now be made and spread.

How to use this guide

- 1 Start with chapters 1 and 2.** Why fakes fool all of us, and the 30-second pause that beats most of them.
- 2 Dip into what you need.** Chapters 3 to 8 each cover one kind of fake: headlines, numbers, photos, videos, voices and profiles.
- 3 Get help from technology.** Chapter 9 shows how everyday AI tools like Grok can help you check, and where they can't.
- 4 Protect the people you love.** Chapters 10 to 12: high-stakes rumours, talking to family, and what to do if you're targeted.
- 5 Practise, then keep the toolkit handy.** Chapter 13 has six worked examples; chapter 14 has tear-out checklists, a practice quiz and a 30-day habit tracker.

IN A WORLD FULL OF DISINFORMATION, GET CLARITY

Every fact, figure and phone number in this guide was checked against an official or original source in October 2026, and the sources are listed at the back. Where we could not confirm something, we say so or leave it out. Some chapters mention using everyday AI tools like Grok to help with a task; always check what they tell you against an official source.

PLEASE NOTE

This guide is general information. It is not legal advice. If you have been threatened, defrauded or had intimate images shared, contact the police and the free services listed at the back. Tools and websites change; the methods in this guide stay useful even when the buttons move.

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CHAPTER ONE · START HERE

Why fakes fool all of us

Being fooled by a fake isn't a sign that you are gullible. Fakes are designed by people who study what grabs attention. They work on clever people, careful people and experts too. The good news is that a few simple habits make a big difference.

Fakes come in many shapes

Fake news

Made-up stories dressed up to look like news, often on websites that copy the look of real newspapers.

Misleading news

Real facts twisted: an old story shared as new, a true photo with a false caption, a number without its context.

Doctored and made-up pictures

Photos that have been edited, or pictures created from scratch by computer software.

Deepfakes

Videos or audio made by computer software (often called AI) to show a real person saying or doing something they never did.

Cloned voices

A copy of someone's voice, made from a short clip, used in phone calls and voice notes.

Fake people

Fake profiles, impersonators and automated accounts that pretend to be someone they're not.

Why our brains are easy to fool

Our brains are built for speed. When we scroll, we make thousands of quick judgements, and most of the time that works fine. Fakes take advantage of a few predictable short-cuts:

1 **Strong feelings switch off checking.**

Stories that make us angry, scared, amazed or smug are the ones we share fastest, and check least.

2 **We trust what fits what we already believe.** If a story agrees with us, it feels true. If it disagrees, we look harder for holes. Everyone does this.

3 **Familiar feels true.** Seeing a claim several times, even from people who are mocking it, makes it feel more believable.

4 **Looks are taken as proof.** A professional logo, a confident voice or a crisp photo all feel trustworthy, and all are easy to fake.

5 **We trust friends.** A story shared by a friend borrows their trust, even though they probably didn't check it either.

What the evidence says

- **False news travels further and faster.** A large study of around 126,000 stories shared on Twitter between 2006 and 2017 found that false stories were 70% more likely to be shared than true ones, and true stories took about six times as long to reach 1,500 people. The researchers found that people, not automated “bots”, were mainly responsible.³
- **Most of us have seen it.** Ofcom’s 2026 survey found that 56% of UK adults who use social media said they had seen false or misleading news in the past year, rising to 65% of those aged 16 to 34.¹
- **Few people feel able to spot deepfakes.** In Ofcom’s 2024 polling, 43% of people aged 16 and over said they had seen at least one deepfake in the previous six months, but fewer than one in ten (9%) felt confident they could identify one.²

CLARITY TIP

You don't have to become a detective. Most fakes fall apart with one simple question: **"Where did this come from, and who else is reporting it?"** The next chapter turns that into a 30-second habit.

Quick self-check: how do you scroll?

HABIT**OFTEN SOMETIMES RARELY**

I share things before
reading past the headline

I share things because
they made me angry or
excited

I check who posted
something before believing
it

I look for the same story
from another source

I've shared something that
turned out to be false

There are no wrong answers. This is just your starting point. Come back to it after a month of using the habits in this guide.

02

CHAPTER TWO · THE CORE HABIT

The 30-second pause

Professional fact-checkers don't have magic tools. What they do differently is simple: they stop, they check who is behind a claim, and they look at what other people say about it, before they believe it. You can do the same in about 30 seconds.

The STOP check

Our STOP check is adapted from a method called SIFT, developed by the digital literacy researcher Mike Caulfield and widely taught in schools and universities.⁴

- 1 S – Stop.** Notice how the post makes you feel. Strong feelings are a signal to slow down, not speed up. Don't share, comment or pay yet.

2 T – Trace who's behind it. Who posted it?

Is it a real news organisation, an official body, an expert, a stranger, or an account you've never heard of? Search their name and see what others say about them.

3 O – Other sources. Is anyone else reporting this? If something huge has happened, several well-known news organisations will have it within minutes. If only one website has it, be very careful.**4 P – Picture the original.** Find where the claim, photo or quote first came from. Is it as new as it seems? Was the quote cut short? Does the full video show something different?

READ SIDEWAYS, NOT DOWN

When most of us land on a website, we read down the page, look at the logo and the “About us” section, and decide if it looks trustworthy. Professional fact-checkers do something different: they open a new tab and search for the website or person’s name, to see what *other* people say about them. This is called **lateral reading**.

What the evidence says

- **Fact-checkers beat historians and students.** In a Stanford study, 10 professional fact-checkers, 10 history PhDs and 25 university students judged real websites. The fact-checkers reached better judgements, faster, because they left the website and checked it from the outside. The historians and students were more easily fooled by official-looking logos and web addresses.⁵
- **Just thinking about accuracy helps.** In a series of experiments, including one on Twitter, simply prompting people to think about whether a headline was accurate improved the quality of the news they went on to share. The researchers concluded that many people share false news not because they believe it, but because they weren't thinking about accuracy at that moment.⁶

The three questions to ask every time

Who made this?

A person, an organisation, an advertiser, an anonymous account? What do they gain if I believe it?

What's the evidence?

Is there a source, a link, a named document, a date? Or just “people are saying”?

What do others say?

Do trusted news outlets, official bodies or fact-checkers agree, disagree or say nothing?

How do I feel?

If the answer is “furious”, “terrified” or “I knew it!”, that's the moment to check.

Practise the pause

Next time a post makes you feel something strongly, write it down here and try the STOP check. After a few weeks, it becomes automatic.

DATE	WHAT I SAW	HOW IT MADE ME FEEL	WHAT STOP FOUND

03

CHAPTER THREE · STORIES AND HEADLINES

Misleading headlines and fake news sites

Most misleading news isn't completely invented. It is usually something real that has been stretched, cut, re-dated or relabelled. Learning the common tricks makes them much easier to spot.

Seven common tricks

THE TRICK	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	THE CHECK
Old news, new date	A real story from years ago shared as if it happened today.	Look for the date on the original article. Search the headline with the year.
The misleading headline	A headline that says more than the story does. The article itself says "may", "could" or "in mice".	Read past the headline before sharing. Check the last few paragraphs, where caveats often hide.

THE TRICK	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	THE CHECK
The copycat website	A site that looks like a well-known newspaper or broadcaster, with a slightly different web address.	Check the address carefully. Go to the real site by typing its name yourself and search for the story.
Satire taken seriously	A joke article from a comedy website, shared as if it were real.	Check the site's "About" page, or search its name with the word "satire".
The cut quote	A real quote with the important part left out.	Find the full speech, interview or document.
Wrong place, wrong event	A real photo or video from a different country, year or event.	Use a reverse image search (chapter 5).
"They don't want you to know"	Claims that "the media won't report this".	If it were true and big, someone would report it. Check reliable outlets and fact-checkers.

Signs a news website might not be what it seems

- ☐ No named authors, or authors you can't find anywhere else

- ☐ No address, no “contact us” and no corrections policy
- ☐ Lots of adverts, pop-ups and “you won’t believe” links
- ☐ Headlines in CAPITAL LETTERS and lots of exclamation marks!!!
- ☐ A web address that mimics a real outlet, with an extra word or odd ending
- ☐ Every story pushes the same angle or the same product
- ☐ Stories that no other news outlet is carrying

WATCH OUT: FAKE NEWS THAT SELLS

Fake celebrity news stories are one of the most common ways people are tricked into scam investments. A well-known face “reveals” a money-making secret on what looks like a news site. Real celebrities don’t share get-rich-quick tips through adverts. See chapter 8.

Where to check a story

If a story is being widely shared, a fact-checker may already have looked at it. Search the claim with the words “fact check”. In the UK, independent fact-checkers include Full Fact, BBC Verify and Reuters Fact Check.⁷ For official facts, go straight to the source: GOV.UK and mygov.scot for government rules, NHS inform for health in Scotland, and the organisation itself for anything about a company or charity.

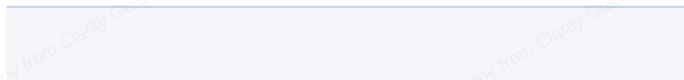
CLARITY TIP

Bookmark three trusted news sources from different points of view, and one fact-checker. When something big breaks, check those first, before social media.

Headline detective: try it yourself

Pick three headlines you see this week that seem surprising. For each one, read the full article and note whether the story actually supports the headline.

HEADLINE	DOES THE ARTICLE BACK IT UP?	WHAT WAS LEFT OUT?
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04

CHAPTER FOUR · NUMBERS

Numbers that mislead

Numbers feel like hard facts, which is exactly why they are so useful to people who want to mislead. The number itself may be true; the trick is in what it's compared with, or what's left out.

Relative risk vs real risk

“Doubles your risk!” sounds frightening. But double a tiny risk is still a small risk. Always ask:

“Out of how many?”

THE HEADLINE

“Eating this food raises your risk of a rare illness by 50%!”

THE REAL PICTURE

If the illness affects 2 in every 10,000 people, a 50% rise means 3 in every 10,000. That's 1 extra case for every 10,000 people.

Five number tricks to watch for

- 1 No comparison.** “5,000 cases!” Is that more or less than usual? Out of how many people?
- 2 Percentages of tiny numbers.** “Up 300%” may mean it went from 1 to 4.
- 3 Cherry-picked dates.** Starting a graph at an unusual high or low point can make almost any trend look dramatic.

4 Squashed or stretched charts. A chart axis that starts at 95 instead of 0 makes a small change look huge. Check the numbers on the side.

5 Average hides the range. An “average” can be pulled up by a few very large figures. Ask about the typical person.

The same number, two stories

Here's a made-up example to show how one fact can be told two ways:

VERSION A	VERSION B
“Crime soars by a third in our town!”	“Reported thefts rose from 9 to 12 this year.”
“Half of people are worried about X.”	“Half of the 40 people who replied to an online poll on a campaign website said they were worried.”

Both versions use true numbers. Version B gives you what you need to judge for yourself: the real size and where the number came from.

Who did the survey?

- ☐ Who paid for the survey or study?
- ☐ How many people took part?
- ☐ Were they chosen fairly, or did they choose themselves (like an online poll)?
- ☐ What exactly were they asked?
- ☐ Has the result been published in full?
- ☐ Do other studies find the same thing?

CLARITY TIP

Official UK statistics come from the Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk) and, in Scotland, from the Scottish Government's statistics pages (gov.scot/statistics) and National Records of Scotland (nrsotland.gov.uk). If a dramatic statistic claims to be "official", look for it there.

Practice: spot the missing piece

For each claim below, write the one question you'd ask before believing it.

CLAIM

MY QUESTION

“Sales of this supplement are up 400%!”

“9 out of 10 people prefer it.”

“Cases have doubled since last week.”

“The average saving is £500.”

05

CHAPTER FIVE · PICTURES

Fake and doctored photos

Photos used to feel like proof. Today, a picture can be edited in seconds or created from nothing by software. The good news: you don't need to be an expert to check where a picture came from.

Three kinds of fake picture

The real photo, false story

The most common kind. A genuine photo from somewhere else, given a new caption. A flood from 2015 becomes “today's storm”.

The edited photo

Something added, removed or changed: a crowd made bigger, a sign changed, two photos joined together.

The made-up picture

An image created entirely by computer software from a written description. Nothing in it ever existed.

The screenshot

A “screenshot” of a post, message or news page. These are very easy to fake and very hard to check.

Reverse image search: your best tool

A reverse image search lets you search the internet *with a picture* instead of words. It shows you where else the picture appears, and often when it first appeared. It's free and takes seconds.

- 1 On a phone.** In the Google app or Chrome, press and hold on the picture and choose “Search with Google Lens” (or similar). On an iPhone, you can also save the picture and use the Google app's camera icon.

- 2 **On a computer.** Right-click the picture and choose “Search image with Google”, or upload it to images.google.com, tineye.com or bing.com/images.
- 3 **Look at the results.** Sort by oldest if you can (TinEye lets you). Has the picture been around for years? Does it appear with a different story?
- 4 **Check the earliest version.** The oldest copy, from a reliable source, usually tells you the real story.

Close-up clues (helpful, not proof)

Computer-made pictures used to give themselves away with odd hands, melted text or strange ears. The software has improved a lot, so these clues are less reliable than they were. If you spot one, be suspicious; if you don't, that doesn't prove the picture is real.

- ☐ Writing on signs, shirts or books that is jumbled or nonsense

- ☐ Hands, fingers, teeth, ears or jewellery that don't look right
- ☐ Skin that looks too smooth, like plastic
- ☐ Backgrounds that melt, blur or repeat oddly
- ☐ Shadows and reflections that don't match the light
- ☐ Lines that should be straight (doors, tiles, railings) that bend

What the evidence says

- **Our eyes are no longer enough.** In a 2022 study, people trying to tell real faces from computer-made faces scored 48.2%, about the same as guessing. With training and feedback they improved only to 59%. The computer-made faces were even rated as slightly *more* trustworthy than real ones.⁸
- **Labels are coming, slowly.** Some cameras, apps and websites now attach “Content Credentials”, a kind of digital label showing how a picture was made or edited. You can check a picture at verify.contentauthenticity.org. But most pictures don’t carry one yet, and a missing label doesn’t mean a picture is fake.⁹

CLARITY TIP

Look for the label too. Many social media sites now add a label saying a picture was made or edited with software, or a community note under a misleading post. These are useful clues, but they are not added to everything.

Picture check worksheet

QUESTION	ANSWER
Where did I see it?	
Who posted it first?	
What does a reverse image search show?	
Earliest date I can find	
Is the caption accurate?	
Verdict: real / fake / unsure	

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CHAPTER SIX · VIDEO

Deepfake videos

A deepfake is a video in which a real person's face, voice or both have been swapped or created by computer software, so they appear to say or do something they never did. Some are jokes. Some are used to sell scams, damage reputations or spread lies.

Where you're most likely to meet one

- **Scam adverts:** a famous presenter, business person or politician appears to recommend an investment, a cryptocurrency or a miracle product.
- **Political clips:** a leader appears to say something shocking, often just before an election or during a crisis.
- **Fake news reports:** a familiar-looking newsreader "reports" a story that never ran.

- **Harassment:** fake intimate or embarrassing videos of real people, often women (see chapter 12).
- **Funny or satirical clips:** often harmless, but they can be re-shared without the joke label.

What to look and listen for

These clues can help, but newer deepfakes may show none of them. Treat them as reasons to check further, not as proof either way.

LOOK

- Lips not quite matching the words
- Blinking that looks odd, or too little
- Blurring where the face meets the hair, neck or glasses
- Skin tone or lighting that changes suddenly
- Teeth or the inside of the mouth looking smudged

LISTEN

- A voice that sounds flat, too smooth or oddly paced
- Breathing sounds missing
- Background noise that cuts in and out

- Words that are unusual for that person
- A message that pushes you to act right now

What the evidence says

- **We are worse at this than we think.** In a 2021 experiment, 210 people tried to spot deepfake videos. They did little better than chance, tended to assume the videos were real, and were more confident in their own ability than their results justified. Offering a cash reward for getting it right didn't help.¹⁰
- **Confidence is low too.** In Ofcom's 2024 polling, only 9% of people aged 16 and over felt confident they could identify a deepfake.²

THE BEST DEEPPFAKE CHECK ISN'T IN THE VIDEO

Because spotting fakes by eye is so unreliable, the strongest checks are the same as for any other claim: **Who posted it? Is the person's own official account or website saying the same thing? Are trusted news outlets reporting it?** A real statement from a public figure will appear on their verified channels and be widely reported.

Video check: step by step

- 1 Pause.** Don't share, comment or click any link in the video.
- 2 Check the account.** Is it the person's official, long-standing account? Or a new account with a similar name?
- 3 Search the claim.** Type the person's name and a few words of what they "said" into a search engine, with "fact check".

- 4 **Find the original.** Take a screenshot of a key moment and reverse image search it. The original clip may show something quite different.
- 5 **If it's selling something, assume it's a scam.** Real public figures do not promote investments in pop-up adverts.

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CHAPTER SEVEN · VOICES

Cloned voices and fake calls

Software can now copy a voice from a short recording, such as a video posted online or a voicemail greeting. Criminals use cloned voices to pretend to be a family member in trouble, a boss asking for an urgent payment, or a bank or police officer.

How the “family emergency” scam works

- 1 A call or voice note arrives.** It sounds just like your son, daughter, grandchild or partner. They're upset.
- 2 There's a crisis.** They've been in an accident, arrested, mugged abroad, or lost their phone and bank card.

- 3 **There's urgency and secrecy.** "Please don't tell Mum." "I need it now." Someone else may come on the line claiming to be a lawyer or police officer.
- 4 **They ask for money.** Usually a bank transfer to an unfamiliar account, gift cards or cash to be collected.

What the evidence says

- **Our ears can be fooled about a quarter of the time.** In a UCL study published in 2023, 529 people listened to real and computer-made speech in English and Mandarin. They correctly identified the fake speech only 73% of the time, and practice made only a small difference. The researchers warned that people cannot reliably detect speech deepfakes.¹¹

Your family code word

Police Scotland advises agreeing a code word with family members that a caller would have to know, and calling the person back on a number you already have for them, never a number the caller gives you.¹²

SET UP YOUR CODE WORD TODAY

- Choose a word or short phrase that's easy to remember but not guessable from social media (not a pet's name or a birthday).
- Share it face to face or on a call you started, not by text or email.
- Agree: *if anyone ever asks for money in an emergency, we ask for the word.*
- Don't say the word first, ask the caller for it.

If you get a call like this

- ☐ Stay calm. Real emergencies can wait two minutes while you check.

- ☐ Ask a question only the real person would know, or ask for the code word.
- ☐ Hang up and call the person back on the number you already have.
- ☐ If you can't reach them, call another family member who can.
- ☐ Never move money because a caller tells you to, even if they say they are police or your bank.
- ☐ Banks and the police will never ask you to move money to a "safe account".

FREE HELP

Call 159 to reach your bank safely if you think a call is a scam (works for most UK banks). **Police Scotland:** 101 to report, or 999 if a crime is happening now. **Advice Direct Scotland:** 0808 164 6000 (consumeradvice.scot) for scam advice. Forward scam texts free to **7726**.

Protect your own voice

- Think about who can see videos where you speak; consider making social media accounts private.
- Use a plain voicemail greeting, or the phone's standard one, rather than a long recording of your voice.
- Be wary of unexpected calls that keep you talking with no clear purpose.

08

CHAPTER EIGHT · PEOPLE

Fake profiles, bots and impersonators

Not everyone online is who they say they are. Fake accounts are used to spread rumours, make ideas look more popular than they are, run romance and investment scams, and impersonate real people and companies.

Signs of a fake or automated account

- ☐ The account is very new, or was renamed recently
- ☐ Few personal details, or a profile photo that's a stock image or a celebrity
- ☐ Posts all day and night, often the same message many times
- ☐ Lots of followers but very little real conversation

- ☐ A name followed by a long string of numbers
- ☐ Only ever posts about one topic, often angrily
- ☐ Replies to many people with almost identical comments
- ☐ Messages you out of the blue with flattery, a job offer or an investment

Fake celebrity endorsements

One of the most common scams online uses fake celebrity endorsements, sometimes with deepfake video, to promote investments, cryptocurrency, diet pills and “free” offers. If you see a suspected scam advert online, you can report it to the Advertising Standards Authority using its online scam ad form, as well as to the website or app showing it.¹³

Romance and friendship fakes

Fake profiles are used to build a relationship over weeks or months, before asking for money for an emergency, a medical bill, travel or an

“investment”. Warning signs include: they can never video call (or the video is always poor), they quickly profess strong feelings, they have a reason to be far away (oil rig, army, overseas work), and they eventually need money.

CLARITY TIP

Reverse image search a new contact's profile photos (chapter 5). If the same photos appear under different names, it's a fake.

Impersonation of companies and officials

- Fake customer service accounts that reply when you complain publicly about a company, then ask for your details.
- Fake “official” pages for councils, charities and government schemes.
- Fake “giveaway” pages using a real brand's logo.

Always contact a company through the details on its own website, or on a bill or card you already have, never through a link or account that contacted you.

ACCOUNT NAME	WHY I WAS SUSPICIOUS	WHAT I FOUND
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09

CHAPTER NINE · A HELPING HAND

Using everyday AI tools like Grok to help you check

Everyday AI tools like Grok can be a useful assistant when you're trying to work out whether something is true. They can explain, summarise and suggest where to look. But they can also be wrong, and they should never be the final word.

What they're good for

Explaining

“Explain in plain English what this news story is claiming.” Useful for long or technical articles.

Questions to ask

“What questions should I ask to check whether this claim is true?”

Where to look

“Which official UK organisation would publish figures on this?”

Spotting tricks

“Is there anything misleading about how this statistic is presented?”

What they're not good for

- **Proving a picture or video is real.** These tools can't reliably tell you whether an image or clip is genuine. Use the checks in chapters 5 and 6.
- **Breaking news.** Information about something that happened in the last few hours may be missing, incomplete or wrong.
- **Being certain.** They can sound very confident while being completely wrong, and occasionally invent sources that don't exist.

- **Personal legal, medical or money decisions.** Use them to prepare questions, then speak to a qualified professional or an official service.

THE GOLDEN RULE

Always check what these tools tell you against an official or original source. If they give you a link or a reference, open it and make sure it really says what you were told.

Good questions to ask

INSTEAD OF...	TRY...
"Is this true?"	"What is the original source for this claim, and what do reliable news organisations or fact-checkers say about it? Please give links I can check."
"Is this photo fake?"	"What steps can I take to find where this photo first appeared?"
"Should I invest in this?"	"What are the warning signs of an investment scam, and how do I check whether a firm is authorised by the FCA?"

INSTEAD OF...

TRY...

“Tell me about this cure.”

“What does the NHS say about this treatment, and what does the research evidence show?”

Privacy first

- ☐ Don't paste in bank details, passwords, PINs or full card numbers
- ☐ Don't share other people's private information or photos
- ☐ Remove names and addresses from documents before asking for help with them
- ☐ Check the tool's privacy settings

IO

CHAPTER TEN · HIGH STAKES

Health, money and emergency rumours

Some fakes are just annoying. Others can cost you your savings or your health. When a claim is about medicine, money or an emergency, slow right down and go straight to the official source.

Health claims

Be very careful with posts promising miracle cures, claiming a treatment is being “hidden”, or telling you to stop a prescribed medicine.

Before acting on any health claim:

- Check NHS inform (nhsinform.scot) or the NHS website (nhs.uk).
- Ask your pharmacist, who can advise for free without an appointment.

- Never stop or change prescribed medicine without speaking to your GP or pharmacist.
- Be suspicious of anyone selling the “cure” they’re telling you about.

Money claims

Fake investment opportunities are often dressed up as news or recommended by fake celebrities. Before you invest, check whether the firm is authorised on the Financial Conduct Authority’s register and whether it appears on the FCA Warning List of firms to avoid, both at [fca.org.uk](https://www.fca.org.uk).¹⁴

- ☐ Promises of high returns with little or no risk
- ☐ Pressure to decide quickly, or a “limited time” offer
- ☐ Contact out of the blue, by phone, social media or message
- ☐ Asked to pay in cryptocurrency or by bank transfer to a person

- ☐ A celebrity or “expert” you’ve only seen in an advert

Emergencies and breaking news

During storms, floods, outbreaks or major incidents, false rumours spread fast, along with real photos from past events. Rely on official channels:

- **Ready Scotland** (ready.scot) for emergency advice in Scotland.
- **Police Scotland** and your local council’s official social media accounts and websites.
- **Met Office** weather warnings (metoffice.gov.uk).
- **SEPA** flood alerts (floodline.sepa.org.uk).
- Trusted national and local news organisations.

CLARITY TIP

In a fast-moving story, the first reports are often wrong, even from honest sources. It's fine to wait a few hours before deciding what really happened.

II

CHAPTER ELEVEN · FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Talking to people who share fakes

Most people who share false information aren't lying. They believe it, or they're worried and want to warn others. How we respond makes a big difference to whether they listen.

Do's and don'ts

DON'T

- Mock or shame them, especially in public
- Pile on with lots of links at once
- Turn it into an argument about who's clever
- Repeat the false claim loudly in your reply

DO

- Message privately and kindly
- Start with what you agree on: "I can see why that worried you."
- Share one good source
- Lead with the true fact, then mention the myth
- Ask questions: "Where did this come from?"

What the evidence says

- **Corrections usually help.** It's sometimes claimed that correcting people makes them believe a falsehood more (a "backfire effect"). A set of experiments with more than 10,000 people found this was rare: most people moved towards the accurate information when corrected, even on politically charged topics.¹⁵
- **Warning in advance can help.** "Prebunking" means explaining the tricks before people meet them. A study of an online game that teaches common misinformation tactics found players rated fake headlines as less reliable afterwards. Later research suggests some of the effect may be people becoming more sceptical of everything, so prebunking works best alongside the habit of checking.¹⁶

A message you could send

EXAMPLE

"Hi, I saw the post you shared about [topic]. I can see why it's worrying. I looked into it, and it looks like the photo is actually from [year/place]. Here's where I found that: [link]. Thought you'd want to know!"

Helping older relatives

- Share this guide, or go through the STOP check together.
- Set up a family code word (chapter 7).
- Agree that anyone can ask "is this real?" without feeling silly.
- Help them set up privacy settings and block unknown callers if they want to.

Helping children and teenagers

- Talk about how pictures and videos can be made or edited, using examples.

- Encourage them to tell you if they see something upsetting or are asked for pictures.
- Ofcom's research shows children see deepfakes too; half of 8 to 15-year-olds in its 2024 polling said they had seen one in the previous six months.²

I2

CHAPTER TWELVE · IF IT HAPPENS TO YOU

Reporting fakes and getting help

If you see a fake, you can report it. If you're targeted by one, whether it's a fake account using your name, a scam that took money, or a fake intimate image, there is free, confidential help.

Reporting a fake post or account

- 1 Report it on the platform.** Use the three dots (...) or the "report" option on the post or profile. Choose the closest reason, such as "false information", "scam" or "impersonation".
- 2 Report scam adverts.** Use the Advertising Standards Authority's online scam ad form, too.

- 3 Report scam emails and texts.** Forward emails to report@phishing.gov.uk and texts to 7726.
- 4 Get help with harmful content.** If a platform won't act on content such as threats, impersonation or harassment, Report Harmful Content can advise UK residents aged 13 and over.¹⁹

Fake intimate images

In Scotland, it is a criminal offence to share, or threaten to share, an image or film that shows or appears to show someone in an intimate situation, without their consent, if it is intended to cause, or is reckless about causing, fear, alarm or distress. The law specifically includes images that have been altered, which covers deepfakes. The Scottish Government consulted in 2026 on new offences about creating such images.¹⁷

FREE, CONFIDENTIAL HELP

Police Scotland: 101, or 999 in an emergency. **Revenge Porn Helpline:** 0345 6000 459, Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm, for adults in the UK. **StopNCII.org:** a free tool for adults that creates a digital fingerprint of an image on your own device, so taking-part platforms can block it, without you uploading the image.¹⁸ If you're under 18, Childline's Report Remove tool can help (childline.org.uk).

If a fake account is pretending to be you

- ☐ Screenshot the fake profile and any messages (with the date)
- ☐ Report it to the platform as impersonation
- ☐ Warn friends and family, from your real account, not to respond
- ☐ If it's being used for fraud, report it to Police Scotland on 101

If you lost money

Contact your bank immediately using the number on your card or by calling 159. Then report it to Police Scotland on 101. Fast action gives the best chance of stopping payments. Under UK rules introduced in October 2024, many victims of bank transfer scams can be reimbursed by their bank; ask your bank about this.

WHAT HAPPENED	DATE	WHO I REPORTED IT TO	REFERENCE NUMBER

I3

CHAPTER THIRTEEN · PRACTICE

Six worked examples

Here are six made-up but realistic examples, based on the kinds of fakes fact-checkers see every week. For each one, try the STOP check yourself before reading how we'd tackle it.

Example 1: The shark on the motorway

WHAT YOU SEE

A photo of a shark swimming along a flooded road is shared during a storm, captioned “This is the A92 right now!”

- **Stop:** it's amazing and scary, the perfect mix for sharing.
- **Trace:** posted by an account with no local connection.

- **Other sources:** no local news, council or police mention it.
- **Picture the original:** a reverse image search shows the same picture shared during storms in several countries over many years.

Verdict: Fake. A recycled image that appears whenever there's a flood somewhere.

Example 2: The “new law” screenshot

WHAT YOU SEE

A screenshot of a news article says pensioners will lose their bus passes from next month. It has a newspaper logo but no link.

- **Stop:** it's worrying and affects many people.
- **Trace:** no link, just a picture of an article.
- **Other sources:** nothing on the newspaper's own website, nothing on mygov.scot or Transport Scotland.

- **Picture the original:** the fonts don't quite match the real newspaper.

Verdict: Fake. Screenshots are easy to make up. Check the official source (here, mygov.scot) for any change to entitlements.

Example 3: The presenter's secret

WHAT YOU SEE

A video advert shows a well-known TV presenter saying they made thousands with a trading app, with a link to sign up.

- **Stop:** it promises money and uses a trusted face.
- **Trace:** it's a paid advert from an account with a random name.
- **Other sources:** the presenter's official accounts say nothing; searching their name with "scam" shows warnings.
- **Picture the original:** the lips don't quite match the words.

Verdict: Scam using a deepfake. Report it to the platform and the ASA. Don't click the link.

Example 4: The study that “proves” it

WHAT YOU SEE

A post claims “Scientists prove coffee cures dementia!” and links to a real university news page.

- **Stop:** a big health claim with an exciting headline.
- **Trace:** the university page is real.
- **Other sources:** the page describes a study in mice that found a possible link and says more research is needed.
- **Picture the original:** the post exaggerated the study.

Verdict: Misleading. A real study, stretched far beyond what it found.

Example 5: The panicked voice note

WHAT YOU SEE

A voice note from “your daughter”: she’s lost her phone and bank card on holiday and needs £400 sent to a friend’s account.

- **Stop:** urgency, money, a new account and a family member in trouble.
- **Trace:** the message came from an unknown number.
- **Other sources:** you call your daughter on her usual number; she answers from the beach, phone in hand.
- **Picture the original:** her voice was probably copied from a video she posted.

Verdict: Scam using a cloned voice. Report to Police Scotland on 101 and tell your daughter to make her accounts private.

Example 6: The protest photo

WHAT YOU SEE

A photo shows huge crowds at a protest “yesterday”.

- **Stop:** it confirms what many people already think.
- **Trace:** shared by a campaign account.
- **Other sources:** news reports mention a protest, but a much smaller one.
- **Picture the original:** reverse image search finds the photo from a different event three years earlier.

Verdict: Misleading. A real photo with a false caption.

Your turn

Find one doubtful post this week and work through it the same way.

STEP	WHAT I FOUND
What I saw	
S – How it made me feel	
T – Who posted it	
O – What others say	
P – The original	
My verdict	

I4

CHAPTER FOURTEEN · YOUR TOOLKIT

The Real-or-Fake toolkit

Everything from this guide on a few pages. Keep them by the computer, stick one on the fridge, or photograph them so they're always on your phone.

The STOP check card

STEP	ASK YOURSELF
S – Stop	How does this make me feel? Am I about to share, comment or pay in a hurry?
T – Trace	Who posted this? What do others say about them?
O – Other sources	Who else is reporting this? What do fact-checkers say?
P – Picture the original	Where did this first appear? Is it as new and complete as it looks?

Quick checks by type

IF IT'S A...	DO THIS
Headline	Read the full article. Check the date.
Website	Check the web address. Search the site's name.
Number	Ask: out of how many? Compared with what? Who says?
Photo	Reverse image search. Look for the oldest copy.
Video	Check the account and the person's official channels.
Voice call	Ask for the code word. Hang up and call back.
Profile	Check age of account. Reverse search the photo.
Advert	If a celebrity is selling an investment, it's a scam.

Practice quiz

Answers are on the next page. No peeking!

- 1.** A friend shares a dramatic photo of flooding “in town today”. What’s the fastest check?
- 2.** A video shows a famous TV presenter recommending a new investment app. What should you assume?
- 3.** You get a voice note from your grandson saying he’s been arrested abroad and needs money. What do you do first?
- 4.** A headline says a food “triples your risk” of an illness. What question do you ask?
- 5.** A news website looks like the BBC, but the address is `bbc-news-today.co`. Real or fake?
- 6.** Everyday AI tools like Grok tell you a quote is genuine and give a link. What should you do?
- 7.** A post says “share before they delete this!”. What does that tell you?
- 8.** Someone you met online can never video call but needs money for a medical bill. What is this most likely to be?

Quiz answers

- 1.** Reverse image search it to see whether it's an older photo or from somewhere else, and check local news and official accounts.
- 2.** Assume it's a scam. Real presenters don't promote investments in adverts; deepfake videos are common.
- 3.** Stay calm, ask for your family code word, then hang up and call him (or his parents) on a number you already have.
- 4.** "Out of how many?" Find the real risk, not just the relative change.
- 5.** Almost certainly fake. Type the real address yourself (bbc.co.uk) and search for the story.
- 6.** Open the link and check it really says that, ideally on the original or official source.
- 7.** It's a classic sign of manipulation, designed to make you share without checking.
- 8.** A romance scam. Stop contact, don't send money, and report the profile.

Your 30-day Clarity habit

Tick a box each day you use the STOP check before sharing something. Thirty days is enough to make it feel natural.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
Day 11	Day 12	Day 13	Day 14	Day 15
Day 16	Day 17	Day 18	Day 19	Day 20
Day 21	Day 22	Day 23	Day 24	Day 25
Day 26	Day 27	Day 28	Day 29	Day 30

Our family online safety plan

Fill this in together and keep a copy where everyone can find it.

PLAN

OUR ANSWER

Our family code word is
agreed (don't write it here!)

Who we call first to check a
worrying message

Our bank's number (from
the back of the card)

Who helps with privacy
settings

Accounts we've made
private

Date we last reviewed this
plan

My trusted sources

TYPE	MY CHOICE
News source 1	
News source 2 (different view)	
Local news	
Fact-checker	
Health	
Money	
Emergencies	

REFERENCE

Free help and useful contacts

Police Scotland

101 (non-emergency) · 999 in an emergency · scotland.police.uk

Your bank (159)

Call 159 to reach your bank safely if you think a call or message is a scam

Advice Direct Scotland

0808 164 6000 · Mon–Fri 9am–5pm · consumeradvice.scot (scams and consumer advice)

Scam texts and emails

Forward texts to 7726 · emails to report@phishing.gov.uk

Scam adverts

Advertising Standards Authority online scam ad form · asa.org.uk

Revenge Porn Helpline

0345 6000 459 · Mon–Fri 10am–4pm · revengepornhelpline.org.uk · StopNCII.org

Report Harmful Content

reportharmfulcontent.com · advice on reporting harmful content (UK, aged 13+)

Childline

0800 1111 · childline.org.uk (including Report Remove for under-18s)

Financial Conduct Authority

fca.org.uk/scamsmart · check the FCA Register and Warning List

Fact-checkers

Full Fact (fullfact.org) · BBC Verify · Reuters Fact Check

**Content
Credentials**

verify.contentauthenticity.org (check for a picture's digital label)

Ready Scotland

ready.scot · official emergency advice

NHS inform

0800 22 44 88 · nhsinform.scot · reliable health information for Scotland

REFERENCE

Glossary

Bot

An automated account that posts or replies without a person typing each message.

Clickbait

A headline designed to make you click, often by exaggerating.

Content Credentials

A digital label attached to some pictures and videos showing how they were made or edited.

Deepfake

A video, picture or audio clip made or changed by computer software to show a real person doing or saying something they didn't.

Disinformation

False information spread on purpose to mislead.

Fact-checker

An organisation that checks claims and publishes what the evidence shows.

Lateral reading

Leaving a website to check what other sources say about it.

Misinformation

False information spread by people who may believe it is true.

Prebunking

Learning about a trick before you meet it, so it's easier to spot.

Reverse image search

Searching the internet using a picture instead of words.

Satire

Humour that uses exaggeration or made-up stories to make a point.

Voice cloning

Using software to copy someone's voice from a recording.

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A CLARITY GUIDE

Real or Fake?

Making the confusing clear.

PUBLISHED BY CLARITY GUIDES

*In a world full of disinformation, get **Clarity**.*

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