

Op-Ed: When Tragedy Strikes, Kindness Should Click First

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In the age of social media, news travels faster than ever, and so do opinions. Whether it's a community tragedy, a wanted person post from local police, or a heartbreaking loss, comment sections fill up within minutes. What could be spaces of support and solidarity often devolve into arenas of judgment, finger-pointing, and cruel speculation. It's a troubling pattern, and one we need to address.

The rise of digital communication has blurred the line between private thought and public discourse. What someone might once have muttered under their breath in frustration or ignorance is now broadcast for all to see, share, and screenshot. Social media may feel like a free-for-all, but freedom of speech doesn't equal freedom from consequence. Especially when grief is involved.

Too often, the families of victims or accused individuals, many of whom are still waiting on due process, are subjected to vile, insensitive comments made by complete strangers. While some commenters claim they're "just being honest" or "telling it like it is," that honesty often comes wrapped in cruelty, laced with assumptions, or completely lacking in context. The ripple effects are real. Parents, children, friends and loved ones read those words. Communities fracture. Mental health and wellness suffer.

Of course, concern and opinion are part of our collective processing. But it is possible, and necessary, to be both concerned and compassionate. Instead of rushing to label someone a monster based on a photo or unverified detail, consider this: What if it were your loved one? Would you want their story reduced to gossip and memes? Would you want to read hateful comments under a photo of your child, your sibling, your friend?

There's also the issue of misinformation. Inflammatory or accusatory comments often spread faster than facts. Speculation gets mistaken for truth, and before long, someone's reputation is irreparably damaged; even if they are later proven innocent. Social media users have a responsibility to pause before hitting "post," especially when emotions are running high and facts are still unfolding.

The reality is that tragedy affects real people. Behind every headline is a grieving mother, a confused sibling, or a child struggling to make sense of what happened. Before you fire off that snarky comment or harsh judgment, ask yourself: Is this helpful? Is it kind? Would I say this if I were face-to-face with the person involved?

Online spaces are still part of our community. How we act on social media reflects who we are in real life. We can be better. We *must* be better. When tragedy strikes, we should lead with empathy, not ego. We should show restraint, not righteousness.

At the end of the day, it really is that simple: **If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all.**

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