Online toxic masculinity

Learn more about the spread of misogyny online and about the rise of ‘the manosphere’ and ‘incel’ culture. Get advice on how to tackle these issues at home.

What do we mean by these terms?

Toxic masculinity is a set of harmful beliefs and behaviours rooted in extreme definitions of what ‘manliness’ should be – for example, not showing weakness. Men and boys can feel pressure to conform to these ideals, which are often shared online and on social media. It **doesn’t** mean that masculinity or being a boy is bad or harmful, however

Misogyny is when someone hates or has an aversion to women, and shows prejudice towards women. Someone might mistreat women or believe that women are not as important or capable as men.

The **manosphere** is a group of online communities where misogynistic views are shared. These groups discuss ‘traditional’ masculinity and promote anti-feminist and sexist beliefs. The communities also discuss everyday topics such as gaming, finance and politics.

A lot of these groups use jokes and memes (pictures) to share their views, so it might not be obvious at a glance that they’re spreading hateful content.

According to The Children’s Society:

- **63%** of young men watch ‘masculinity influencers’ and **54%** of boys think that boys have it harder than girls today. These behaviours and attitudes can contribute to misogyny
- **58%** of girls and young women have experienced some form of online harassment and **37%** have experienced some form of sexual harassment at school

Other vocabulary you might hear

Incel – short for involuntary celibate. This refers to a man who believes he is unable to form a romantic or sexual relationship with a woman, despite wanting to.

Red pill/Redpilled – those who have 'taken the red pill' have 'seen the truth' (i.e. they now believe that society treats women too well, and other ideas that undermine equality and fairness between genders).

Pickup Artists (PUA) – people who persuade, force or trick women into having sex with them, and claim to be able to teach others to do the same.

The 80/20 rule – a (fake scientific) theory that 80% of women are only attracted to the top 20% of men. This is used to blame women for men's feelings of inadequacy and rejection.

'Chad' and 'Stacy' – Used by people in the incel subculture to describe conventionally-attractive men ('Chads') and women ('Stacys').

'Foid'/'femoid' – a derogatory term to refer to women, short for 'female humanoid organism'. It suggests they are inferior to men and sub-human.

Alpha/beta males – the idea that some men ('alphas') are strong leaders who can obtain romantic partners, while others ('betas') are weak, unattractive and inferior, often because they aren't 'manly' enough.

Looksmaxxing – an online trend encouraging boys and men to improve their physical appearance to become more 'desirable' based on certain standards of masculinity.

Not everyone uses this type of language, however, so it's important to also be alert to generalisations being made about women and men – for example, statements about how *all* women act, or comments highlighting that women and men are different species.

Some **emojis** linked to incel culture are:



Where might your child see this content?

Manosphere content is shared by various influencers across many different online services, including:

- Social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram and Discord
- Podcasting platforms
- Online messaging boards such as 4Chan and Reddit
- Live streaming gaming platforms such as Twitch

Well-known influencers include Andrew Tate, Hamza Ahmed, Harrison Sullivan ('HSTikkyTokky'), Nicolas Balinthazy ('Sneako') and Jordan Peterson, but there are many more.

Content from misogynistic influencers will often:

- Be combined with other, less controversial material including fitness and lifestyle advice. This can help attract a wider audience, including children who aren't searching for misogynistic content
- Include step-by-step instructions on how to improve social standing or appearance
- Showcase wealth, luxurious lifestyles and expensive possessions. This makes followers think they can have the same success if they adopt the same beliefs
- Include references to other extreme ideologies, prejudices and conspiracy theories, particularly antisemitism and far-right extremism

How does this content affect children?

Children, especially boys, might get involved in these online communities as it gives them a sense of self-worth, belonging and security.

They can be strongly influenced, and even radicalised, by what they see.

Manosphere content promotes ideas that men are more important and more powerful than women and that violence against women is acceptable. Following these beliefs can lead to misogynistic behaviour, and violence against women and girls.

This content also promotes unrealistic expectations that can lead to poor self-esteem and mental health issues. It preys on vulnerabilities of boys and young men, especially those related to their appearance, feeling alone and being rejected by women and girls.

What can we do as parents/carers?

We don't shy away from talking about online toxic masculinity in school when pupils wish to discuss things, staff are trained to manage these conversations. It is covered in the PSHE curriculum and pupils can seek support through our own support services or referred/signposted to external agencies. **It is important that we are all comfortable with the terminology and know how to react to such situations.**

However, children are less likely to be vulnerable to this type of content if they are having similar conversations reinforced at home. We recommend you:

1. **Read recent news articles** about toxic masculinity and famous influencers, if you're not already familiar with them (you can find some articles in the 'Sources' box below)
2. **Ask your child what they're getting up to online** – show genuine interest, don't judge them or tell them what they should and shouldn't be doing. They're more likely to share if they feel you're interested, rather than trying to check up on them
3. **Encourage your child to question what they see online** – a child who is naturally sceptical about what they see online is less likely to be influenced by things that aren't true. Have conversations about why they trust certain influencers and how they can double-check the information they're seeing
4. **Have open conversations about toxic masculinity** – don't tell your child how to think, but question their thinking and understanding. Ask if they believe some of the views being shared, such as that women "belong" to men, and how that might make the women in their lives feel, or they themselves feel
5. **Be role models** – encourage your child to be open with their emotions. Show respect for women and girls, and encourage your child to model this behaviour. Help your child to find other positive role models online and offline

Sources and further reading

This factsheet was produced by The Key Safeguarding: **www.thekeysupport.com/safeguarding**

Protecting young people from misogyny and the manosphere, The Children's Society

Understanding the Manosphere, Educate Against Hate

Sculpting jaws, giving scores: Inside the word of looksmaxxing, BBC news

Toxic masculinity and mental health, Youngminds

Teachers' union warns of 'masculinity crisis brewing' in schools, BBC news