



The Manosphere: A Parent's Guide

Boys in the Man Box

As parents we consider it normal for boys to become more taciturn as they enter adolescence. This withdrawal is a part of normal teenage development, the first step in seeking independence, but it should not be a signal to leave boys entirely to their own (digital) devices. In fact, the clichéd image of the silent, bedroom-dwelling teen often hides a deeper reality: many boys today don't have people they can confide in.

When boys reach adolescence, they begin to become aware of the wider culture of masculine expectation and stereotypes, sometimes called the 'Man Box'. At school, they enter a peer culture which often prizes dominance, athleticism and 'banter' over authentic emotional expression. Boys may start to lag behind girls in expressing empathy and some find it hard to talk about their worries with friends for fears of seeming 'girly'.

Unfortunately, with teens now spending hours every day on social media feeds and in closed online communities such as Discord, influencers of the so-called 'manosphere' can exploit this vulnerability. They may be able to offer the emotional validation and sense of belonging that boys are struggling to find elsewhere, while simultaneously pushing harmful, sexist messages which denigrate women.

Five Steps to Caring Communication

To protect boys from extremist ideologies and toxic masculinity influencers, we recommend a blended communication approach:

- 1. Listen Without Judgement:** Create a safe space at home where boys can share opinions, including those you may not agree with, without fear of being shamed or punished. Allow them to speak freely without jumping in with angry counterarguments, even if their views are shocking.
- 2. Calling In vs. Calling Out:** Instead of shaming (calling out), or punishing boys, call them in by encouraging them to consider new information and reflect on different perspectives.
- 3. Engagement:** Regularly chat and ask questions about digital consumption, or even view the content yourself so that you're better placed to introduce alternative points of view without shaming.
- 4. Critical Thinking:** Equip them with tools to assess the credibility and accuracy of the content they consume, and the motivations of those who create it.
- 5. Emotional Literacy and Resilience:** Teach boys to value empathy and express vulnerability, which are proven protective factors against sexism, hostility and susceptibility to extremism. Build their understanding of how they may be emotionally manipulated online by content designed to provoke anger, fear or resentment.

The Critical Thinking Toolkit: FACTS

Teach your child this handy mnemonic to help them distinguish between real and fake online:

F – **Find** the claim or information you want to check.

A – **Analyse** the source and look for credibility.

C – **Cross-check** the information with multiple reliable sources.

T – **Take note** of any biases or misleading elements.

S – **Seek** expert opinions or verified sources to validate the information.

Strategies for Parents

1. Prebunking (The Early Defence)

The most effective way to protect boys from getting sucked into harmful ideologies is to counter the hateful messaging in advance. Don't wait for a problem to arise – inoculate boys before they become infected. We call this technique 'prebunking'.

Normalise Digital Talk: Share online content you enjoy and watch or play it together. Express interest in boys' online lives, ask what they are seeing and how they feel about it. Keep yourself informed about social media trends and the most popular online influencers.

Spot the Nugget of Truth: Many conspiracy theories grow from a tiny nugget of truth that is then built upon and exaggerated. For example, real data from a single online dating app has fuelled the myth that eighty percent of women are attracted to twenty percent of men. Providing fuller context will help boys find that truth and understand how it may have been distorted to manipulate their feelings.

2. Debunking (Stopping the Spread)

If a boy repeats manosphere talking points (like the '80/20 rule'), engage calmly.

Side-by-Side Interaction: Boys often find it easier to open up to adults during a shared activity, for example a leisurely walk or a car ride, than in a face-to-face conversation.

Add Meaning to Their Pool of Knowledge: When they express opinions based on something they have seen online, share additional information or alternative viewpoints without invalidating their own thoughts or experience.

Counter-Messaging: Use personal stories or reference admired female figures (teachers, relatives, sports women or celebrities) to challenge generalisations and remind a boy that stereotypes don't represent reality.

Strategies for Parents

3. Upstanding (Taking Action)

Encourage boys to be ‘upstanders’ – male allies who speak out against misogyny as it happens. Speaking out against misogyny can be done both online and in the real world. It’s important to make the point to boys that the abuser might not stop or change their behaviour, but it is still worth demonstrating that you oppose it. It sends a signal that this activity is not acceptable.

When boys see misogynistic online abuse, (while gaming or in the comments section of a social post, for example), they can choose to take action:

Directly:

- Ask the abuser to stop.
- Suggest a comment is inappropriate.
- Use the platform’s report function to report the user.

Indirectly:

- Tell a trusted adult.
- Document events.
- Support a victim one-on-one.

4. Modelling

Model gender equality and respect in your own behaviour and relationships. Parents and carers are the most influential figures in kids’ lives and their first role models. Your lived reality as a family will do more to counter the manosphere than anything else.

Example Scenario: Manosphere Narratives

Boy citing a manosphere trope such as the 'gold digger' narrative that women are only interested in men who have a lot of money.

The Trap (what to avoid)

Reacting with panic or alarm or trying to shut down the conversation:
'That's just ridiculous. I don't care where you've heard that, I don't want you repeating it again'

The SOUK Approach (Debunking)

Step 1: Listen without judgement. Show you are willing to hear him out first.

Parent: 'Mmm, okay. Go on'

Step 2: Add meaning to the pool. Offer a different viewpoint calmly, without invalidating him.

Parent: 'That belief has been around for ages. In my opinion, it's based on a sexist stereotype that's unfair'

Step 3: Question the source's motive. Trigger introspection about the influencer.

Parent: 'Why do you think that influencer is posting that? Do you think being controversial helps him get more views or make money from the algorithm?'

Step 4: Personalise it (counter-messaging). Use a trusted female figure as a reference.

Parent: 'It's lucky your mum doesn't think that way, isn't it, or she'd never have married a poor teacher like me'

Example Scenario: Pre-emptive Conversation about Porn

You want to prepare your child for the inevitable algorithmic push of sexually explicit content before he encounters it.

The Trap (what to avoid)

Treating the subject as taboo or ‘dirty’, or waiting until you find something on his phone to react angrily.

The SOUK Approach (Prebunking)

Step 1: Show you understand the digital reality that this content will find him without him looking for it.

Parent: ‘You know, social media feeds are designed to keep you scrolling, and sometimes they push content that isn’t suitable for kids, including adults having sex, just to get engagement’

Step 2: Critical thinking questions. Teach him to question the intent of the content.

Parent: ‘If you see anything like that, I want you to ask yourself a few questions. ‘Why am I being shown this content? Is it making me feel shocked or excited just to keep me watching?’

Step 3: Shared values. Anchor the conversation in your family’s moral worldview regarding respect (particularly for women and girls).

Parent: ‘In our family, we believe sexual relationships are based on mutual respect and enjoyment. Does that video show respect to the women involved, or is it treating them like objects?’

When to Seek Professional Help

While radicalisation to the point of violence is rare, you must notify the police immediately if you believe that your child is at risk or if they are planning violent acts. Additionally, consult a GP if you notice signs of mental distress, which may include:

- Dramatic changes in appearance, mood, habits or schoolwork.
- Becoming unusually withdrawn or irritable.
- Obsessive workouts or restrictive diets.

Manosphere Lexicon

Alpha

A label for a dominant and socially successful man. Many now use the term to mock incels.

Beta

A label for a man perceived as less dominant or assertive.

Simp

Someone perceived as excessively attentive or deferential toward a romantic interest.

Cuck

An insult implying weakness, submissiveness or lack of self-respect, derived from 'cuckold'.

Looksmaxxing

Looksmaxxing is an online self-improvement subculture focused on maximising physical attractiveness. It has branched off to different types of 'maxxing', referring to the act of taking a specific trait, habit, or lifestyle to its limit.

AWALT

'All Women Are Like That'; the belief that women share the same core relationship behaviours.

AWFL/AWFUL

'Affluent white female (urban) liberal'; used as a derogatory term for white progressive women.

Femoid/Foid/FHO

'Female humanoid organism' is an insulting term meant to suggest women are not only less than men, but less than human.

Cracked/Cracking

Coded slang used to talk about sex online. Depending on context it may simply mean 'had sex with' or instead reflect a particular framing of sexual relationships. In the manosphere it sometimes refers to nonconsensual sex, suggesting that men do the cracking and women get cracked.

Red Pill

Those who are 'redpilled' claim to understand hidden truths about gender relations, dating, and society. The term comes from the 1999 film *The Matrix*, in which main character is offered a choice between revelation (the red pill) and illusion (the blue pill).

Manosphere Lexicon

Blue Pill

Those who are 'bluepilled' are perceived as accepting mainstream views about relationships and society.

Black Pill

The 'blackpill' philosophy argues that someone's dating success is determined entirely by their physical attractiveness. It suggests that no amount of self-improvement can change one's ability to access sexual relationships.

Normie

In broader internet slang, an abbreviation for 'normal'. Within incel communities, however, it refers to anyone who remains unaware of what incels view as the true nature of social and romantic dynamics, similar to being 'bluepilled'.

Incel

Short for 'involuntary celibate', incels are a subculture of men who describe themselves as unable to find romantic or sexual relationships despite wanting them.

Gymcel

A person associated with incel culture who focuses heavily on fitness.

Femcel

Short for 'female involuntary celibate'. Originally a female counterpart to 'incel', the term has evolved into a broader identity, online meme and aesthetic.

Chad

A term used by incels, 'Chads' are the men most women want to date. They are confident, brash and conventionally attractive.

Stacy

'Stacys' are the women incels want to date, but who only want to date Chads.

Unalive

A term for death, including murder or suicide, used to get around content guidelines on digital platforms.

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Sexual market value (SMV)

A manosphere concept that treats dating as a marketplace in which people possess varying levels of desirability based on factors including physical attractiveness, age, social status, wealth and personality.

High-value male/man

A reference to someone with markers of value in the 'SMV', including fitness and wealth.

Men going their own way (MGTOW)

A movement and online subculture whose members advocate minimising or avoiding romantic relationships, marriage and sometimes broader involvement with women.

Soy boy/Soya boy

A derogatory label for men seen as effeminate or progressive.

Wagecuck/Corporate slave

A slur used to mock men with conventional jobs and to glorify independence or entrepreneurship.

White knighting

A derogatory term for a person – usually a man – who is perceived as defending or supporting a woman primarily to gain her approval, affection or romantic interest.

More Resources

Combatting Misogyny

[UN Women](#) – A guide to having open conversations with boys about misogyny and its impact.

[Boyhood Initiative](#) – A range of resources for parents and carers to help boys lead happier lives.

[Thinkuknow](#) – Age-appropriate activities to discuss sensitive issues with boys including porn, sexuality, sextortion and healthy relationships.

[Beyond Equality](#) – A helpful toolkit for parents on talking to boys about online influencers.

Preventing and Countering Extremism

[ACT Early](#) – Resources, advice and a confidential support line to discuss and get help for vulnerable individuals.

[Educate Against Hate](#) – Advice, support and FAQs for parents about online safeguarding and having difficult conversations with children.

[Shout Out UK](#) – A free youth-centred interactive learning package for education on extremism, radicalisation and Prevent.

[Counter Hate](#) – A free guide for parents on helping children navigate social media safely.

[GOV.UK](#) – For advice and possibly to make a referral.

More Resources

Media Literacy:

Shout Out UK – A range of free media literacy resources aimed at children and young people.

Internet Matters – Step-by-step safety advice to help manage online use and discuss harmful content with kids and teens.

Parent Zone – Articles, videos and podcast episodes with up to date expert advice.

Commonsense Media – The family resources pages of the website provide media literacy tools to help families reinforce critical thinking, creativity, connection and curiosity.

Dismiss – A suite of images and videos prebunking disinformation tactics, aimed at young people.

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Man Enough

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Protect
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