Working with boys and young men to prevent sexism and sexual harassment

It's Not OK:

A toolkit for preventing sexism and sexual harassment in schools

national education union

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Introduction

Why do boys need opportunities to think about sexism and sexual harassment?

We live in a society where gender stereotypes still significantly affect young people's views and choices at school, and their ambitions and dreams for the future. These stereotypes can constrain and limit all young people – and stop them doing things, such as certain clubs, sports or subjects. It impacts their behaviour towards others and influences the choices they make under the pressure to fit in.

Education is one place where stereotypes about men and women can be actively challenged. LGBT+ and non-binary students can face widespread bullying and stereotyping at school. Education about preventing the attitudes that perpetuate sexual harassment can reinforce and support work that your setting is doing to prevent homophobia and racism.

Challenging sexism and homophobia mutually reinforce each other because of the misguided assumptions that boys who aren't acting 'in masculine ways' will be gay, or will fare badly in the world unless they 'man up'.

Gender inequality and gendered social norms – the beliefs that a person's sex should involve certain behaviours or roles in society – contribute to entrench patterns of violence against women and girls. Equally, they stop individual boys and young men from fulfilling their potential.

There is growing awareness of the level of sexual violence and sexual harassment in the UK, and particularly how widespread sexism and sexual violence are in schools. Many schools are now focused on how to reduce and tackle sexism and sexual harassment.

Gender stereotypes start for younger children, for example, with ideas about what jobs men and women can do. As they progress, gender stereotypes lead to a social norm that says that girls and women are worth less than men, they are sexual objects who should be sexually available to men and they should want male comments on their bodies and looks.

> **It is these attitudes that form the foundations for sexism and sexual harassment in schools.**

Sexual harassment can come from anyone and can happen to anyone, and we should be mindful to look out for those already vulnerable to prejudice, for example LGBT+ students and students who face discrimination on the basis of race or religion. With that in mind, sexual harassment is predominantly experienced by girls and women and predominantly committed by boys and men.

Sexual harassment leads to unsafe learning places, absenteeism, students experiencing poor mental health, hurt, fear, isolation and more. The change needed in schools and wider society needs to come from individuals changing their attitudes and behaviours, and that applies to everyone in and around a school setting.

The Home Office strategy for violence against women and girls review of evidence found that education initiatives have been shown to have promising effects on changing attitudes relating to violence against women and girls . This tool focuses on safe and supportive work with boys as part of a whole school approach where staff, families and leadership work to create change.

The goals of this toolkit are to suggest actions in your everyday teaching practice to help address sexism and gender-based violence. It includes some approaches that will address issues faced by young men and boys , while engaging them in conversations about the experiences of women, girls and non-binary people in our society.

We begin with some general frameworks to help you understand the 'whats' and 'whys' of this work; we then provide some tips and case studies; and finally we end with some exercises that you can adapt to your teaching context.

Beyond Equality

Beyond Equality is an education charity that facilitates group-based discussions and activities with boys and young men in schools, as well as working with all staff to adopt a whole school approach to tacking sexism in schools. The workshops encourage participants to reflect on masculinities and engage them in gender equality, healthy relationships, gender-based violence prevention and mental wellbeing.

The NEU and Beyond Equality have worked together to produce this advice. From Beyond Equality's work in schools we know that many boys have too few opportunities to reflect on these issues. Many boys tell Beyond Equality that this is the first time they've had an open and honest conversation about their experiences of sex, relationships, identity and other social issues.

How to use this tool

Teaching is a skill. This toolkit is designed to give you guidance on how to make professional judgements in your schools about what learning to plan, as well as when and how. We provide sample sessions at the end of the document for you to adapt and use.

Some of the frameworks about gender and masculinities are useful when thinking about how we set up any class or activity with young people, and you could apply them to any subject. Some of the activities are best suited to pastoral care scenarios or to subjects in which discussions about social norms, social expectations and gender inequality are more easily brought up (English, drama, history and anything that discusses society). They are ideal for lunch clubs or other groups that are outside of the normal curriculum.

There are important conversations that can happen in primary school aged pupils, around boundaries, equality and social expectations. Children can engage in conversations about fairness and healthy and kind relationships. Exercises like the paper toss and masculinity collage are more suitable for primary school aged boys.

No matter what the age and year group, be aware that the boys may hold a wide range of experiences, potentially including witnessing domestic violence, so you will need to be aware of safeguarding procedures in your settings.

We have provided sample sessions that can be run with just boys, but most of these exercises can be done with mixed gender groups. It's important to realise that your students will have very different relationships to the gender norms discussed – for some these might be associated with the behaviours and attitudes that directly and repeatedly harm them, while others might get a sense of stability and identity from a similar place. Especially in mixed gender discussions, **it is very important to take the time to point out that what is being critiqued are power imbalances, injustice and the impact of stereotypes that are restrictive and harmful, NOT the young people themselves.**

Any teacher can (and should) do this work. It is important that all teachers try to model different forms of masculinity and femininity although our gender and other identities will impact on how the young people interpret the conversation from us. When preparing, consider that male teachers might have a greater opportunity to role model positive behaviours to male students.

Feel free to reach out to Beyond Equality as you apply the toolkit. As well as our teacher training, we offer teacher forums – spaces for teachers to discuss their own initiatives, successes and challenges, and to hear guidance from Beyond Equality experts.

Understanding sexism and sexual harassment

Sexism is prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination on the basis of sex and gender.

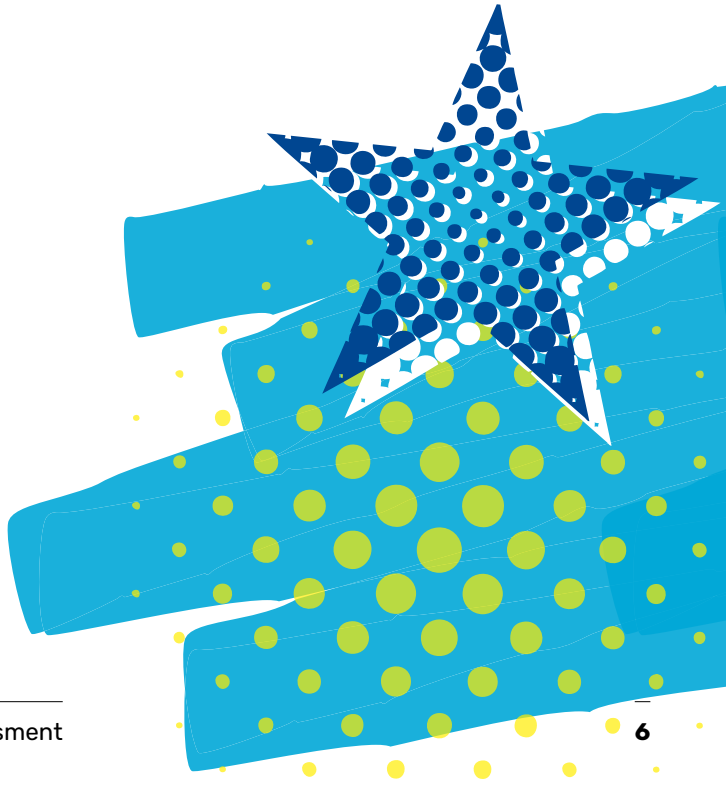
It is useful to discuss this in relation to gender-based discrimination because often gender norms are used to discriminate, and because sometimes the discrimination is based on someone's gender identity rather than their sex. (Gender is how people identify, present themselves to the world and how they are 'read' by others – the identity, cultural and social – while sex is defined by biological features.)

Sexism is a human construct. It is built on a history of strict gender roles and restricted rights, often tied to other forms of discrimination, like class prejudice, homophobia and racism. Sexual harassment is one form of sexual violence, involving unwanted comments of a sexual nature that make someone feel uncomfortable. It can include online statements, comments made directly to someone or things said in the background.

Making the case

To explain the need for preventative work, it might be necessary to share with other colleagues or with senior leaders the studies that document how widespread sexual harassment is across education settings. There are many studies and reports that highlight the impact and breadth of sexism in the UK and in UK schools. They include:

- NEU It's just everywhere: a study on sexism in schools and how we tackle it
- Ofsted review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges
- the Home Office Tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) strategy calls on schools to do their part in preventing VAWG
- Project deSHAME looks at young people's experiences of online harassment across Europe.
- Everyone's Invited testimonials



Isms and power

Sexism, like other isms, is linked to power and systemic power imbalances. Stereotypes and negative attitudes exist about men and boys – they are harmful and need to be consistently challenged. In general, we don't speak about men experiencing sexism because the systemic power structures favour men – so sexism is typically used to describe the discrimination experienced by women, non-binary and trans people.

But, it is important to recognise that many of the stereotypes about men are harmful to them and promote limiting, insulting or outdated ideas about masculinity (eg, not being caring, not expected to express emotion or display feelings, not trusted to care for children, prone to use aggression.)

The stereotypes about men connect to other patterns of stereotyping and intersect with other areas of their identity. For instance, Black boys are often treated as adults, viewed as if they embody many masculine stereotypes (such as physical strength and aggression), and are discriminated against on the basis of this.

Similarly, Black girls can be treated as overly sexual or aggressive through a process of adultification, placing adult expectations on teenagers because of their race. It is not only race that intersects with sexism, but class, ableism and cultural factors can each combine to create unique and challenging situations for young people.

Sexism in schools is common in the language, behaviour and attitudes of young people (eg, girls being shamed for having periods, assumptions that engineering is a male career). This extends to staff attitudes towards young people (eg, 'boys will be boys') or school practices (eg, special recognition and prominence given to celebrating the men's team sporting victories).

Seeing the invisible

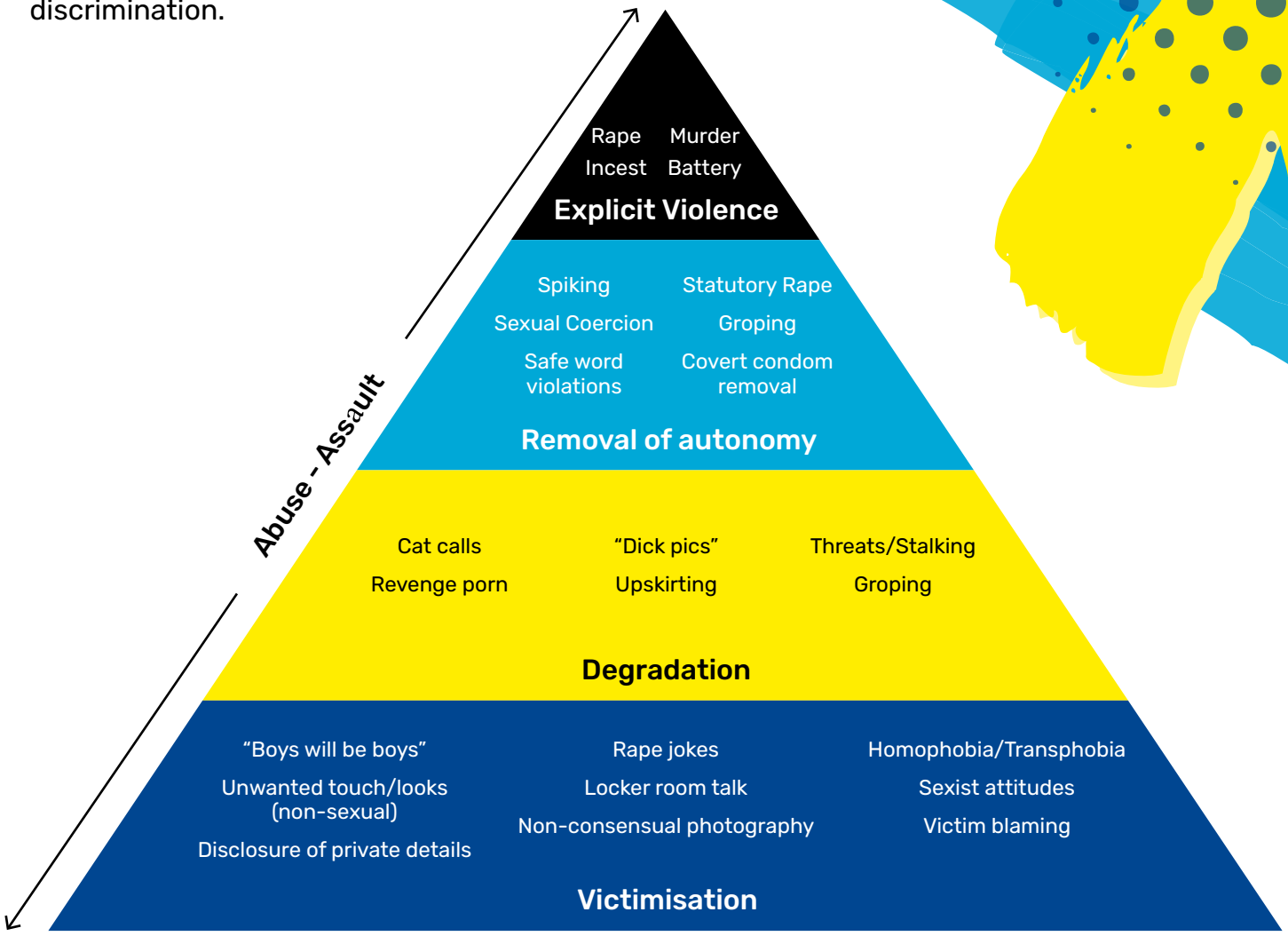
Sexism is often normalised in our society, seen as natural, just the way things are. Therefore, it can be difficult for schools and teachers to recognise how gender norms might be part of our own practices. An inability to recognise sexism directly results in a lack of reporting of these incidents. Because of this, taking part in reflective exercises about where gender norms show up in your teaching and your school can be a powerful way of understanding how your young people will be experiencing, learning from and reacting to these norms. Beyond Equality teacher training features large amounts of reflective practice.

These questions can be a good starting point for thinking about the patterns in your school and what generates them:

- What is the makeup of your senior leadership team and teaching staff in different subjects? Is there a gender balance? Does the ethnicity breakdown of your staff body reflect the student population?
- Which activities, role models and students are visibly promoted around the school in photos, posters, assemblies, newsletters and talks – eg, do you give special prominence to the male sporting teams?
- Are any sexist attitudes prevalent at your school, such as: is the school supportive of girls and staff having periods or are girls/staff made to feel uncomfortable for having periods, or are assumptions made that STEM is a male career?
- Are your staff teams aware of the impact of gender norms and actively countering these, avoiding comments like 'boys will be boys'?]
- Does your PHSE curriculum cover gender in depth?

The pyramid of violence

Best practice in sexual violence prevention shows the importance of tackling sexism and other systemic discrimination.



'It's just banter': moving from intention to impact

Humour is wonderful, a joy in our lives and a way to get through tough times or slow days. But often 'banter' is just a way to chip away at someone, focusing on their insecurities or reinforcing discrimination. It can be really harmful to individuals and create toxic school or professional cultures.

Harassment is also often described as banter, as aimed at having a laugh… or even 'disguised' as flirting, again leading to the under-reporting of these incidents.

In these cases it's important to change the conversation from what the person meant by their comments to instead focus on the impact of these comments. This might need you to explain some of the broader social significance or highlight privilege – which we discuss later.

A helpful learning point here can be 'the focus is on impact not intention'.

Safer and braver spaces for boys

What will boys gain from this learning?

It's clear from the evidence that sexism and sexual harassment are systemic problems that can be seen across all segments of society, regions and cultural groups. So we need systemic interventions, where we try and use education to unpick the stereotypes that pressure and constrain all young people.

Working with boys is vital because:

- Most perpetrators of sexual violence and sexual harassment are men, and we need to interrupt the cycles that condone, provoke and legitimise male violence.
- They will go on to become husbands, partners, fathers, uncles, foster carers and more. Intervening at a young age can help to break cultural cycles of violence against women and girls.
- It can make a difference by helping boys to be active bystanders and friends to each other within peer groups – by changing their own behaviour, influencing other men and boys, and supporting women and girls. We can equip young men with the awareness and skills to allow them to have a positive influence – to think for themselves and act for others.
- While less common, men and boys might have experienced sexual harassment, or know someone who has. Survivors UK, an organisation that supports male identifying survivors, reports that it is 26 years, on average, before a man seeks help for the sexual violence they've experienced. Conversations can break down stigma and victim blaming and may lead to a male survivor of sexual assault seeking help.
- This can give boys the understanding of how to create healthy relationships, and skills at creating safer and more equitable workplaces.

The links between certain ideas of 'being a man' and unhealthy relationships

Our conversations with young men and boys frequently reveal a strong pressure to be (hetero) sexually active, and to tell the other boys about this activity. This can lead to stress, a sense of failure, an unrealistic expectation that everyone else is having sex. It also can lead to young men feeling that a large part of their value and worth as a person is determined by having multiple sexual partners and having sex they can tell their social group about.

Alienated boys and bad ideas

Many boys are feeling confused about conversations that they hear around them in the media, from their school or peers. And sadly, there are some prominent voices telling them that they're being attacked by feminist efforts towards equity or public efforts to eliminate sexual violence.

Such messages are currently very effective at targeting boys, and staff need to know that many boys will be primed to jump to the conclusion that they're being attacked by conversations about gender equality and preventing gender-based violence.

It can be uncomfortable for boys to realise that they, their friends, brothers and fathers are likely to have been doing things that have been very harmful. Staff can't avoid that feeling of discomfort, but should aim to give students time and opportunities to discuss those emotions. If not, defensiveness will shut the conversation down.

Top tips on talking to boys and young men

- It's not about attacking men. We're trying to combat toxic ideas and harmful behaviours, so that everyone is able to build healthy and equitable relationships. We're not out to attack men, nor even necessarily to attack conceptions of masculinity. Instead, we are trying to help boys understand that they have a role to play in creating a fairer society for all, and to help them recognise the harm that other people experience from some behaviours and attitudes that might seem normal to them because of gender norms.
- Give space for boys to speak about any frustrations or discomfort they feel about feminism, gender equality or gender-based violence. Listen and encourage an exploration of these feelings, but don't validate them or agree with the points. Such feelings are common for boys and young men, and are part of the change-making process – and we can help boys speak about and understand them, without reinforcing the ideas that we're seeking to change. We can also praise them for taking the first step of recognising that change is needed.
- Patriarchy and toxic masculine norms harm boys, place pressure on them to conform, lead to violence in their lives, and close down options for them to express their personalities, interests, sexuality and emotions. You can highlight that men's mental health often suffers because of gender social norms about men not talking about their feelings or mental health, or seeking help for their physical or mental wellbeing.
- You can invite boys to think about the kind of adult they want to be. Do they want an unequal relationship with the women and girls in their lives, such as wives, sisters, mothers and daughters (remembering that some boys are or will be LGBT+)? Do they want to be a man that is feared by his children and relatives or loved because he cares for them? Asking them to imagine who they could be can help to unpack some of the benefits of a fairer society. With some curiosity about their experiences and emotions, we can quickly bring to the surface gender norms that harm them, and lay the foundation for empathy for others. This can defuse the narrative that this is a feminists versus men issue, and open up space for transformative conversations.

Prevention through social norms and gender transformative work

To transform the gender social norms that exist in our lives, we can facilitate activities that can help to challenge harmful stereotypes and allow people the space to create their own, less harmful ideas. Staff can do this work in everyday interactions with young people (and colleagues) by avoiding language and behaviours that reinforce restrictive stereotypes (eg, language that presumes the gender of particular professions). Schools can also create single gender spaces for boys to reflect on how these gender norms affect them and influence them.

We know that there are many messages that reinforce sexism, normalise power imbalances and excuse violence, and we know that these ideas are often embedded in gender norms that seem 'natural' or 'normal'. Hence we recommend a whole group approach to preventative work, which can bring these ideas to the surface, allow space to examine them and give students the confidence to think differently, and to think for themselves.

Tips on a gender equality approach

- One step at a time. Don't aim to deconstruct everything at once. Give people space and time to take small steps in the right direction. Remember, some boys will never have considered these questions, so even getting them to engage will be a win.
- Be curious. The aim is to help people explore how gender norms exist around them and impact on them. Ask lots of questions. Just be careful not to make people feel like they have to share personal things when they're not ready, or that they should feel ashamed for their feelings or thoughts.
- Be ready with some relevant and relatable facts. The reality is that many boys will be oblivious to the experiences of their female, trans and non-binary peers, and to broader inequalities in society. Stories from peers, statistics about their lives can be important. The closer to their world the better.
- We are aiming to let boys know that they don't have to fit ONE idea of what it is to be a man, but can find their own interests and identity (note the Man Enough book and podcast in the reference section).
- Give the group space to counter bad ideas. Often there is a silent majority who aren't comfortable with harmful behaviours, who can recognise bad ideas.

Tips for safer and braver spaces

Rather than a focus on absorbing information, the goal is to reflect on our existing social norms. This introspection and group discussion requires participants to feel as safe as possible to express their true opinions and experiences, and to dare to try to learn new things. Good facilitation can help create this space.

- Start conversations by checking with people's emotions. Boys might hold back from describing these, but it's still an important place to start.
- Note that when talking about their experiences or feelings there is no right answer, but they should also respect the opinions and experiences of others. They should understand and be aware that other people will have different experiences.
- Ask them what they would like the discussion to feel like. They can draw on their own experiences of group work that felt productive.
- Don't presume you know something about each individual. Be curious about their experiences and try to frame generalisations in ways that leave space for differences – 'most of', 'many', 'maybe this leads to'.
- Use inclusive language or be purposeful and explicit when you are not doing so. For instance, it might be important to talk about some specifics about boys' relationships with, conversations about or desires towards women. Remember to acknowledge that there are other same sex relationships.
- Maintain confidentiality and anonymity when discussing stories but be clear that if something that comes up in a conversation is a safeguarding matter (that puts themselves or someone else in danger), it must be reported to the designated safeguarding lead.
- Signpost support at the start and end.
- Remind them of safeguarding procedures and resources they can access if they need support.

Tips to make your work include all students

As soon as you start a conversation about identity, or how people are treated in society, it will become very clear that there are a huge variety of different men, who have different levels of opportunity or advantages, or who may face a range of other forms of discrimination. Here are some tips for navigating a conversation about gender inequality with this in mind:

- Acknowledge early in any discussion that there are lots of different experiences, cultures and ideas of being a man. This varies across different countries.
- When talking about gender or sex-based discrimination, also discuss how this impacts on different groups differently.
- Be curious about young people's own views and experiences. Give them chances to talk about where their ideas come from.

Non-binary and trans young people

Trans boys may not always feel comfortable in a group of boys but the chances are they will feel more upset by not being 'considered a boy' and being left out. For them and non-binary pupils, you should leave it up to the pupils which group they want to join if different groups are being used. If you explain the nature of the work to trans and non-binary students, ask if they feel they will be comfortable and if they want to take part. If they don't think they will be comfortable, they don't need to.

Facilitating conversations

The example exercises that we offer at the end of this document are based around a reflective and discussion-based style of learning. You might need to adapt your normal teaching practices to ones that incorporate more facilitation, which involves giving young people more space to set the agenda and bring in their own experiences. We've offered some framework to help you do this work, and to open up space for critical thinking and reflection about gender norms and how they can impact on society.

It can, for some, feel like a significant shift from usual teaching styles and relationships with young people, and many of the facilitation techniques have their origins in youth work approaches.

Here are some things we've learnt to be useful:

- Make sure enough time has been set aside for a proper conversation.
- Plan to facilitate from 'backstage', aiming to gently steer but avoiding being in the centre of the conversation.
- Be curious.
- Listen obviously and effectively, reinforcing contributions but never validating incorrect or harmful ideas.
- Be grateful for all contributions.
- Talk about your own ongoing learning journey.
- Point out that you don't have all the answers; furthermore, don't just give answers without giving students the time

to think, but explore through questioning.

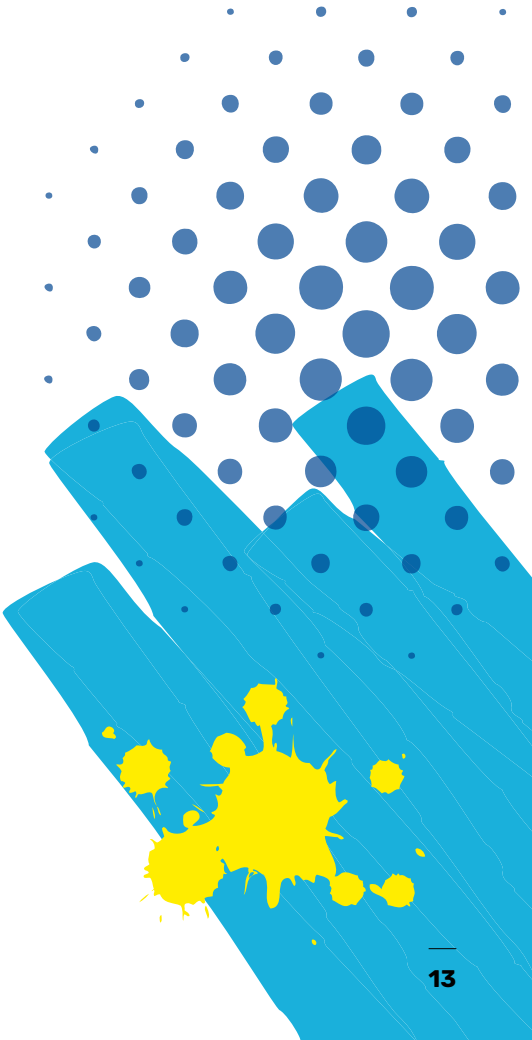
- Be alert to the emotional aspect of the conversations and be willing to intervene to create space for those emotions to be worked through.
- Know which conversations might be better handled by someone else and find people to work with.
- Don't try to cover too much ground in one session and be prepared for the session to end in a deep discussion that you hadn't planned.
- Understand your own style and strengths.
- Brief stories (real and personal, but not too private or traumatic) can inspire both attention and understating. Each facilitator needs to find relevant stories that they are comfortable telling.

Acknowledging without validating negative comments

One of the important outcomes of a successful session will be to give young people the space to express their experiences, emotions and views, including those that are factually incorrect and harmful.

Try to handle these comments appropriately in a discussion.

- Set the limits at the start (eg, no bullying speech), and construct them in terms of empathy for others and potential upset to others. The group can help you build these to enable them to speak freely.
- It can be useful to write them up and have a reference to refer back to if students cross any boundaries.
- Thank people for contributing, even if they say something negative (except if they clearly violate the group agreement).
- Ask critical follow-up questions, or seek clarification of why they believe this.
- Ask the group if there are other perspectives or information. Often there are many people who strongly disagree with perspectives.
- Be ready to correct factual mistakes with information.
- There are no incorrect emotions, so don't try to police people's feelings. You can check how someone is feeling in the discussion.
- Avoid sweeping generalisations. Open up space for different perspectives and experiences. Using words like 'maybe', 'sometimes', 'many' can be useful ways of avoiding debates.
- Humanise the 'other side' of the discussion.



Sample session

Masculinity collage

Aim: to allow young people to talk about masculinities with their peers – to increase insights into their own ideas about masculinities; to increase awareness of the diversity in ideas and expressions of masculinities.

Equipment: photos from magazines of various people, making sure you have multiple photos of people from a wide range of backgrounds and identities represented.

Time: 15-30 minutes

Number of students: four to 30, ages ten to 19.

Access: students who struggle to cut up images may need them prepared in advance. This session requires verbal skills so will need co-ordination with the SEND support if a student might struggle with this.

Room set-up: table or floor space for small groups (four to six people) to discuss visual materials.

Participants are divided into groups. Each group receives a series of photographs of men in different situations. The groups are allowed to organise the photos according to their own judgement on the most masculine to the least masculine.

During this process, the facilitator does not interfere with the groups. It is important that participants ask each other questions, discuss and create an order they can explain. That is why they have to explain the created sequence afterwards to the rest of the group.

The facilitator can ask:

- Why did you choose this order?
- What could have changed the order?
- Ask about the position of each photo

It is important that participants are placed in an environment where they come into contact with other ideas and opinions about masculinity.

Tip

Try wrapping up the session with a discussion about how ideas of masculinities can vary across cultures and change over time. It's very likely that your pupils will have different readings of the photos, which can help with this discussion. Or you can bring in additional pictures of British men who have very different sets of masculine norms, such as 19th century dandy fashion.

You can point out that the variety has always been there, and that it's possible to take space to develop their own ways to express their identity.

Sample session

Body sculpting

Aim: making gender stereotypes visible using your own body (mime) – to open up discussions on (masculinity) norms and how we place these onto men's bodies; to create discussion about gendered social norms and the artificiality of stereotypes.

Equipment: none needed.

Time: 20 minutes.

Participants: four to 30, all ages.

Access: the session requires the ability to move limbs but this can be a very adaptable approach. If you feel there is a lack of representation, for example of men in wheelchairs, prepare supporting positive images in advance.

Room set-up: clear a large space free from chairs and tables.

Participants form pairs and decide who will be person A and who will be person B. Start with a practice round, where you ask person A to ask person B to move different parts of their body until they are in the shape of an animal. Person B has to guess what the animal is. Then ask the participants to change roles within the same pair and repeat the exercise.

For the next exercise, ask person A to instruct person B to move into a shape of a stereotypical man by telling him how to change his body posture. Secondly, person B is instructed to position person A as a man according to his own ideas.

Afterwards the teacher reflects on the most interesting poses and discusses with the participants what differences and issues came up during the exercise.

- Use the input of the participants to start a dialogue about masculinities and what this looks like.
- Participants are allowed to (agree to) disagree and discuss their own views on masculinity and femininity. It is important that the facilitator remains in control of the discussion and in the end aims for a joint conclusion, perhaps in line with how varied these ideas are.

Variation – let the participants embody a woman, homosexual man or another stereotypical character.

Tip

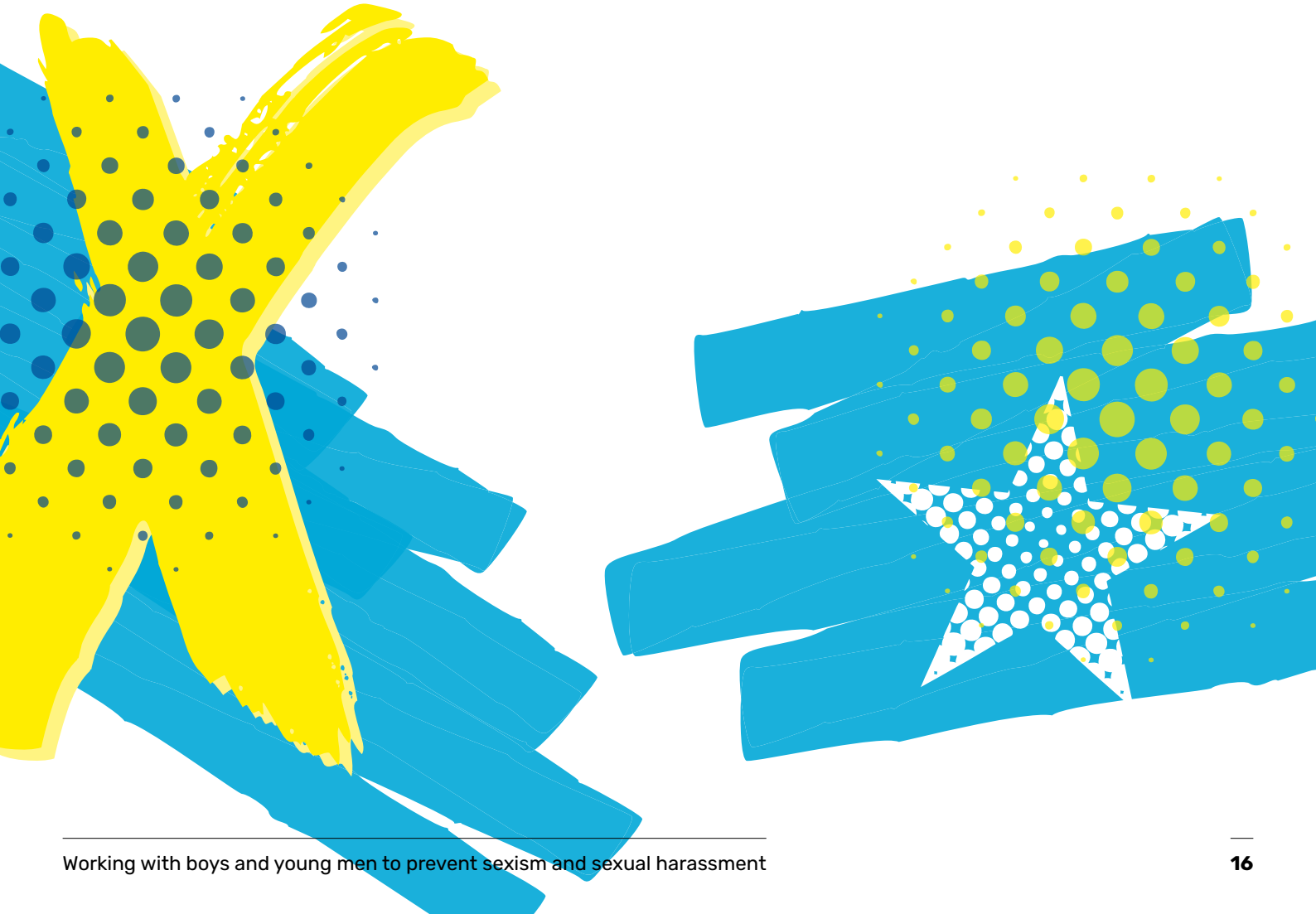
- Facilitators should clearly demonstrate the exercise at the start.
- Be mindful about physical contact with the participants.
- Some participants can use the freedom as an opportunity to disturb the workshop. If you think that your class group needs limits, such as 'no sexual poses', set those in advance.
- Be mindful of your own group. This exercise may well lead to homophobic ideas and attitudes being shared or expressed, so be ready to challenge these stereotypes and explore why those prejudices remain widespread.

Sample session

Body sculpting continued...

Some useful images include:

- Earth Song by Titus Agbara, a painting of a Black father with his child, and similar positive pictures of fathers.
- Havana-born dancer Carlos Acosta who is now director of the Birmingham Royal Ballet. **carlosacosta.com**
- Keith Brymer Jones and Rich Miller from TV's Great Pottery Throw Down. Rich is a ceramics expert and often draws out the emotional and racial significance of how racism has influence pottery. Keith is well known for having an emotional reaction to the emotions potters put into their work. **radiotimes.com/tv/entertainment/talent-shows/great-pottery-throw-down-bake-off-comment/**
- Ade Adepitan MBE is a Nigerian-born British television presenter and wheelchair basketball player. **disabilityhorizons.com/2020/02/ade-adepitan-mbe-to-be-made-a-patron-of-learning-disability-theatre-group-blue-sky-actors/**



Sample session

Sex on trial

Aim: to create a space where the group can consider the nuances of sexual harassment and sexual assault – to increase willingness to strive for positive and healthy sexual interaction rather than just the 'bare minimum' of not committing sexual crimes.

Equipment: appropriate audio visual equipment to show Sex on Trial video. Please note, the video is fictional but involves a scene of sexual abuse. Watch the video beforehand and make sure that the group is ready (age and maturity) to see it.

Time: 25 minutes (there is a possibility to make this a longer series of 20-30 minute sessions, using the other three videos from this series).

Participants: 15-20, ages 16+.

Access: if you have students who cannot see or hear the film, you will need to consider how they take part in advance.

Room set up: the room will need to be set up so that all students can easily see the video, when required, but also so that they can have a conversation with each other, ideally in a circle. This might require you to move chairs during the session.

Tell the participants that they are going to watch a video and then have a discussion about sex and preventing sexual violence.

Begin by saying that you'd like this conversation to feel as manageable as possible. Ask the group what sort of ground rules they would like in place to have a sensitive conversation. Write their suggestions down on the board, adding anonymity, confidentiality and care for others if they haven't included them. Signpost support available within the school and our external help-seeking.

Show the participants this clip on BBC 3 – **bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03jvhgj**

Ask the participants what happened in the video? How did the different people feel? How can you actively ask for consent in these situations?

Summarise the responses to this question by explaining that in this case it would count as rape because he was aware that she wasn't enjoying the act and she gave no sign of consent.

Wrap up the session by drawing attention to the healthy relationships curriculum as important part of learning to build safe and equitable relationships. It's much better for us to learn how to make sure our partner(s) consents whenever we're intimate.

Sample session

121 conversations

Aim: to allow students to speak about their own experiences of gender expectations and how girls and boys feel they are treated in school, by peers, staff or their friends in terms of gender.

Time: 15 minutes.

Equipment: none needed.

Participants: four to 30, all ages with questions adapted to be relevant.

Access: for pupils with learning difficulties, particularly those with speech or hearing impairments, you can give more than 60 seconds for each discussion so that they can comfortably express everything they need to say.

Room set up: space for students to sit in pairs and comfortably turn their chairs to face each other.

The success lies in the simplicity. It's really easy to set up, no materials are required and anyone can get involved.

From the perspective of a session that aims to discuss masculinity, this activity is particularly helpful as it can get your pupils thinking quite deeply about questions that they may not have asked themselves before – but at the same time, doesn't push them to analyse masculinity in a critical fashion: something that some pupils won't be comfortable with.

Split the class into pairs and explain that you are going to be giving them a series of questions that they will each be given 60 seconds to answer. Make it clear that they will both get a chance to answer each question.

Let them know that there are a few rules to this game:

1. Do not interrupt the other person (practice 'active listening').

2. Do not ask the other person follow-on questions.

3. Use all of your 60 seconds, even if that means being in silence.

NB, give a clear reminder that pupils don't have to share any information that makes them feel uncomfortable.

As the activity progresses you can also give them best practice tips on how to actively listen to the other person. It can be useful to drop one of these in before asking each new question and telling the class, "this time I want you to try to focus on…". This will keep them engaged with the activity and should help improve the depth of their answers. This is a good activity for developing oracy skills.

Best practice tips

1. When listening, try nodding and smiling in response to what the other person is saying to show that you are paying attention.

2. When listening, you may find yourself thinking about a question you want to ask the other person; although this is nice in normal conversation, in this activity we want you to focus purely on what they are saying, rather than thinking about what we want to say once they're finished.
3. When speaking, try to think of what else you have to say if you fall silent. Sometimes we might feel like we can answer the question in ten seconds or even in one sentence. If we give ourselves more time to think about what's in our head, it might lead us to realise that we've got more to say.

Recommended questions

1. What do you learn about [masculinity/being a man] at school and from your peers?
2. What do you think our school teaches/suggests about [masculinity/being a man]?
3. What message do you think YOU send out about [masculinity/being a man] to your friends and class?
4. What did you learn about [masculinity/being a man] when you were younger (eg, at primary school)?
5. What do films/TV shows/music teach me about [masculinity/being a man]?

This is a really flexible activity, so you can ask whatever questions you think will suit the group in question. If you're working with a mixed gender group, you can either change 'masculinity' to 'your gender' or ask everyone to discuss masculinity and then ask everyone to discuss femininity as well. Make sure if you have trans or non-binary students that you use 'your gender' so they can define it themselves. It will definitely be interesting to compare and contrast the views your various pupils have!

This activity is about exploring one's own views, thoughts and feelings. There's no right answer and you're not trying to get the pupils to a specific place. The best way to follow on from each question is to simply ask whether the question/their answer to it surprised them, made them think of the issue in a different way or was particularly difficult or easy to respond to.

You can wrap up the activity by drawing out the following points; you can interject these points yourself or draw on them as the pupils bring them up themselves:

- Everyone's version of what being a man/woman/non-binary person means is unique to them; although some of our answers will have been similar to some of our peers, other answers will be very different.
- Why do they think stereotypes about gender are so widespread and get repeated and recycled, for example in advertising?
- Are some portrayals of/lessons about our gender more positive or negative than others? Which ones? Why?
- What do teachers need to think about differently in how students feel they are treated because of their sex or gender?