

Talking to young men and boys about the manosphere

A practical guide for parents, carers, educators and youth workers

Key information

Publication type: General

Publication date: Tuesday 2 June 2026

Contents

[Overview](#)

[Purpose of this toolkit](#)

[Who it's for](#)

[How to use this toolkit](#)

[Core principles](#)

[Quick guide](#)

[Young people's online lives](#)

[What is the manosphere?](#)

[Why it appeals to some boys and men](#)

[Why this content can be harmful](#)

[What can trusted adults do?](#)

[A tool for young men and boys](#)

[Detailed guidance](#)

[Understanding boys' experiences today](#)

[What is the manosphere?](#)

[Risks and harms](#)

[The manosphere as gateway to other harmful ideas](#)

[Red flags](#)

[Keeping them talking](#)

[The N.O.I.S.E. check](#)

[Responding to common manosphere talking points](#)

[Promoting positive alternatives](#)

[Supporting different ages and contexts](#)

[Seeking extra support](#)

[Final message](#)

In partnership with Beyond Equality

In partnership with

[Beyond Equality logo](#)

Overview

Purpose of this toolkit

This toolkit supports trusted adults to have open, constructive conversations with boys about online content targeting men and boys, including content from the manosphere.

It aims to help you:

- understand some of the wide range of reasons why young people go online
- understand what the manosphere is
- recognise potential risks and harms for all young people, including specific harms for boys and young men
- build confidence in talking to boys in supportive, effective ways.

Much of the guidance in this toolkit could be applied to sensitive conversations with any young person. But there's also specific guidance that takes into account boys' distinctive needs and experiences when it comes to this issue.

Who it's for

- Parents and carers
- Educators and school staff
- Youth workers and practitioners
- Anybody working with or supporting boys

How to use this toolkit

You can read this guidance from beginning to end, or you can:

- just read the [quick guide](#) below
- use the contents to go to the [detailed guidance](#) sections you want to read
- prioritise the sections that are most relevant to you right now.

Core principles

This guidance aims to help you to understand how to have conversations that are:

Non-judgemental

Meeting boys where they're at and helping them understand complex topics, navigate risk and practise responsibility without blaming or shaming them.

Curious and open

Taking the time to explore boys' perspectives and experiences without assuming you already know what they think.

Sensitive and solution-focused

Approaching boys in ways that are sensitive to their needs, and operate with the core belief that they can be part of positive change toward a gender equal world.

Quick guide

In this section, find a summary of the key issues and some good practice suggestions to get you started.

Young people's online lives

The internet can be a great source of connection and support for young people – but online life is not without risk. One growing concern is the loose network of online spaces known as the manosphere. Understanding these spaces and why they appeal to some boys and men can help adults support young people better.

What is the manosphere?

The manosphere isn't a single website or organisation. It's a label for a variety of online spaces including forums, video channels and social media groups, that have two features (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, Internet Matters):

- they are targeted at and mostly populated by men and boys
- they show hostility towards women and women's rights.

They also often encourage boys and men to believe there's only one right way to be a man, and that involves being rich, being physically muscular and fitting a narrow standard of 'good looking', and controlling or dominating other people to prove that you're the best.

Why it appeals to some boys and men

The manosphere can offer:

- a sense of belonging
- easy explanations for why life might feel hard or confusing (for example, it's all the fault of women or feminism)
- perceived 'solutions' to self-esteem issues and feelings of anxiety about the future.

Some young people might come across mansphere content online without deliberately looking for it. For example, scrolling on their TikTok 'For You' feed and coming across a video from a mansphere creator. They may be drawn in by it without even realising that the content they're consuming may be harmful for them and others.

Why this content can be harmful

- They can reinforce insecurity and pressure for boys.
- They can shape expectations about what relationships should be like in unhealthy ways.
- They can affect peer culture and behaviour offline.
- They can normalise harmful attitudes towards women and girls.

What can trusted adults do?

Strong relationships with trusted adults can help protect young people against the harms of the mansphere.

Adults can:

- listen to young people supportively and without judgment – and, by doing this, learn more about young people's experiences and perspectives
- help young people meet their needs for connection and belonging
- support young people to recognise online content that may be harmful for them or others, including mansphere content, and to seek help when they come across it
- provide gentle but firm challenge if young people repeat talking points from the mansphere
- support young people to develop their critical media literacy skills and to recognise when content may be trying to manipulate their emotions.

A tool for young men and boys

Beyond Equality and the Greater London Authority have developed a tool for young men and boys to help them critically assess content they see online and understand when it may be circulating ideas from within the mansphere.

[Learn how to use the N.O.I.S.E. check](#)

Detailed guidance

Explore the following sections for more detail and practical guidance.

1. [Understanding boys' experiences today](#)
2. [What is the manosphere?](#)
3. [Risks and harms](#)
4. [The manosphere as gateway to other harmful ideas](#)
5. [Red flags](#)
6. [Keep them talking](#)
7. [The N.O.I.S.E. check](#)
8. [Responding to common manosphere talking points](#)
9. [Promoting positive alternatives](#)
10. [Supporting different ages and contexts](#)
11. [Seeking extra support](#)
12. [Final message](#)

Understanding boys' experiences today

To understand why manosphere content can be influential, it helps to understand boys' wider experiences.

As they grow up, boys receive powerful and influential messages about what it means to be a man. These messages come from many sources, including peers, media, family expectations and social media. Many boys encounter narrow ideas of masculinity: being emotionally stoic, dominant, self-reliant, heterosexual, muscular and always in control. Some researchers call this the 'Man Box'.

These rigid masculine norms can be harmful for boys and men themselves. Pressure to appear strong, self-sufficient and emotionally controlled can make it difficult for boys to express vulnerability or seek support when they are struggling. Equipundo and Beyond Equality's 2025 State of UK Men report found men are less likely than women to seek help for physical or mental health concerns, while Movember's Real Faces report found many men experience gender bias in healthcare settings that discourages future help-seeking.

For some boys, these pressures can contribute to loneliness, anxiety, low self-esteem and a sense of disconnection. At the same time, rigid expectations around dominance and control can make boys vulnerable to online narratives that frame masculinity as being "under threat" and offer simplistic explanations for their frustrations.

However, these same masculine norms can also have serious consequences for women and girls. Ideas that men must be dominant and that femininity is weak or inferior can contribute to sexist attitudes, harassment and misogynistic behaviour. Ofsted reports that 92% of girls experience sexist name-calling at school, while Girlguiding found that more than half of girls experienced sexual harassment in the previous year.

Research from Ofsted and the National Education Union also shows rising misogynistic behaviour in schools, including harassment of girls and women staff.

Boys' online lives

Today's young people spend more time online than preceding generations. As well as going online to complete schoolwork, many young people use the internet to chat to friends, explore who they are, get advice about dating

and relationships, and find answers to their questions about the world.

The internet can be a valuable source of connection and support for young people – but online life is not without risk. Boys who feel isolated, insecure or uncertain about their identity may be particularly drawn to online communities that promise confidence, belonging or self-improvement.

Research by the Association of School and College Leaders and University College London has shown that vulnerable boys – including neurodivergent boys and those experiencing social isolation – are particularly likely to be exposed to manosphere content by social media algorithms when searching for self-improvement content online.

Absorbing messages that it is "unmanly" to show emotion may make boys more likely to hide their problems and less likely to ask for help. In this context, loneliness or anxiety may sometimes be externalised as resentment or grievance, making boys more susceptible to manosphere messaging.

At the same time, studies from Movember, University College London and the University of Kent show increasing exposure to misogynistic online content, with boys who consume it more likely to view controlling or violent behaviour as acceptable (Women's Aid). This highlights how harmful gender norms can negatively affect boys themselves while also contributing to harm against women and girls.

What is the manosphere?

The manosphere isn't a single website or organisation. It's a label for a variety of online spaces – including forums, video channels and social media groups – and has two features (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, Internet Matters):

- it is targeted at and mostly populated by men and boys
- it shows hostility towards women and women's rights.

It also often encourages boys and men to believe there's only one right way to be a man, and that involves being rich, being physically muscular and fitting a narrow standard of 'good looking', and controlling or dominating other people to prove that you're the best.

It's important to note that not every online group or community aimed at men and boys, or populated by mostly men and boys, is automatically part of the manosphere. There are lots of groups and spaces online aimed at men and boys that are positive or neutral in their impact.

Common ideas of concern within manosphere spaces

The following ideas and talking points are often discussed within manosphere spaces:

- Women's rights disadvantage men.
- Men are entitled to women's attention or sex.
- Society unfairly favours women.
- People can be ranked according to attractiveness or status.
- Successful men must be dominant, wealthy and physically powerful.

Key groups in the manosphere

Key group	Key beliefs
Incels	'Involuntary celibates' believe they are doomed to romantic rejection and often blame women for their unhappiness.
Pick-Up Artists	Pick-Up Artists (PUAs) claim to teach men how to attract women, often through manipulation or emotional control.
Men Going Their Own Way	Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) communities encourage men to avoid relationships with women entirely.
Men's Rights Activists (MRAs)	Some Men's Rights Activists (MRAs) discuss genuine issues affecting men. Others reject women's rights and promote misogynistic ideas.
Influencers	Some influencers discuss masculinity, fitness or success in ways that echo manosphere ideas, even if they are not formally connected to these groups.

These groups may:

- criticise women's rights
- promote 'alpha', 'beta' or 'sigma' hierarchies
- present dominance as essential to masculinity
- encourage manipulative approaches to relationships.

Because this content often appears motivational or aspirational, harmful messages can be difficult to recognise.

How young people encounter this content

Young people may encounter misogynistic content without searching for it. Algorithms on platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and Instagram often promote content that triggers strong emotional reactions and therefore attracts lots of engagement from social media users. This makes it more likely that content from within the manosphere will be boosted by algorithms.

According to Association of School and College Leaders and University College London's Safer Scrolling report (2023):

- Manosphere content is often framed as entertainment or self-help on social media, making it difficult for boys to spot potential harms.
- Boys experiencing loneliness or exclusion are particularly likely to find these types of content pushed to the top of their social media feed by recommender algorithms.
- Misogynistic attitudes online can shape offline behaviour and relationships.

The appeal of manosphere content

This content can offer boys:

- feelings of belonging and connection

- a sense of direction and instructions about self-improvement that appear to ease insecurity and anxiety about the future
- simple explanations for difficult emotions
- someone to blame for painful experiences.

This is how some boys get drawn in.

Risks and harms

Harms to men and boys

Exposure to this content also has a negative impact for boys. Boys who consume this type of content regularly may experience:

- reinforcing of insecurity and increased pressure to look and act a certain way, including pressure to spend money, exercise excessively, ignore injuries and take physical risks in an attempt to meet restrictive standards about how they should look
- limiting of emotional expression by encouraging them to keep their problems to themselves and ridiculing men who show vulnerability
- difficulty forming and maintaining healthy relationships, including friendships – this can happen as a result of harmful attitudes toward women and girls, as well as being encouraged to treat other boys and men as competition
- negative impacts on mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Harms to women and girls

The ways in which manosphere content shapes boys' attitudes and relationship behaviours has real consequences for women and girls, including:

- normalisation of sexism and misogyny
- impact on relationships and peer culture
- restriction of freedom and safety as women and girls are forced to edit their own behaviour out of fear.

The manosphere as gateway to other harmful ideas

The manosphere is also connected to a wider online ecosystem that adults should be aware of. Alongside misogynistic messaging, some influencers and content creators promote harmful or exploitative content that can expose boys and young men to a range of harms.

Some influencers post content that may encourage boys to take risks in order to build muscle and "improve" their physique. This can include taking unregulated supplements and appearance-enhancing drugs such as steroids, as well as exercising excessively and ignoring injuries. These messages are often packaged as advice about "success", "self-improvement" or becoming a "high-value man", and can be particularly appealing to boys

who feel insecure, isolated or under pressure to prove themselves.

In some online spaces, gambling and high-risk financial behaviour such as risky investing are framed as markers of masculinity, status or ambition. Boys may be encouraged to see sports betting, cryptocurrency speculation, "get rich quick" schemes or aggressive investing as a route to power, independence or social validation. This can expose young people to significant financial harms, including debt, exploitation, addiction and scams, while also reinforcing unhealthy ideas that self-worth is tied to wealth, dominance or material success.

Some manosphere spaces also overlap with extremist or conspiratorial content, including narratives that blame feminism, minority groups or "elites" for men's frustrations. Some of these narratives can be antisemitic, spreading harmful and false ideas about Jewish people "controlling" society and hoarding wealth.

While not every boy exposed to manosphere content will engage with these ideas, adults should understand that these online pathways can normalise harmful beliefs and risky behaviours alongside misogyny.

Red flags

Early intervention can help prevent harmful ideas becoming entrenched. Look out for the following signs that a boy may be engaging with manosphere content – and use our guidance below to intervene sensitively.

Remember: one sign alone does not automatically mean a young person is engaging with harmful content.

What you might hear

Examples include:

- "Men have it harder than women now"
- "Women only care about money or looks"
- "Nice guys always finish last"
- "Feminism has gone too far"
- "You have to be dominant"

These comments may reflect:

- repetition of online content
- testing reactions
- attempts to understand rejection, loneliness or confusion.

What you might see

Examples include:

- increased engagement with dominance-focused influencers
- content shifting from self-improvement to misogyny
- posts mocking women or girls
- viewing relationships as competitive or transactional.

What you might notice

Examples include:

- more dismissive language about women
- increased rigidity around gender roles
- strong reactions to rejection
- withdrawal or isolation
- reduced empathy.

It's important to remember that seeing one of these signs doesn't necessarily mean a young person is engaging with harmful content online. There can be lots of reasons for behaviour changes in young people. Look for patterns of behaviour over time, and approach with curiosity, not accusations.

If something concerns you, begin with a calm check-in that opens up space for the young person to tell you more about what's going on for them, rather than jumping right in with an accusation or an assumption. The most important thing is to support the young person, including by identifying any unmet needs that might inform their online behaviour.

The most important thing is to support the young person, including by identifying any unmet needs that might inform their online behaviour.

Keeping them talking

Why regular conversations matter

Strong, trusting relationships with adults they can talk to are the best protection against the harms of the manosphere for all young people.

When young people feel able to talk about their online lives without fear of judgment, they are:

- more likely to ask for help when they need it
- less likely to feel lonely
- better able to develop critical thinking skills
- better supported to develop their communication skills over time.

For young men and boys, who may face additional challenges in opening up, knowing they can talk to adults they trust is especially important.

It can be difficult to know where to start when approaching these conversations – the following tips can help you build up your communication skills and habits over time.

Laying the groundwork

If you're not used to having regular conversations with the young people in your life, jumping straight into an intense discussion about manosphere content might feel overwhelming – especially for boys, who may find it particularly difficult to open up.

It's important to lay the foundations for these deeper conversations by making it clear to boys that you're interested in their perspectives and that you're someone they can trust to have an open, non-judgmental approach.

- **Start small.** Make a habit out of short check-ins about how their day went and what they got up to. This can go a long way in making communication feel like a normal part of boys' day to day lives.
- **Keep it simple.** If talking about themselves is tricky, try watching a movie or a YouTube video together and asking them what they thought. Some boys may find it easier to chat whilst doing a task or hobby together – trying talking while you go for a walk, whilst working on a hobby together or whilst doing a chore together.
- **Choose the right moment and context.** Boys already face barriers to opening up, so pushing them at the wrong moment is unlikely to be a productive approach. Give them time to decompress after a busy day. If you want to talk to them about something sensitive or challenging, choose a private moment where you can chat one-to-one, and make sure you leave plenty of time to have the conversation without rushing.
- **Offer reassurance proactively.** Boys may be worried about coming to you with something difficult in case they get into trouble. Offer frequent, light-touch reassurance that you want to know if something's up, even if they've done something wrong, and that your first priority will be to help them do better. If you do get upset with them, practise taking a moment to calm yourself down and then explaining what happened and trying again.

Talking about online life

Building up the habit of talking about your respective online lives can help lay the foundations for boys to talk with you about any content they've seen that worries them, including manosphere content.

- **Ask what young people like or dislike** about what they watch online. Learn who their favourite creators are, how they found them and what appeals to them.
- **Share your own online experiences** to make it feel like a two-way exchange rather than an interrogation. This can be as simple as showing them an age-appropriate meme, video or post that you enjoyed and telling them what you like about it.
- **For younger children, try sitting with or near them some of the time while they're playing games or using their devices.** Begin short, light-touch check-ins by asking simple questions like "What are you watching?" or "Who is this character?" or "What's your favourite part of this game?"

Building media literacy

Helping young people develop their ability to critically assess what they're looking at online can go a long way toward helping them identify when content might be manipulating or harming them. This is an important part of supporting boys to recognise manosphere content and keep themselves safe.

Try looking at videos, articles, posts or other content with your young people and working with them to help them critically assess what they're looking at.

Try some of the questions below:

For older children

- "What's the main message here?"
- "How can we check if this is true?"
- "Why do you think this content is popular?"
- "How might this creator benefit if lots of people are watching this content?"
- "How does this make you feel?"
- "What might someone who disagrees say?"
- "Who is someone in your life you could talk to if you saw something online that made you feel uncomfortable or unsure?"

For younger children

- "What's happening in this video?"
- "How did it make you feel?"
- "How do you know when something makes you feel worried or uncomfortable? What feelings happen in your body when you feel upset or worried?"
- "Is anyone being treated unkindly here?"
- "What should you do if you see something that worries you?"

The N.O.I.S.E. check

The N.O.I.S.E. check is a simple conversation tool that helps young people think critically about online content. You can use it together with the young men and boys in your life, or share it so they can use it independently.

- [Learn how to use the tool as parent, carer or trusted adult](#)
- [Share the tool with young men and boys](#)

Responding to common manosphere talking points

Below, we've outlined some of the common points of view platformed in the mansphere, along with some phrases that you might hear from a young person who is being influenced by this type of content. These are not an exhaustive list - you may hear variations on these.

The 'what you could say' sections below give you some ideas for what you could say to counter some of these talking points.

Gender roles and "who has it harder"

What the mansphere typically says: Men and women should occupy specific, fixed roles in society. Society is set up in favour of women and deliberately excludes, punishes and demonises men.

Your goal: Widen their perspective without dismissing their feelings.

What you might hear

- "Men have it worse than women now"
- "No one cares about men's problems"
- "Girls get everything handed to them"
- "Boys always get blamed for everything"

What it might mean underneath

- Feeling overlooked or unfairly treated in their day to day life
- Frustration about their own experiences
- Trying to make sense of other forms of inequality they may experience in their own lives
- Feeling anxious about the future and under pressure to achieve success in a specific way

What you could say

- "It sounds like you're noticing some things that feel unfair. What's made you feel like that?"
- "I agree that boys can have a tough time, as well as girls. What do you think boys struggle with most?"
- "Do you think it's possible that different people can have different challenges at the same time?"
- "What do you think girls might experience that's difficult? How do you think that might affect a girl growing up today?"

Dating and relationships

What the mansphere typically says: Women are shallow and only interested in dating the most 'high status' men. Only men who are conventionally attractive, ripped and rich will be able to 'get' women. Women are naturally deceptive and will leave their partners for a higher status man if they get a chance to.

Your goal: Move from stereotypes to real, respectful relationships; counter exaggerated or distorted online talking points by shifting their attention to their real, day to day lives.

What you might hear

- "Girls only go for rich or good-looking guys"
- "If you're nice, you just get ignored"
- "You have to play games or you'll get rejected"
- "Girls just use guys"

What it might mean underneath

- Insecurity, poor self-esteem or feeling unworthy of love
- Fear of rejection
- Confusion about what a healthy relationship looks like

What you could say

- "That sounds frustrating. Has something like that happened to you or someone you know in real life?"
- "What do you think makes someone a good partner or friend?"
- "Do you think all girls think the same, or might different people want different things? Have you ever had a conversation about this with a girl you know in real life?"
- "How would you want someone to treat you in a relationship?"
- "What's something you wish girls understood about you?"

Power, dominance and success

What the mansphere typically says: Society is hierarchical and only 'alpha' men are going to be successful and get what they want. Being 'alpha' means being ripped, dominating or controlling others and getting as rich as possible. Men should choose their friends and partners according to who makes them look good and guarantees them success.

Your goal: Expand their idea of strength and respect. Help them think about real-world relationship impacts. Redirect their focus toward positive or constructive experiences and talking points.

What you might hear

- "You have to be alpha or people walk all over you"
- "Weak guys get no respect"
- "You need to dominate to win"
- "Real men don't show emotions"
- "You should only be mates with successful people"

What it might mean underneath

- Pressure to prove masculinity
- Confusion about masculinity and uncertainty about how to assert their own choices about what it means to be a man
- Fear of being ridiculed if they're perceived as weak
- Desire for respect or status
- Anxiety about the future
- Loneliness and a lack of meaningful connections

What you could say

- "What do you think makes someone respected in real life? Can you think of any examples of people you know who are loved and respected by other people? What do other people like about them?"
- "Can you think of someone you respect who isn't loud or dominant? What are they like? How do they treat other people?"
- "What are some other ways a person might show that they're strong?"
- "Do you think it's possible for someone to be strong all the time? How might it affect their life if that's what they're trying to do?"
- "What happens to friendships if someone is always trying to dominate? What happens to romantic relationships?"
- "What are some things you really like about your friends? How do you and your mates show that you care about each other when one of you is having a hard time?"

Critiques of feminism

What the manosphere typically says: Feminism stigmatises and harms men. Feminism is about putting men down for the benefit of women. Feminism is a threat to men.

Your goal: Build understanding and offer alternative perspectives, not shut them down.

What you might hear

- "Feminism is just anti-men"

- "Women already have equal rights, now they're trying to take over"
- "Feminists just want special treatment"
- "Men can't say anything anymore"

What it might mean underneath

- Confusion about equality – seeing the expansion of other groups' rights as an attack on or a diminishment of their own
- Feeling defensive or excluded
- Lack of understanding about what feminism is
- Anxiety about the future
- Exposure to simplified or misleading content

What you could say

- "What have you heard about feminism? Where did you hear that?" Use some of the [media literacy prompts](#) above to critically assess their sources.
- "Is there a different way we could look at this? What might someone who disagrees with that point of view say?"
- "Do you think everyone should have the same opportunities? What would the world look like if that were the case?"
- "What do you think equality between men and women should look like?"
- "Can you think of situations where women might still be treated unfairly in society? How do you think that affects their lives?"

When language becomes harmful

If a young person uses **abusive or discriminatory language**, it's important to be clear and calm.

Your goal: Set boundaries without rejecting the young person or shutting the conversation down entirely.

What you could say

- "I'm not okay with that kind of language – it can be harmful."
- "We can talk about your ideas, but we need to do it respectfully."
- "Let's find a better way to say what you're trying to express."

Key approach

- **Start with curiosity** – ask what they mean, don't assume

- **Acknowledge feelings** – even if you challenge their ideas
- **Encourage critical thinking** – "What do you think? Where did you get that idea? What's a different way to look at this?"
- **Offer alternative perspectives** – gently and consistently, even if they don't immediately agree
- **Keep the conversation open** – this is ongoing, not one conversation

Promoting positive alternatives

Understanding and responding to the harms of the mansphere is a crucial part of being there for today's boys as a trusted adult. But many boys are drawn towards this type of content because of underlying needs that have gone unaddressed for too long.

Boys deserve better than the empty promises of online misogynists. How else can adults support boys, offline as well as online, to reduce the appeal of the mansphere?

The following top tips can help get you started.

Top tips

1

Show boys there are many ways to "be a man"

Help boys see that masculinity does not have to mean dominance, toughness or emotional silence.

Highlight men who are:

- kind and emotionally open
- creative or collaborative
- respectful in relationships
- comfortable asking for help.

Use books, films, sport, social media and everyday role models from within your family or community to show broader, healthier versions of masculinity.

2

Build strong relationships before difficult conversations

Young people are more likely to reflect on harmful ideas when they feel respected and listened to.

Try to:

- stay calm and curious
- avoid blame and shame

- listen before correcting
- keep conversations ongoing, not one-offs.

You do not need to be a digital culture expert to tackle the harms of the manosphere. Many of the solutions are relational.

3

Help boys develop emotional literacy

Many boys are taught to hide vulnerability or "deal with things alone". Supporting emotional literacy helps boys express feelings in safer, healthier ways.

Encourage boys to:

- name emotions beyond "fine" or "angry"
- notice body signs of stress or discomfort
- reflect on how feelings affect behaviour
- practise communicating emotions respectfully

Simple questions can help:

- "What were you feeling when that happened?"
- "What was going through your mind?"
- "How do you think the other person felt?"

4

Teach that confidence and respect are not the same as dominance

Many boys are exposed to messages that "real men" must dominate others to succeed.

Reinforce that strength can also mean:

- emotional literacy and the ability to regulate when upset
- kindness and empathy
- taking responsibility
- repairing harm
- treating others with respect.

Praise positive behaviours when you see them.

5

Model healthy relationships and communication

Boys learn a lot from the adults around them.

Model:

- respectful disagreement
- apologising and repairing conflict
- active listening
- equality in relationships
- calm responses during difficult conversations.

Where possible, make these values visible across school, home and community life.

6

Set clear boundaries around harmful behaviour

Empathy and understanding are important – but so are clear expectations.

Be clear that:

- sexist language and harassment are not acceptable
- "banter" can still cause harm
- everyone deserves respect and safety

Where a boy in your life has caused harm or treated someone poorly, use restorative approaches that help boys:

- reflect on impact
- take responsibility
- repair relationships
- think about what they would do differently next time.

7

Keep boys connected to community and belonging

Loneliness and isolation can increase vulnerability to harmful online spaces.

Support boys to find:

- positive friendships
- clubs, sports or creative activities
- trusted adults and mentors
- safe online and offline communities.

Help them feel that they matter and belong.

8

Make this work part of everyday culture

Healthy masculinities are best supported when this work is visible and consistent.

In schools and organisations, this might include:

- linking gender equality to school values and ethos
- challenging sexism consistently
- including these topics across teaching and pastoral support
- using displays, role models and resources that reflect inclusive values
- listening to pupil voice and experiences.

Young people are more likely to engage when they see adults treating this work as part of everyday life, not a one-off topic.

9

Keep going – change happens over time

Developing healthier masculinities is an ongoing process.

Some conversations may feel awkward or difficult. Young people may test boundaries, repeat harmful ideas or push back. That does not mean the conversation has failed.

Small, consistent actions matter, such as:

- check in regularly
- showing curiosity
- offering guidance without shame
- helping boys believe in themselves and their future
- following up and checking in regularly.

Even small shifts can make a big difference over time.

Supporting different ages and contexts

Younger children

For younger children, focus on:

- using simple language
- identifying feelings, recognising discomfort or unease and responding by finding a trusted grown up
- treating people with fairness, kindness and respect.

Younger children may come across harmful content accidentally while gaming, watching videos or using shared devices. They often need support to understand what they are seeing and how it makes them feel.

Practical tips for younger children

Use everyday examples

Talk about behaviour in:

- TV shows
- YouTube videos
- games
- books and stories
- playground situations.

For example:

- "Was that character being kind or unkind?"
- "How do you think she felt when that happened?"
- "What could someone have done differently?"

Focus on fairness and empathy

Younger children often respond well to clear ideas about fairness.

Try questions like:

- "Would that feel fair if it happened to you?"
- "How would your friend feel if someone spoke to them like that?"
- "Do you think everyone should be treated with respect?"

Help them recognise uncomfortable feelings

Children may not have the language to describe discomfort yet.

Help them notice:

- Tight chest
- 'Funny feeling' in the stomach
- Feeling worried, confused or upset

You could say:

- "Sometimes our body tells us when something doesn't feel right."

- "If something online makes you uncomfortable, you can always come and tell me."

Keep conversations short and regular

Younger children often engage better with small, repeated conversations rather than one long discussion.

Try:

- chatting while travelling or playing
- asking quick questions during screen time
- sitting nearby while they game or watch videos.

Encourage asking for help

Make it very clear that they will not “get in trouble” for telling you about something upsetting online.

Simple reminders help:

- "You can always come to me if something online feels strange."
- "Even if someone tells you you'll be in trouble if you tell me what's going on, you should always tell me. I'll help you figure it out."

Cultural and community awareness

Young people's experiences of masculinity, relationships and identity are shaped by:

- family values
- faith and culture
- community norms
- online influences
- personal experiences.

Avoid assuming that boys from particular backgrounds will automatically think or behave in certain ways.

Practical tips for culturally aware conversations

Stay curious and respectful

Ask questions instead of making assumptions.

For example:

- "What messages do you think boys get about being a man?"
- "What does respect look like in your family or community?"

Focus on shared values

Even when perspectives differ, many communities share values around:

- respect
- kindness
- responsibility
- safety
- looking after others.

These shared values can provide common ground.

Highlight diverse role models

Use examples of men from different backgrounds who model:

- care and empathy
- respectful relationships
- positive leadership
- emotional openness.

This helps challenge the idea that there is only one "correct" way to be masculine.

Be aware of different experiences

Some boys may also experience:

- racism or discrimination
- economic stress
- family pressures
- social isolation
- additional needs or disabilities.

These experiences can shape how they relate to identity, belonging and online spaces.

Seeking extra support

Recognising more serious concerns

Many young people will experiment with ideas, repeat things they have heard online or test boundaries as part of growing up. More serious concern usually comes from a pattern of escalating behaviour, increasing rigidity in beliefs, or signs that harmful ideas are beginning to shape how a young person treats themselves or others.

Where to go for help

If you're worried about a young person, consider the following:

- If you're based in a school, a youth centre or another organisation, follow your organisation's safeguarding procedures.
- If you're a parent or carer, access specialist services and helplines such as:
 - [Childline](#)
 - [NSPCC](#)
 - [Internet Matters](#)
 - [CEOP Safety Centre](#)

Final message

Young people are navigating a complex online world where harmful ideas can spread easily.

But with **strong relationships**, **open conversations** and **consistent support**, trusted adults can help boys and young men:

- think critically
- build healthy relationships
- develop confidence without harm.

You don't need to get it perfect. Staying present, curious and supportive is what matters most.

[Back to table of contents](#)