

# A conversation with young girls about news watching habits

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Eva Litkenhous is ten years old and is in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. She lives in Auburn, Alabama, and attends Lee Scott Academy, a private Christian school. I talked with Eva about her experience with news-watching.

*Caroline Rice: Do you watch the news at all?*

Eva Litkenhous: Sometimes if it is about weather.

*CR: Whenever the pandemic was going on, did you see that on the news, or did you hear it from your parents?*

EL: I heard both.

*CR: Have you heard of the term fake news?*

EL: Yes ma'am, I have.

*CR: What do you think of when you hear that word?*

EL: I think of scam and not talking about how everything will be alright, because it will be.

*CR: Do you think there are any news people or weather people that give false information?*

EL: I think they don't give totally true news; my Bible teacher says that they never say just pray to God about it.

Chaney Litkenhous is 14 years old and is in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. She attends Lee Scott Academy, a private Christian School. I talked with Chaney about her experience with news watching.

*Caroline Rice: Do you ever watch the news?*

Chaney Litkenhous: I mean, not really, only if my parents put it on.

*CR: When the pandemic was going on, did you see this news on the TV or parents?*

CL: I get a lot of news from my parents and social media.

*CR: What social media are you talking about?*

CL: Probably Instagram, what people put on their stories. And, I normally listen to my parents more than what social media says because it's normally not true.

*CR: What made you realize that maybe not all news you hear is necessarily true?*

CL: Hearing different things from different people; if you look at what the TV news says, a lot of times it's different than what social media says. And then personally getting news from someone else, like your parents, is also completely different too.

*CR: Is there any instance that you can think of that you saw fake news or misinformation?*

CL: Just what other people think of something- everyone has different opinions on something. So when it gets spread, it changes.

*CR: Have you ever heard of the term fake news or misinformation?*

CL: Yes, I have heard both of those before, but when I think of it, I think of something making up information to make others believe it is true, or misleading them and trying to go against someone else in one way or another,

*CR: Do you think that comes from intentionally misleading people or is it on accident?*

CL: Both, when some people are sharing their thoughts don't mean to mislead someone, but some people do intentionally want to make others change their minds,

*CR: Have you ever been told to get your news from a credible source?*

CL: Yes, from my teachers when they tell us to find sources for different things we research, they tell us which ones are true and which ones we can use. They tell us that .com means they are fake. Sometimes they will tell us they want us to use certain sources because they will be true.

From this interview, it is evident that a girl as young as ten years old clings to information given to her by another source, and in this case, her Bible teacher and her parents. She doesn't watch or read news; she only hears news from her parents and Bible teacher. While this is beneficial if the parents' goal is to shelter their child and keep her from being exposed to harsh news coverage, she is not learning valuable skills of media literacy that will benefit her in the future.

The contrasting viewpoint from the 14-year-old girl comes from her interaction with social media. She recognizes that she is exposed to information on social media, particularly Instagram. It is notable that she specified 'Instagram stories' and not just posts; Instagram posts imply more thought given to process information, while Instagram posts imply scrolling mindlessly. Much of her information comes from the Instagram stories, meaning that she sees the threat of absent-minded scrolling through stories. She also understands that the news can contradict what she sees on social media. This can stem from watching news that someone may not agree with, and scrolling through social media to see people's opinions that you do agree with. This can create conflict if the user is not actively consuming a wide variety of sources, keeping in mind that people have biases and will share information that they agree with.