

Online safety and social media guidelines for staff and volunteers

GI's profile is rising rapidly, but as a charitable organisation we may receive less general support compared to our colleagues at other comparable, high-profile organisations.

This makes us vulnerable to external attacks and reputational damage, particularly in the press and on social media. Although many people across many lines of work keep their online presence and their work life separate ("my views do not represent those of my employer") the sensitive nature of our work and the current state of trans issues in the media means that we are all assumed to be representatives of GI, and of the trans community more widely, regardless of how much we may seek to draw a line between them.

These guidelines are intended for all GI staff and volunteers to help safeguard our organisation – *and, importantly, ourselves* – online.

Misinformation and fact-checking

Trans issues are particularly prone to misinformation. While this often takes the form of anti-trans groups and individuals deliberately spreading misinformation, it can also occur within the community.

Example

When the planned closure of GIDS was announced, many media outlets incorrectly reported this as the end of child gender identity services in England. This was then repeated by some community sources, causing needless panic.

Because many in the trans community treat GI - both our official and unofficial channels - as a reliable source, it's important for us to take extra precautions against misinformation.

Remember:

- **Verify information before sharing it.** Sometimes claims get exaggerated or distorted online - particularly if they're distressing or concerning. If something is being shared widely then ask yourself before sharing it:
 - Is this from a trusted source?
 - Has this been verified by multiple sources?
 - Is there anyone I can ask to confirm this?

- What will be the impact of sharing this?
- **Responding to misinformation.** We all want to do our part to combat misinformation, but sometimes engaging with it can inadvertently help spread it further.
 - If you find misinformation in the press you can [report it to a regulator, like IPSO](#). You have to be able to clearly demonstrate that information is inaccurate; complaints about personal beliefs or opinions, even transphobic ones, will not be upheld. A good example is the common falsehood that young trans people are being rushed into medical transition or offered surgical interventions. These claims are demonstrably false with reference to the NHS page for gender identity services, and could be reported.
 - If you find individuals spreading misinformation online, it's usually best to ignore it. It can be tempting to try and engage in order to share the facts, but most of the time this will not change anyone's mind and may give more oxygen and an increased platform to the initial misinformation. Misinformation shared by the media or a public organisation will normally have a complaints procedure - for individuals, it's best to leave it. If you believe that someone is sharing misinformation by accident or in good faith then it may be helpful to politely point out the inaccuracy with reference to resources or media, but avoid getting drawn into a long public debate.
 - GI have access to a pilot feature on Twitter that allows us to report tweets for misinformation. This should only be used in exceptional circumstances, e.g. when a tweet sharing misinformation is getting a lot of traction and there is no other means of recourse. To pass on tweets for reporting, please email the Comms Officer (cleo.madeleine@genderedintelligence.co.uk). **This feature is currently in early access and subject to ongoing changes at Twitter - please do not discuss it outside of work.**

Conduct

GI has no interest in policing what you say or do publicly. Conduct that could cause damage to GI as an organisation or a brand is already governed by our working agreement and our contracts, which outline our responsibilities and expectations as representatives of GI.

However, there are a few best practice guidelines we can follow beyond our contractual obligations to minimise potential risks and keep ourselves safe online.

- **Anticipate any issues.** In some situations it's best to take a moment to reflect on how social media content might be read. This isn't to say don't complain online - but be mindful of how and when you do.
 - A lot of current political events provoke a lot of rage, and posting on social media can be a useful outlet at the time - but what we post in anger may later

be taken as a reflection on our work as a whole.

- Insults or complaints about public figures or politicians might be taken in bad faith as expressions of GI's position.
- **Don't engage.** Arguing with other accounts online is unhelpful - even if they're objectively wrong or being transphobic.
 - Many right-wing provocateurs intentionally start fights online to spread misinformation or cause (di)stress. We can limit their reach by not engaging.
 - If someone is harassing you, block them. If someone is posting hate speech or encouraging harassment or discrimination, report them.
- **Operational and information security.** As we saw in the recent employment tribunal involving Stonewall and Garden Court Chambers, both internal and external communications could be requisitioned as evidence (and potentially taken out of context and used against us) if GI were to be sued. If an individual makes a subject access request or Freedom of Information Act request then GI will be legally obliged to release any and all communications relating to that person. To prevent legal trouble or reputational damage down the line:
 - Don't discuss or complain about individuals in written communications at GI, or on social media.
 - If you feel you must, do not name anyone directly, or by using identifiable acronyms or initials
 - It may be best to have any such discussions on a call instead
 - Periodically delete conversation histories on sensitive subjects, particularly when organisations or individuals are named.

Safety and Wellbeing

It can be stressful being online as a trans person, particularly on social media where discussions of trans issues are often polarised and emotive. These guidelines are intended to support your wellbeing and keep you safe in online spaces.

- **Self-preservation.** You can avoid stress online by controlling your environment and being conservative with your energy and attention.
 - It can feel as though it's important to engage with pro-trans media / fight anti-trans media as much as possible (after all, we're all here because we're very passionate). Even engaging with positive content can be draining if you spend too much time on it. Remember that taking regular breaks and keeping

rested is important to our long-term ability to support our community.

- You can minimise anxiety from anti-trans content in the news and online by curating your social media. As well as individually blocking anti-trans voices, you can use functions like keyword filtering, blocklists, and disabling replies from people you don't know to control what you see on social media. If you want advice with any of these features please contact the Communications Officer (cleo.madeleine@genderedintelligence.co.uk).
- **Personal security.** Keeping your personal information safe online is especially important at GI, as we may be more vulnerable to harassment because of our identities and the nature of our work. **Please note these are guidelines intended to promote safety in online spaces and are not intended as restrictions on how GI staff and volunteers use social media.**
 - If you use social media for both recreational and professional purposes it may be useful to keep separate accounts so that no personal details are shared via your professional networks. Likewise, it may be helpful to keep personal social media accounts locked (or to lock them intermittently as and when you need).
 - If your social media is publicly available, be mindful of what kind of content you share. Names or addresses, pictures of yourself, contact details and similar could be accessed by bad faith actors if they are shared publicly.
 - Avoid sharing personal details online, and when you do always ensure you trust the person you are talking to. This includes sharing personal GI emails - wherever possible, only give out public-facing addresses. If representatives from the press or media approach you about your work at GI, please refer them to Public Engagement using the publicengagement@genderedintelligence.co.uk inbox.
 - If you are personally targeted online as a result of your work with GI, or you are concerned that you might be, report it to your line manager and notify the Communications Officer (cleo.madeleine@genderedintelligence.co.uk).
- **GI staff support policy.** If your wellbeing has been impacted as a result of online spaces and social media it may be helpful to consult the GI staff support policy and see what options are available to you.

Whistleblowing

We have a whistleblowing policy in the Great Big Book but it is in need of updating. Where there is a perceived need to whistleblow online — or to share otherwise privileged information across social media — this will be taken in the spirit which with whistleblowing is meant, as long as it follows the usual procedures for doing so. Only when all other avenues

of communication or resolution have failed can privileged information pertaining to Gendered Intelligence be shared across social media.