

Navigating Masculinity

The Media's Influence on Young Males

Masculinity

Understanding masculinity is key to comprehending how it could become negative. Masculinity is a term for qualities or behaviours that people associate with being a boy/man. Being strong and brave are examples of what society traditionally expects from men.

It is important to note that not all masculinity is toxic.

It is ok for boys and men to be strong and brave in healthy ways. However, it becomes an issue when some of these ideas of 'being a man' become more extreme.

Toxic Masculinity

The phrase toxic masculinity refers to when the ideas of masculinity and 'being a man' become harmful and extreme. People who promote toxic masculinity believe to 'be a man' you must:

- ⚠️ **Never show any feelings or emotions:** This means being strong all the time, not crying or feeling sad – even if you are.
- ⚠️ **Be aggressive and tough:** You must always be ready to fight or be in charge, even if it hurts others.
- ⚠️ **Hide your weaknesses:** You can never ask for support/advice or admit you are wrong – that makes you vulnerable.
- ⚠️ **Think you are stronger and better than girls or women:** This is disrespectful and untrue.

Recently on social media, the more harmful extremist views of what defines masculinity have increased in popularity.

Core Messages of Toxic Masculinity

Young men can be influenced into these harmful communities through the promotion of ideals such as:

Advocating for Dominant Male/Submissive Female Roles - promoting exaggerated male characteristics like physical strength, focusing on the idea of the 'alpha male'. This is usually paired with the ideal that women are meant to be obedient and submissive to men.

Men's Rights - focusing on promoting 'men's rights', framing their content as a 'solution' to the increase of women's rights. This can seem relatable to young men who feel excluded by the equality movement, especially regarding feminism.

Emotional Engagement - claiming to empathise with the struggles that young men face such as exclusion, rejection or confusion about society's expectations. They often promise a future of wealth and relationships if their promoted lifestyle is followed. This makes content relatable for vulnerable young people while also giving them hope.

The buzz around Netflix's *Adolescence* sparks discussions on the impact of negative masculinity portrayals on young people.

The show highlights a growing concern: young males whilst online, are increasingly exposed to harmful, extremist views of what it is to be masculine. To address this, it's crucial to promote healthier models of masculinity, emphasising emotional expression, self-awareness, and helping young men critically engage with, rather than be unquestioningly influenced by online content.

Signs a Child May Be Affected by Toxic Masculinity

Although valuing masculinity is not always toxic, it is important to be aware of the signs that a child may be influenced by extremist views.

- Withdrawal from friends/family
- Repressing emotions and rejecting support
- Low self-esteem and insecurity
- Speaking negatively about women (e.g., appearance, relationships)
- Excessive time spent on specific websites/apps
- Obsession with physical appearance

Top Tips for Having Supportive Conversations

Engage in conversations about:

- ✓ **Healthy relationships** and treating girls/women respectfully.
- ✓ **Healthy masculinity**, model emotional expression and self-awareness.
- ✓ **Use parental controls** on social media to monitor screen time and limit harmful content consumed.
- ✓ **Ensure** the young people in your care know who their trusted adults are, that they can confide in if they are anxious about content they find online.
- ✓ **Introduce** positive male role models who embody healthy masculinity.
- ✓ **Educate** the young people in your care about how they can critically evaluate online content.

Language and Symbols

Discriminatory language and harmful emojis used in extremist online communities play a role in creating a culture that normalises harmful views of masculinity.

- 🔴 **Red pill** – A reference to the film *The Matrix*. If you are a 'red pill', you are 'waking up' to a 'reality' of the world being against you because women are in charge/only attractive men are successful.
- 🖤 **Black pill** – This refers to accepting the belief that women choose sexual partners based on predetermined genetic features and a man cannot change this.
- 🟢 **The 80 to 20 rule** – The belief that 80% of women are only attracted to 20% of men.
- ☕ **Kidney bean/coffee beans** – Used to call someone or self-identify as an incel (involuntary celibate).
- ♂️ **Alphas and Betas** – Alphas are believed to be confident men who are leaders. Betas are believed to be submissive, weak men.