

HOW TO TACKLE MISOGYNY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

A guide for teachers on how to address misogynistic attitudes, and help students to build positive relationships.



With contributions from:

Adam Brooks, Deputy Headteacher, St. Andrew's Catholic School
Charli Faux, Subject Lead for Life Skills, Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School
Tracey Neale, Assistant Headteacher, Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni
Sarah Towers, Deputy Headteacher, Holmer Green Senior School

INTRODUCTION

Concerns about misogynistic attitudes among secondary school students are on the rise, and discussions about the issue are rippling out from school staffrooms to government departments.

In July 2025, the Government updated its Relationships, Sex and Health Education guidance for English secondary schools, with a stronger focus on education which confronts the challenging topics of misogyny, unhealthy relationships and harmful online content.

Addressing this effectively is also reflected in the latest operating guidance for Ofsted inspectors for talking to students about RSHE in the new framework. The guidance recommends giving single-sex pupil groups the opportunity to speak more freely about challenging issues such as sexual harassment, online sexual abuse and sexual violence.

Although schools are only part of the solution, they have a very important role to play in guiding young people, helping them question online content and creating an environment where everyone feels safe to be themselves.

This report will discuss the challenges schools face, and provide practical strategies from teachers to tackle the growing threat of misogyny for our young people.



WHY IS MISOGYNY ON THE RISE?



There is no simple answer.

In a world where children are subject to a greater range of influences than ever before, they are coming across a bewildering array of extreme social and political beliefs on the issues of the day. Misogyny is one of these, and countering it is not an easy fix.

A complex mix of factors is accelerating the spread of misogyny in our schools, and that's why it is so challenging for teachers to address.

Harmful online content

Social media platforms are responsible for driving the trend. If a young person views misogynistic content, the algorithms continue to feed them more, creating echo chambers where harmful attitudes become normalised. At this point it becomes harder for a young person to challenge divisive opinions.

Research was conducted in partnership between UCL, the University of Kent and the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), to investigate algorithmic modelling. The researchers found that when they set up new TikTok accounts, there was a fourfold increase in the level of misogynistic content in the 'For You' page over just five days on the platform.



Likewise, children are increasingly exposed to online pornography which depicts extreme sexual violence, providing a distorted and dangerous view of what a relationship should look like.

Manosphere content creators

There's been a rapid increase in prominent figures promoting misogynistic views, and this is having a profound impact on some young men. The Andrew Tate phenomenon has given rise to many imitators who continue to advocate anti-feminist views and promote increasingly extreme beliefs.

In a Teacher Tapp survey, 80% of teachers agree they are worried that the views of Andrew Tate and similar influencers are having a negative effect on male pupils' behaviour, with 47% agreeing strongly.

The danger is that these influencers often present themselves as lifestyle coaches or success mentors, making their harmful messages more palatable to vulnerable young men.

Low self-esteem

Peer pressure has always been an issue during the teenage years, but with the additional pressure of social media promoting unrealistic standards of perfection, it's hardly surprising our generation of young people suffer from low self-esteem.

In fact, a third to a half of adolescents struggle with low self-esteem, according to the support service, Let's All Talk Mental Health.

When young people are not sure of themselves, they can turn to problematic online sources for guidance, and in the case of some boys, the guidance comes from misogynistic influencers.





Unfulfilled need to belong

An adolescent wellbeing study from the BMJ explains how teenagers are hardwired to want to belong to a group and to matter to the people in that group.

Where family and community connections are not as strong as they could be, young people often seek other places which offer a sense of belonging, which explains why teens can be drawn into gang culture.

Manosphere influencers are exploiting this need, and providing new communities where vulnerable boys can satisfy their desire to be included and valued.



Backlash against gender equality

Born after much of the progress in gender equality was made, boys might be confused by the focus on gender equality, and girls' successes. This can lead to resentment in the form of misogyny.

A report from the UN Agency for Gender Equality suggests harmful content spread on social media platforms is helping to drive retrograde ideas about the roles of men and women in society.

If boys are also hearing misogynistic views from family members at home, this can strengthen discriminatory beliefs, making it harder for schools to challenge them.





All these dynamics are contributing to the increase in misogyny among secondary school students, and subjecting boys to damaging influences at an impressionable age.

We spoke to school leaders and teachers about how they are tackling misogyny at its roots, without positioning boys as the problem.

The following sections look at typical scenarios playing out in schools – and how teachers are addressing them and supporting their students to overcome them.

1. Challenge online influences

2. Help students develop self-worth

3. Provide positive role models

4. Build a culture of respect

1 CHALLENGE ONLINE INFLUENCES

A child's circle of influence is no longer restricted to their family, friends and community. Social media platforms are introducing children to the unfiltered views of strangers. Among these are manosphere communities which promote anything from casual sexism to the outright hate of women.

Scenario 1:

A group of 13-year-old boys are getting involved in online manosphere communities and being fed misogynistic content on TikTok and YouTube.

The boys have started to express these views at school. As a result, misogyny is sweeping through the school like wildfire causing division among students and making some students feel unsafe.

Here are some ways teachers suggest challenging harmful online views:

Open up the conversation

Follow up these conversations in a safe space rather dismissing them as trivial, or shutting them down. This works best when there is a whole-school approach to challenging extreme online views, because every student understands they will be expected to explain the comments they have made to a staff member.



If our staff hear something misogynistic, they don't chastise or set detentions. Instead, they make it clear to everyone present – including those impacted by it – that the offensive comment is unacceptable. Teachers then pick up on the conversation with the student later on. This might be reinforced by giving the child a mentor who will be a good role model for them.

Tracey Neale, Assistant Headteacher, Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymn





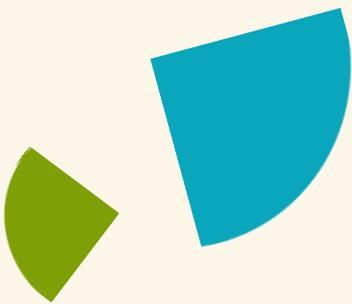
Train up your experts

It's a good idea to have a member of staff who is trained to respond appropriately to misogyny in school. This gives teachers someone they can call on for support if they witness harmful behaviour or misogynistic language.



If a student starts quoting Andrew Tate, or someone similar, we encourage staff to de-escalate the conversation and refer the student to our safeguarding team. We've got people there who are specialists in having these conversations. They calmly encourage the student to take a step back, unpick what they have said, and reflect on the effect it's had on the others in the class.

Sarah Towers, Deputy Headteacher, Holmer Green Senior school.



Work closely with parents and caregivers

Consider inviting parents to sessions where you can highlight the dangers of misogynistic content by giving examples of what students are currently consuming on social media and gaming platforms. Suggest ways you can work together with parents to limit online access and encourage safe use of social media.



Without trying to frighten parents, we show them statistical evidence that by the age of 13, most children will have seen pornography and misogyny on their phones. Parents can sometimes feel that topics like these are too hard hitting for younger teenagers. But when I invite parents in for coffee mornings to explain how we're approaching these issues in our PSHE lessons, they are really supportive and ready to continue the conversation at home.

Charli Faux, Subject Lead for Life Skills, Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School.



Bust the myths

Try helping students challenge some of the misinformation they encounter online by using statistics and evidence.



One thing we often hear from students is the belief that many women make false allegations of rape. It's important to combat any falsehoods with actual data, such as the research for the Home Office which suggests that only 4% of cases of sexual violence reported to the UK police are found or suspected to be false. That busts the myth with tangible evidence.

Tracey Neale, Assistant Headteacher, Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni.



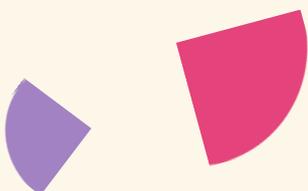
Educate students about misogyny

Use your PSHE sessions to take a proactive stance by explaining the impact of online misogynistic content, the language used, and why it is so damaging. Explain that misogynistic influencers are good at dressing up extreme views as life hacks.



We take a whole year group off timetable one afternoon a week for enrichment sessions. Rather than choose vague topics unrelated to students, we use these to tackle something that has happened in school recently head on. For example, if a student has shared an inappropriate video around the school, we'll talk about the impact it's had on other students, or why the content could be misunderstood, and how we can work to do better next time.

Adam Brooks, Deputy Headteacher, St Andrew's Catholic School.



2 HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP SELF-WORTH

The secondary school years are a time of self-discovery, when young people measure themselves against their peers. There is a desire to fit in, and some boys may feel pressured into going along with views they don't really agree with.

It takes true strength of character to challenge the codes and beliefs of your classmates. Building a student's sense of self is an important way to help students stick to their principles rather than giving in to peer pressure.

Scenario 2:

Teachers have noticed that some of their 11-year-old students are seeking validation from older groups of boys in the school. They have started to embrace negative influences to fit in, including misogynistic thinking.

These are some of the ways teachers are helping students to build their self-worth.

Help students trust their instincts

Ensure emotional regulation and self-esteem is built into your PSHE teaching, right through students' time at school. A consistent message helps students develop the resilience to trust their instincts and be their better selves.

Throughout their time at school, we help students to know their value and refuse to play along with attitudes they know are wrong. This includes challenging online misinformation and understanding how algorithms reinforce it. But also how to resist peer pressure by standing up to bullies and walking away from situations which feel uncomfortable.

Charli Faux, Subject Lead for Life Skills, Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School.





Show students they belong – and matter

Show students how much they matter to the school community, by giving them roles on committees, or positions of responsibility. Where possible, there are benefits to these being well balanced between boys and girls. It's also important to ensure that those who are influenced by misogyny are actively engaged and included.



Part of the reason boys end up on these incel forums is because they have such low self-worth. We try and show our students that everyone is important by inviting students to contribute positively to the school. For example, we might say to a student, 'You would be really good on our equalities committee, why don't you come on board?'

Tracey Neale, Assistant Headteacher, Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni.



Get students' views

Create opportunities for disengaged students to be actively involved in school decision-making. Give them agency, and show them their views are respected and, if possible, acted upon.



I asked our sixth formers to review all our PSHE teaching. They said the school does nothing about safe online dating – and in the sixth form, that's important. So we developed a module on using dating apps safely, which is a big step, particularly for a Catholic school. Our leadership team recognised that the student voice is essential in making students feel valued.

Adam Brooks, Deputy Headteacher, St Andrew's Catholic School.



3 PROVIDE POSITIVE ROLE MODELS

Some students may lack positive male role models, so they actively seek alternatives online. Fortunately, schools are extremely well equipped to show children good role models, from teachers and staff members to other students.

Scenario 3:

In a PSHE session for 14-year-olds, some of the boys talked about their fathers and brothers, and it became clear in the course of the lesson that many held misogynistic views. The boys respect these relatives but the concern in school is how to challenge these views without impacting the boys' relationships with their families.

Providing positive male role models is the most effective way to counter this issue. Here are some creative ways schools are providing positive role models to contradict stereotypes held by male family members outside of school.



Give students examples they can aspire to

Take every opportunity to show students real examples of men who support women's achievements and who thrive in an equal society, possibly with the support of carefully selected specialists, or trained members of staff.

Show students it's not a sign of weakness to take leadership from women and work alongside them.



Careers sessions can be a good way to give students positive examples of how ordinary men and women progressed from school into their chosen careers, working and succeeding together.

Tracey Neale, Assistant Headteacher, Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymini.



Encourage staff to model positive masculinity

Encourage staff and students to come up with examples of positive masculinity they have witnessed in school over the past week. This could involve any qualities from strength and leadership to compassion and understanding. Use these examples as themes for discussion.



We've done a lot of work linked to Paul Dix, author of *When the Adults Change, Everything Changes*, who advocates modelling good behaviour for students. This works well with our staff body which is quite wide ranging and diverse. Our staff members help students understand there are many different types of positive masculinity, by actively rejecting misogynistic notions and insisting on kindness as the number one priority in our school.

Sarah Towers, Deputy Headteacher, Holmer Green Senior school.



Provide peer role models

Set up initiatives such as student mentoring schemes, and involve a range of students, not just those who are high achievers. This will help students emulate the strengths they see in those they look up to.



Our school is training Year 11s and 10s to be mentors so students always have somewhere to go if they don't feel comfortable discussing something with a teacher. The mentors then raise any issues with a member of staff, or the school's designated safeguarding lead, according to the school's safeguarding procedures.

Tracey Neale, Assistant Headteacher, Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni.



4 BUILD A CULTURE OF RESPECT

Misogynistic thinking revolves around a set of harmful stereotypes. These stereotypes stem from a lack of understanding of the things that really matter to men and women. Building mutual respect between all students is the key to tackling this.

Scenario 4:

An experienced teacher is concerned that the current cohort of students is more divided on gender lines than ever before. The teacher is noticing how some of the boys talk about harmful stereotypes, such as alpha males, and some the girls are starting to make comments that seem to point to a belief that all men are dangerous. There is a growing lack of understanding and respect between boys and girls.

Here are some ways schools are creating a culture of respect.



Promote better understanding

Ask the boys and girls to give examples of the challenges each other is facing. Use these to create a discussion between genders about the respective challenges, and highlight the importance of mutual understanding.



Although we are a girls' school, we make sure we talk about the pressures on boys as well as girls in our teaching. When we have conversations about body image, mental health or sexual assault, we talk about the impact of these issues on boys too.

Charli Faux, Subject Lead for Life Skills, Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School.





Focus on respectful language

Encourage staff to call out disrespectful language when they hear or see it being used across the school, and create opportunities to emphasise the power of positive language.



The language children use is taking a more extreme tone than previously, and I think that's the case in society generally. If someone has used racist or misogynistic language, we will educate everyone about what that word actually means, and its historical context and background, so students know why they shouldn't use it.

Adam Brooks, Deputy Headteacher, St Andrew's Catholic School.



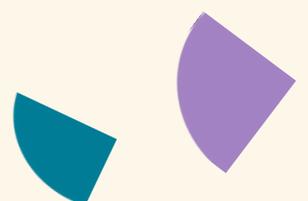
Talk about healthy relationships

Try using real examples which resonate with students, rather than talking about relationships in an abstract way. Misogyny can shape what young people think a relationship should look like, so help students see the difference between unhealthy and healthy relationships.



Asking students to give examples of relationships they see on television shows can inspire some interesting discussions. It allows students to look at relationships from both sides and to think about what is good or bad about the way men and women are speaking to each other.

Charli Faux, Subject Lead for Life Skills, Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School.





Praise good behaviour

Find ways to praise boys for qualities which reflect positive masculinity – helping a younger student, or being polite to staff. Showing boys the impact of their positive behaviour helps them integrate fully into the school community.

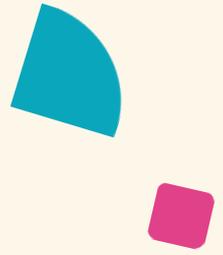


All students take part in a character education programme where they are rewarded for the values of integrity, honesty and kindness. It's a gradual drip feed so every day the children are reminded to, 'just be kind.' No one needs to stand up and say, 'Don't be misogynistic,' or, 'Don't be racist or homophobic,' because that is already understood.

Adam Brooks, Deputy Headteacher, St Andrew's Catholic School.



CONCLUSION



For many complex reasons, misogyny is becoming a growing concern for society in general, and young people in particular. Schools cannot provide all the solutions, but teachers are right there at the frontline, challenging misogynistic influences on students at an impressionable time in their lives.

A whole school approach is most effective in tackling the impact of harmful online content. This includes catching negative comments when they happen, and not ignoring or downplaying them.

Rather than shutting down the conversation, teachers can take the conversation out of the classroom and provide a safe space where students can reflect on their views.

When students have a strong sense of self-worth, they are less susceptible to negative influences and more likely to stand up for the values they believe in. Schools can help students build their confidence by involving them in the school community, rewarding strengths and giving students a voice.

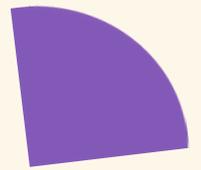
Schools are well placed to combat misogynistic role models, because they are packed full of their own positive role models who can demonstrate many different facets of positive masculinity. Teachers, other staff members and older students can all take an active part in mentoring students.

Misogyny thrives on division, but schools can provide opportunities to break down that division by encouraging respectful behaviour and helping children recognise what makes a healthy relationship.

If schools continue to do what they do best – modelling positive values, helping students to think critically and providing effective relationships education – they will give students the confidence to reject the message of misogyny and go into the future as positive role models themselves.



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