Shaping Healthy Masculinity

1. **Start the conversation early**

2. **Be curious**

3. **Encourage emotional expression**

4. **Create safe spaces to talk**

5. **Challenge harmful stereotypes gently**

6. **Talk about online influencers**

7. **Promote respectful cross-gender friendships**

8. **Expose boys to diverse role models**

9. **Watch for warning signs**

10. **Normalise help-seeking behaviour**

Young people today are navigating a rapidly changing world — economically, socially and emotionally. Many are struggling to find direction. For boys in particular, even a simple search for advice on fitness, confidence or relationships can quickly lead them into a stream of online content that promotes extreme or unhealthy ideas. This is the reality of the digital age and the nature of today's attention economy.

This topic has gained renewed attention with the release of the critically acclaimed TV show 'Adolescence', which highlights the complex challenges boys are facing. In recent years, there has been a concerning rise in online spaces that present confusing and often harmful ideas about masculinity. Many boys are exposed to messages that glorify toughness, emotional detachment and dominance, while dismissing empathy, vulnerability, and kindness as signs of weakness. These outdated ideals are limiting boys' emotional growth and shaping how they engage with others. The impact is real — and it's being felt across our schools, homes and communities.

1. Start the Conversation Early

Talk to your child about what it really means to be a man — highlight kindness, integrity, and respect, not dominance or control. Ask them what they think it means to be a "good man" and share what it means to you. Use TV shows, sport, or current events as natural conversation starters.

2. Be curious

Rather than lecturing, ask thoughtful, non-threatening questions that spark reflection: "What do your friends think about relationships?", "Who do you follow online?", "What do you admire about them?", "How does that content make you feel?"

3. Encourage emotional expression

Make sure your child knows that it's okay — even healthy — to feel a wide range of emotions. Remind them that emotions are a normal part of life, and learning to express them is a real strength, not a weakness.

4. Create safe spaces to talk

Foster an environment where your child feels safe bringing you concerns. Avoid interrupting, correcting, or jumping into problem-solving mode. Just listen. Validate their feelings and thank them for opening up. This builds trust and makes it more likely they'll return when it really matters.

5. Challenge harmful stereotypes gently

When you hear your child repeat sexist jokes, dismiss emotions, or use language that worries you, don't shame them — ask them where those ideas come from and what they believe. This opens space for learning and unlearning. Help them think critically, rather than defensively.
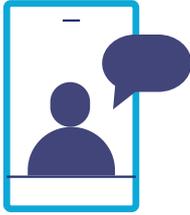
6. Talk about online influencers

If your child is following online figures like Andrew Tate or others, ask them what they like about those personalities and listen carefully. Then ask: "Is there anything in their messaging that could be harmful or disrespectful?" Your goal isn't to ban, but to build critical thinking.

7. Promote respectful cross-gender friendships

Encourage your child to build healthy, platonic friendships with girls. These relationships teach them to value girls as equals, not just romantic interests, helping them develop empathy, emotional literacy and mutual respect.

8. Expose boys to diverse role models

Introduce your child to men who challenge stereotypes — those who express emotion, show kindness, and support others. Share stories of men who are strong and compassionate. The more diverse the examples, the more expansive their understanding of what it means to be male.

9. Watch for warning signs

Be mindful of subtle shifts: a growing fixation on certain online content, withdrawal from usual friendships, signs of frustration, or mocking of women or vulnerable peers. These may be early signs of exposure to harmful messages. If something feels off, open the door gently for a conversation.

10. Normalise help-seeking behaviour

Talk openly about therapy, counselling, or talking to trusted adults. Let your child see that seeking support is smart, not shameful. Share examples from your own life to show that strength and vulnerability can co-exist.