

## **Supporting Boys in the Digital Age: Guidance for Parents and Carers**

The Netflix series *Adolescence* has sparked important discussions about the challenges facing young boys and men today, particularly in relation to toxic masculinity, incel culture, and online radicalisation. The series tells the story of a 13-year-old boy who becomes involved in a tragic incident after being influenced by harmful online content, highlighting how young people—especially boys—can be drawn into dangerous online spaces.

Due to the popularity of this series, it has brought attention to this subject, and it serves as a reminder of the importance of parents and carers being proactive in guiding their children through the digital world. Below are some key strategies to help support young men and mitigate these risks:

### **1. Stay Actively Engaged in Your Child's Digital Life**

Jack Thorne, co-creator of *Adolescence*, has stated that he will withhold smartphones from his own son until at least the age of 14 to limit exposure to harmful online content and the pressures of social media. We know that some parents in our community have chosen to give their children basic phones that do not allow access to social media, but we also recognise that many face pressure from their children to provide the latest devices.

If your child does have a smartphone, consider the following steps:

- Have an open-phone policy – regularly check messages and social media to see who they are communicating with.
- Limit access at night – keep phones and other devices downstairs overnight to reduce social media use at bedtime.
- Talk to them about their online presence – ask what apps they use, what privacy settings they have, and who they interact with.
- Educate yourself – learn about online subcultures that may promote harmful ideologies, such as incel forums, so you can have informed discussions.

### **2. Teach the Importance of Healthy Relationships**

The charity [Everyone's Invited](#) has highlighted how toxic behaviours can emerge at a young age. Encourage open conversations about respect, consent, and appropriate interactions to help your child develop a healthy understanding of relationships. For example:

- Normalise discussions about respect and boundaries
- Teach your child that consent is not just about sex - it applies to personal space, sharing information and emotional boundaries
- Use age-appropriate examples - hugging a friend, borrowing something from a peer.
- Discuss media portrayals of or masculinity in films, music and social media
- Challenge harmful attitudes - e.g. boys will be boys
- Teach your child that real strength comes from respect and empathy and not dominance or control.

### **3. Encourage Critical Thinking About Online Content**

Engaging in open discussions about the potential dangers of online material—including the spread of misogynistic ideologies—can help raise awareness and promote independent thinking. Encourage your child to:

- Be sceptical, not cynical – Ask: Who wrote this? Why was it written?
- Recognise bias – Not everything online is true, and even reputable sources can have an agenda.
- Spot manipulation tactics – Identify clickbait headlines, emotionally charged language, and confirmation bias.
- Be aware of AI-generated content – Show them how to fact-check claims using multiple sources before forming an opinion.

### **4. Provide Positive Male Role Models**

Boys need strong, positive influences in their lives. Fathers, male carers, and mentors can model empathy, respect, and emotional expression to counteract societal pressures that equate masculinity with aggression or emotional suppression.

#### **Need Further Support?**

We are here to support you and can signpost you to further resources if needed. By working together, we can help young people navigate the digital world safely and confidently.

#### **Emojis**

Context is everything and most children will use emoji's in the manner they are designed for. However, the program 'Adolescence' has highlighted the negative use of emoji's and there meaning. The following link will identify the meanings of emoji when used for negativity.

<https://boyz-2-men.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Emojis.pdf>