

How to talk to boys about misogyny

July 18 2023, by Sophie King-Hill



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Government research suggests that the sexual harassment of girls by boys is [extremely widespread in English schools](#). The highest rates of reports of sexual abuse by people under 25 come from girls [aged 15 to 17](#).

The government's [Women and Equalities Committee recently emphasized](#) the need to combat misogyny through work with young men

and boys. I contributed as an expert witness to the committee on relationships, sex and [health education](#) and my input was quoted in its report.

It is vitally important that we talk about misogyny with boys. The [committee's findings](#) suggest that relationships and sex education at schools is not targeted enough to boys' needs, and that they may not have a full understanding of what sexual harassment is. Boys may feel [shut out of the conversation](#), leaving them feeling blamed but unable to contribute to solutions.

One key aspect of this that is often overlooked is that misogyny is damaging to boys, too. The idealization of hyper masculinity and the expectation that men should be heterosexual, dominant and emotionless leaves little room for boys to explore their identity.

If you are a parent, you may be uncertain about how to raise this topic with your son. This may also be true if you work with young men and boys.

In my research I work with [young people](#) on topics such as relationships and sex education, misogyny and masculinity. My work is underpinned by the importance of listening to young people about matters that concern them. Here is some guidance on how to talk to boys about misogyny that may be helpful.

Approach the topic without judgment

Before talking to a boy about misogyny, first think about your own views on boys and young men. Perhaps you feel anger or disgust at the way girls at school may be made to feel by their male peers. But you should try to keep blame out of the conversation.

Violence and sexual harassment against women and girls is [carried out mostly by men and boys](#). But the first step in addressing this issue is to [create dialog](#)—and this is unlikely to happen if boys feel judged. Blame causes resentment and shame which shuts down communication.

Let boys say what they feel

You may find opening a discussion like this incredibly difficult. As a society, we have issues broaching sensitive topics such as sexual behavior and gender. You could start by asking your child's opinion on a particular issue, such as online misogyny influencers or sexual harassment at school. You could contact their school to find out what your child is currently learning in relationships and sex education, and raise those topics with them.

Let your son know that they are able to be honest and you will not judge them. You may not like what you hear. But to truly get to the heart of the matter, [boys](#) need to feel that they do not have to stick to a social script and are able to say what they are really feeling.

Then gently unpick the issues with them. The important thing is not to blame or shame them for what they may be thinking, but to help them see how misogyny is damaging not only to women, and other genders, but also to themselves.

Listen to their ideas

Young people are the experts in the world that they live in now. Your child may well know more than you do about how much pornography is shared between teens, what misogynistic influencers are saying, how sexual harassment happens online and what their peers' views on gender are. They may also have good ideas about tackling misogyny.

Make your conversation a discussion, not a lecture, and prepare to learn from them, too.

Masculinity and misogyny aren't the same

There are many different ways to be a boy or man. But there is a perception, reinforced by [traditional media](#), [social media](#) and pornography, that men should look and act a certain way: dominant, emotionless and strong.

In some places—such as the content produced by misogynistic influencers—this way of being a man is accompanied by negative, harmful views about women. This [kind of masculinity](#) has been labeled as "toxic."

But traits seen as stereotypically masculine are not inherently bad. Strength, leadership and assertiveness can be positive attributes for all genders. There is nothing wrong with a young man or boy identifying with this type of masculinity. It is misogynistic views, which can be coupled with negative traits such as sexual entitlement and violence, that should be pushed back on. We have to make this distinction and separate them when considering masculinity.

Boys also need support to thrive—and misogynistic perspectives damage everyone. As parents, we should approach these topics with compassion and an awareness that we are all in this together.

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