

Parents and carers

Exploring the online experiences of boys and young men

For boys and young men, the internet can be a place where they seek connection, validation and guidance as they explore what it means to be a man today.

eSafety's [young men online research](#) explores their experiences and the ways that they can be supported online to develop healthy and positive masculinities.

Talking to young people about their online experiences

These are some conversation starters which can be used with all young people:

- **Be curious, not critical:** Show interest and give them the time to explain before jumping in with opinions or judgement.
- **Focus on values, not fear:** Go beyond 'That influencer is dangerous.' Try: 'Do you think that person treats people with respect?'
- **Know where they hang out:** Explore the apps they are engaging in. [The eSafety Guide](#) as information on a range of common social media, games, apps and sites, and how users can report harmful content.
- **Avoid panic:** Ask what they like about certain influencers or jokes – though we might not like what some of the influencers stand for or promote – it's an opportunity to explore what it is about them that's capturing their interest.

We can also be creative in the way we ask, by focusing on questions that open conversations, instead of shutting them down. For example:

- **'Hey, that meme's everywhere – what do you think it means?'** This shows you're paying attention and opens the door to their interpretation first. It's also an opportunity to use this as a teaching moment, in case they think it's harmless, but is potentially offensive to others.
- **'That one's interesting. Where did you first see it?'** This invites them to reflect on the source, which can lead to a conversation about where ideas come from and how they spread.
- **'Do you think everyone sees that meme the same way?'** This encourages critical thinking about audience and impact and is an opportunity to help them understand how memes can be used to spread hate or disinformation.



When to talk to young people about their online experiences

The best time to talk to young people about what they're doing online is when the pressure is low and the connection is high. For example:

- **while doing something together**, such as walking the dog, gaming together – side by side moments feel less intense than a face-to-face chat
- **after a shared experience**, watching a video, hearing a news story or seeing something online
- **when they mention something**, for example, if they mention a game, a meme or a creator.

Connecting young people to positive sources

Understand what is driving their attitude and connect them to people, organisations or online groups that promote positive attitudes about masculinity and social cohesion. Some strategies you may try, include:

- **asking** what does a good role model look like to them? What does a role model mean? Remember, young people can have many role models.
- **looking locally** – is there someone in the family or community who shares similar positive values or interests? If not in the family, is there a sports coach, community leader, or mentor? Remember it doesn't always need to be a male role model.
- **engaging with youth programs or online communities** that foster emotional development, self-awareness or positive social justice initiatives.
- **modelling respectful behaviour** by apologising when wrong, showing emotion without shame, respecting diversity and calling out harmful narratives and stereotypes.

Reporting harm

You can help young people to collect evidence and report online harm if it is part of [cyberbullying](#) targeting someone under 18. Or if [Image-based abuse](#) is involved.

If they have seen [illegal and restricted online content](#) (this includes material that shows or encourages child sexual abuse, terrorism or other extreme violence) an anonymous [report](#) can be made to eSafety.

Find out more at [Report online harm](#)

Additional reading and resources

- [An unfair fight – how algorithms are shaping our adolescents | eSafety Commissioner](#)
- [Shining a light on the dark forces manipulating our teenagers | eSafety Commissioner](#)
- [A way forward: Disrupting the darker forces impacting young men online | eSafety Commissioner](#)
- [Parents | eSafety Commissioner](#)

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