



Expectations, Sexism & Misogyny - Handout

Introduction

Young people grow up surrounded by messages about gender from families, schools, peers, media, and wider culture. These messages shape how they see themselves, how they understand relationships, and what they believe is expected of them. Social media and digital communication can amplify these pressures, but they are only one part of a broader landscape of gendered expectations.

Many young people use online spaces to connect with friends, express themselves, and explore their interests. These spaces can help young people feel supported and find communities that reflect their identities. At the same time, cultural norms around gender, appearance, and behaviour can be reinforced both online and offline.

There are benefits and risks in any environment where young people interact — whether face-to-face or digitally. Some contexts may expose them to particular harms more than others. For example, some online spaces may normalise sexist humour or gender-based harassment, while peer groups online and offline may reinforce rigid expectations about masculinity or femininity.

Some risks include:

- Cyberbullying and social exclusion
- Scamming/extortion or coercive behaviour
- Intimate image abuse
- Radicalisation into harmful ideologies, including gender-based extremism
- Self-esteem and body image pressures
- Isolation or withdrawal from supportive relationships
- Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts
- Exposure to inappropriate content or misinformation
- Idealisation of peers or influencers
- Encouragement of self-harm or risky behaviours

Young people navigate a complex mix of cultural messages about gender. While we cannot control every influence they encounter, professionals can play a vital role in helping them develop critical thinking, healthy relationship skills, and confidence to challenge harmful norms.

Pornography

It is normal for young people to be curious about bodies and sex, especially as they reach adolescence. It therefore makes sense that young people may seek out pornography, and it's important that we don't shame somebody for this, or pass judgement. However, pornography can often be a young person's main (or only) form of 'education' on bodies and sex. This is problematic as mainstream pornographic content is overwhelmingly unrealistic, violent, and misogynistic, and often young people are shown pornography unsolicited (through a pop up, or sent to them, for example).

Accessing and watching mainstream pornography can be linked to increased sexual, relational and body dissatisfaction as well as low self esteem. Mainstream pornography depiction of relationships can impact dating dynamics, expectations and create issues around consent and abuse.

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The average age a child will be exposed to pornography is 13 years old, however some children can be exposed from the age of 9. Research shows the younger a child is exposed to pornography, the higher is the likelihood of becoming a frequent user of pornography.

Although 50% of young people aged 16-25 years old actively seek out pornography, children and young adults can be exposed accidentally through pop-ups or ads in websites or social media platforms. A large majority (78%) of pornography users has been exposed to pornography depicting sexual violence, and 47% of young people aged 18-21 had experienced a violent sex act. Girls are significantly more likely than boys to have experienced a violent sex act, however boys will feel pressure to perform them.

***Data from Children's Commissioner report on the impact of pornography**

[New evidence on pornography's influence on harmful sexual behaviour among children | Children's Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](#)

Law

Misogyny is not a crime in the UK. However, misogynistic behaviour can fall under a number of existing laws including harassment, stalking, intimate image abuse (including the creation and dispersal of 'deepfake' images), threats and intimidation, sexual harassment, sexual assault, voyeurism, upskirting, online sexual exploitation, and malicious communications (both online and offline).

In the online space, there are several laws that may apply to misogynistic behaviour:

- Communications Act 2003 criminalises offensive or threatening online messages.
- Malicious Communications Act 1988 criminalised messages intended to cause distress or anxiety.
- Online Safety Act 2023 requires platforms to reduce harmful content, including misogynistic abuse.

Both offline and online misogynistic behaviours can be both a safeguarding issue and a criminal matter.

Schools, youth organisations and local authorities have a legal duty to protect young people from gender-based harm by challenging sexist behaviour, preventing harassment and reporting concerns.

Safeguarding

If someone is in immediate danger, call **999**.

If you are concerned that a child may be at risk, then you need to make a **report** to the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub)/ Children's Social Care or the equivalent in your area.

To support a young person reporting nude images being shared:

NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) on 0800 800 5000

Project Report Remove

[Supporting young people to report nude images: Report Remove | NSPCC Learning](#)

If you talk to a child about harms or abuse, please bear in mind the following:

- Find a private space
- Avoid judgemental language
- Maintain a record of your conversation
- Don't promise not to share information

When talking to children and young people about sexism and misogyny, it is important to remain positive and respect their opinions and experiences. Try to keep judgement and criticism out of the conversation, and as far as possible try to engage young people in informal spaces.

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Part of being an active bystander is about gently challenging terminology (e.g. derogatory language about women) without telling young people off and discouraging them from speaking freely in future. You can ask them where they have heard that language and help them to think critically about the words they are using.

Some key points:

- Be curious about the content and influencers being watched and ask questions
- Challenge the opinion, not the person
- Help in building strong, trustful relationships, especially across genders
- Encourage positive male role models and influencers
- Encourage young people to take control of their social media feeds

The Three Rs - Regulate, Relate and Reason Model

The Regulate, Relate, Reason (3 Rs) model, developed by neuroscientist Dr. Bruce Perry, is a neuroscience-based framework used to help dysregulated adults and children.

Regulate: Check in with young people rather than check up on them. Ensure you are asking how they are and encourage open lines of communication. One way of doing this is by modelling your own vulnerability, sharing something of your own experience as a way to connect and show that we all navigate emotions, but we need to learn how to regulate them.

Relate: Ask them questions about how they are feeling, the things they enjoy, and their opinions. Frame them as an expert of their own experience from which you can learn, and try to figure out what aspects of the content they are watching are attractive to them, and why.

Reason: Discuss the difficult topics with them and try to engage them in seeing content from different perspectives. Ask them what they think about alternative points of view.

Conversation starters

How to start?

Social media

- What is your favourite thing to do online?
- Who do you like following on social media? Why?
- What kind of content do you share on social media?
- How do you think social media could negatively affect someone's mental or physical health? What are some ways we can avoid this?
- Do you follow any accounts that focus on posting positive or uplifting content? What are your favourites?

Negative online content

- Have you ever felt sad or unhappy when you have been online? What did you do? Would you do anything differently now?
- What does online bullying look like to you? What's the difference between bullying and joking around?
- What advice would you give to a friend who was being bullied online? What support could you offer them?
- What would you do if one of your friends was bullying someone else?
- What is it in that (reel/podcast/post) that you agreed with?
- What do you think about other perspectives on that content?

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Misogynistic / gender-based abuse

- Have you ever heard someone say something that didn't feel quite right, even if it was framed as 'just a joke'?
- Do you think girls and boys get treated the same at school?
- Have you ever felt expected to act or look a certain way just because of your gender?
- What do you think about the ideas promoted by [name of social media influencer] about men and women?
- Do you notice a difference in the way male and female creators are treated in the comments of the videos you watch?

Online pornography

- Do you feel comfortable speaking about this topic with me? Is there another trusted adult you'd feel more comfortable speaking to?
- How does pornography differ from intimacy in real life? Do you think pornography is realistic?
- Have you ever accessed or stumbled across porn online?
- If you had questions about porn or sex, where would you go for answers?

Sending naked images

- Do you feel comfortable speaking about this topic with me? Is there another trusted adult you'd feel more comfortable speaking to?
- Why do you think some people send nude images or videos of themselves to others online?
- Have any of your friends sent nudes? What did you think? Can you think of any risks?
- What advice would you give to a friend who has had their nudes shared without their consent?

Helpline numbers

Childline on 0800 1111

[Childline | Childline](#)

NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) **on** 0808 800 5000

Project Report Remove

[Supporting young people to report nude images: Report Remove | NSPCC Learning](#)

The Mix

[Get Support - The Mix](#)

Youth Access

[Find help | Youth Access](#)

Childnet

[Childnet – Online safety for young people](#)

Respect (UK Charity focused on stopping perpetrators of domestic abuse)

[Respect | Home](#)

Kiran Project (Counselling for Asian boys/men)

[Home | Kiran Support Services](#)

CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command, for reporting abuse)

Email: bookings@sundialcentre.org

Website: www.sundialcentre.org

Useful Links and Resources

NSPCC online safety blog

[Online safety blog | NSPCC](#)

Advice for professionals

<https://www.childnet.com/help-and-advice/teachers-and-professionals>

Educate Against Hate - Government Safeguarding resources

[Misogyny – Educate Against Hate](#)

White Ribbon Allyship

[Allyship: The key to real culture change — White Ribbon UK](#)

Children's Commissioner report on the impact of pornography

[New evidence on pornography's influence on harmful sexual behaviour among children | Children's Commissioner for England \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](#)

Qualitative research project to investigate the impact of online harms on children

[Qualitative research project to investigate the impact of online harms on children \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Digital stalking leaflet

[https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2016/08/2009_Digital Stalking Leaflet.pdf](https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2016/08/2009_Digital_Stalking_Leaflet.pdf)

Responding to children experiencing online harm and abuse

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/skrhl5wb/helplines-insight-briefing-responses-children-online-harm-abuse.pdf>

Information for parents

Advice for Parents and Carers

<https://www.childnet.com/help-and-advice/parents-and-carers>

Chat Apps

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/social-media/chat-apps/>

Child Safety Online – Practical Guide for Parents

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-safety-online-a-practical-guide-for-parents-and-carers>

Cyberbullying Advice for Parents and Carers

<https://saferinternet.org.uk/guide-and-resource/cyberbullying-advice-for-parents-and-carers>

Explicit Content

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<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/inappropriate-explicit-content/>

Keeping Children Safe Online

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/online-safety>

Online Safety Advice for Parents

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/media/nkvbqk20/online-safety-updated-feb-2020.pdf>

Online Safety Dinosaur

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/techosaurus/>

Online Safety Guidance for Parents

https://swgfl.org.uk/assets/documents/online-safety-guide-for-parents.pdf?_id=1553269251 Online Safety

Guide for Parents of 14+ year olds

<https://www.internetmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Internet-Matters-Age-Guide-14plus-Jan-23.pdf>

Revenge Pornography – what to do

<https://www.thecyberhelpline.com/guides/revenge-porn>

Sharing Nudes

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety sexting-sending-nudes/>

Swiggle:

[Child-safe Search Engine https://swgfl.org.uk/services/swiggle/](https://swgfl.org.uk/services/swiggle/)

Useful apps to cope better with mental health

<https://safelinksupport.co.uk/safelink2016/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Useful-Apps.pdf>

Having a conversation with your child

<https://www.ceopeducation.co.uk/parents/articles/having-a-conversation-with-your-child/>

Set your child up for online safety with these simple tasks

<https://www.internetmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Internet-Matters-Set-Up-Safe-Checklist-Mar-2023.pdf>

Things I wish my parents had known: Young people's advice on talking to your child about online sexual harassment

https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2021/12/cco_talking_to_your_child_about_online_sexual_harassment_poster_for_parents_2021.pdf

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<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/skrhl5wb/helplines-insight-briefing-responses-children-online-harm-abuse.pdf>

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