



# What makes conspiracy theories so powerful— —and so disruptive?

Conspiracy theories aren't just fringe ideas or political noise.

They follow a pattern:

## 1 They oppose mainstream explanations of events

They assign blame to individuals or groups—not systems



## 3 They describe malevolent or hidden intentions

They're epistemically risky—  
not necessarily false, but more  
prone to error



## 4 They are shared social constructs, not just private beliefs

In public health, education, and social discourse, this matters. Why?  
Because these theories can:



Undermine  
trust



Polarize relationships



Hinder collective  
action



Create deep fractures  
in families, communities,  
and institutions

Addressing conspiracy beliefs requires more than fact-checking.  
It means understanding their emotional, social, and cognitive roots—and  
engaging with empathy and curiosity, not just correction.

Let's stop asking, "Why do they believe that?"

And start asking, "What need is this belief fulfilling and how can  
we address it more constructively?"