

TOXIC MASCULINITY & HOW TO TACKLE IT

This factsheet has been produced to:

raise awareness of the ever-growing misogynistic community that children are accessing. Whilst online communities are great, sometimes a counter-narrative is needed from adults. Having conversations early and routinely makes a difference, here are some tips to help you.

Why?

Being a child and teenager can be a difficult, confusing, and emotional time. Many young people are coming to terms with, or are struggling with their identity, and they may feel unhappy or alone and look online for support. The **Manosphere** appeals to young men (and some older ones too) who may feel this way.

Research has shown that some young people can feel alienated by the feminist, BLM, LGBTQ+ rights movements and that no-one cares about them.

Some influencers are seen by children as aspirational, masculine role models who value hard work, money, possessions and control. They may also position themselves as an alternative to 'woke culture' and therefore appeal to young men who feel underrepresented or undervalued.

The confluence of this with widespread economic problems, food and fuel poverty and feeling disenfranchised about their futures means that messages from the Manosphere are very digestible and appealing to some young people.

If you have concerns about a young person - Engaging in conversation will be a good place to start to explore what may be happening in their lives.



You could also research webpages, influencers, icons, language to get an idea of what a child might be exposed to. Try searching something related to feminism or women on a social media site (like Youtube or Tiktok) and see what sort of content is suggested to you afterwards by the algorithm.

Having Difficult Conversations

These conversations are extremely difficult to start and can sometimes end in argument, so here are some top tips for having difficult conversations:

Empathy is key!

Make time for the conversation face to face and try to remove distractions... like your phone.

Try and create a safe space for the conversation – i.e., it's probably best to wait until you're off the bus and sitting in the kitchen with a cuppa, go for a drive, play a ball game or take a walk. If talking to a student make sure you are in a confidential area and try to ensure they don't feel they're being told off

Remember that young people probably know more than you about this! So be ready to learn together, listen, not interrupt, and be prepared to be shocked by what you might hear

Try not to have an emotional reaction to what you hear, it might close the channel for discussion

Be open and non-judgemental, try to understand 'even if I don't understand, I really want to'

Check in afterwards to see how that conversation has landed

Try to make these conversations / sessions part of your routine, it might help to plan several lessons based on this subject to build up awareness

Be conscious of triggers – work this into your ground rules so children feel safe and able to take time out if needed

Empower young people to challenge misogynistic culture and to come to their own decisions through understanding and knowledge. The aim is to do this, not to shame or stigmatise

Signs that a child may be accessing the Manosphere



A change in appearance or behaviour: For example, someone might be more withdrawn, or display more confidence.



A change in socialising habits: A young person might have a new group of friends or be spending more time on their own. Perhaps they have been arguing more with their peers.



A change in their mental health: a young person may be increasingly angry, low in mood, or self-harming for example.



Discussing prominent 'influencers' or saying misogynistic things



Any of these symptoms (or characteristics) could be signs of something else going on in a young person's life. It's important to consider any changes and try to explore these through discussion



Denial or an unwillingness to engage in conversation when challenged.



Getting in more trouble at school.



Talking as if from a script.



Spending more time on a phone/ in their own room.

There are a growing number of male influencers who openly express misogynistic views and encourage unhealthy relationship behaviours towards women. Some names you might have heard (to name a few) include Matthew Hyman, Harrison Sullivan, Robertas Ziogelis, Andrew Tate.

Warning: if you do decide to access this content, some is difficult to watch and upsetting.

We must all be aware, that putting extra attention on one person can also lead to more support of them. For example, it might make someone look a person up online, therefore altering their algorithm on social media. Certain influencers, although banned from social media remain to be popular and their content is easily accessible online due to fans reposting content.

Baring this in mind, for the purpose of this factsheet we are going to mention the name of Andrew Tate (AT).

He is unique in that his views cross several spectrums of concern; extremism, hate, violence against women and girls, radicalisation, racism and homophobia.

He is what we might refer to as a Pick-Up Artist (PUA), is a self-described misogynist, former kickboxing champion and social media influencer with a huge following

AT has taken full advantage of the digital world to openly promote his extreme, right wing, prejudiced views, he manipulates the algorithms and presents his videos in short clips to quickly engage attention.

The more controversial the clips are the quicker the algorithm promotes them.

Andrew Tate also offers paid courses for men and boys to attend to learn how to change their lives and be more like him, these are much like a pyramid scheme



You might notice a young person making this hand signal. This is used by Andrew Tate, his family and his followers as a sign of mutual respect for his beliefs and the beliefs of the misogynistic community

Social Media

Social media has many positives but can also be dangerous. AI (artificial intelligence) algorithms recommend content and videos based on what is popular or similar to content that has already been viewed. This often means that negative, harmful content is pushed towards young people when they are accessing social media. It happens with the mansphere but also with content such as suicide or self-harm.

FORTNITE



MINECRAFT

Positive Role Models

Sometimes it might not be enough to discuss the negative aspects of the mansphere, especially if a child is struggling. It might be a good idea to explore with a child some potential positive male role models based on their interests. This might be a celebrity or someone in their personal life

Luke & Ryan Hart

Luke and Ryan are domestic abuse advocates, whose mother and sister were sadly killed by their father after a lifetime of domestic abuse and coercive control.



Lewis Wedlock

Lewis is a lecturer, TED speaker and social psychologist whose work centres around exploring and challenging gender-based structures



Unhealthy relationship traits

We must stress the importance of safely challenging misogynistic behaviour, especially in young males, and guiding them to recognise more positive role models, it's crucial in protecting girls and in raising the next generation of men that women do not need to be afraid of.

One way to counter toxic masculinity is to offer a 'counter narrative' to highlight that things influencers are saying are unacceptable. It could be a good idea to explore positive role models.

Some male PUAs or influencers condone and encourage this behaviour towards women with an aim to manipulate or control their female partners.

The more misogynistic language, beliefs and actions are normalised, the more girls experience hate and violence, the impact of this abuse on a girl's life is devastating and significant.

Coercive, Controlling, Isolating, Excluding, Intimating, Threatening, Jealous

Disrespectful, this could include of someone's identity (i.e., their gender)

Using male privilege or social status to control a partner

Harmful/Abusive (sexually, physically, emotionally)

Manipulation tactics; Peer Pressure, 'Gaslighting', 'Love bombing', 'Negging'

Definitions

Masculinity

The social construction (the thoughts, ideas, beliefs formed by society) of roles, attitudes, behaviours that are thought to be characteristics appropriate for men and boys.

Toxic Masculinity

A belief that certain harmful and negative roles, attitudes, or behaviours that are thought to be regarded as male behaviours are causing harm to society, men themselves and people of any gender. This is closely linked to misogyny

Misogyny

A feeling of hatred, dislike, contempt for, or mistrust of women. It is a form of prejudice and manifests in different ways, often coming out of traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes. Misogyny can present as physical, sexual, or emotional harm and it can be less obvious behaviours such as patronising, feelings of superiority, subtle put downs or dismissals

Pickup Artists (PUA)

A group of (predominantly) males who persuade or force multiple women to have sex with them through a mixture of coercion, manipulation, or flattery. It blurs the lines of consent and some self-proclaimed PUAs openly share views which condone rape and sexual assault and there is a cross over into the extreme far right for some who occupy this space. This means that this ideology serves as a gateway to more extremist groups. They also appear to live confident, powerful, and successful lives.

Incel

The term Incel is short for Involuntary Celibate and refers to a community of men and boys who feel they are unable to find romantic relationships with women and girls despite wanting to do so. They believe their lack of romantic relationships is due to their biological make up. Someone who is part of the Incel community might see a romantic relationship as achievable only through violence

Manosphere

This is a term used to encompass several online communities that express and promote misogynistic views and opinions. These might include 'incels', 'pickup artists' and 'men going their own way'. Boys as young as 8/9 are accessing material from the manosphere

Resources (click to open)

Healthy relationships

Power and Control Wheel
Healthy relationships | NSPCC

Addressing Misogyny in schools

Bold voices
PSHE Association Resources for Schools
Relationships and sex education
Teaching about Misogyny & Andrew Tate

Talking to young people

How to Talk to Your Child about Mental Health

Places for children to get support

Childline
Home - Is This OK?

Online Safety:

Information, Advice and Support to Keep Children Safe Online
Keeping children safe online | NSPCC

Further Reading/Watching

BBC : The Dangerous Rise of Andrew Tate
Incels: A new terror threat to the UK? - BBC News

Further information & training

For further information, or to access free training within Suffolk around Preventing Radicalisation, Criminal Exploitation or Violence Against Women and Girls contact community.safety@suffolk.gov.uk