

Positive approaches to masculinity toolkit



Contents

Contents	2
Introduction	4
Why does this work matter?	5
The Somerset Context	7
Why take a whole school approach?	8
Aspects of a whole school approach	9
1: Policies	9
Updating the RSHE Policy	9
Updating the Behaviour Policy	10
What Staff Will Do.....	12
Support for Pupils Affected	13
Support and Challenge for Pupils Who Have Caused Harm.....	13
Updating the anti-bullying and Peer to Peer Abuse Policies	13
Going further: Updating the Equalities Policy.....	16
2: Managing Behaviour	17
Clear Expectations.....	18
Understanding what drives boys' behaviour.....	19
Taking a restorative approach.....	20
Calling In and Calling Out	22
3: Pastoral Approaches for boys	24
Staff Skills and Somerset specific pressures	24
Building Emotional Literacy.....	25
Encouraging Help Seeking.....	27
Identifying who needs help.....	28
4: Teaching and learning	29
What works for boys?	29
General tips for teaching and learning	29
Responding to external events.....	30
How could you weave these topics through different subject areas?.....	32
English.....	32
Mathematics	32

Science	32
Art	33
Music	33
Drama	33
Physical Education	33
Technology / Design & Technology	33
Modern Foreign Languages.....	34
History	34
Geography	34
RSHE/PSHE	34
Activities to explore gender stereotypes:	35
The Man Box.....	35
Living Sculptures.....	40
Alternative: Relationship Snapshots	44
Word Race	48
Conclusion.....	51
Further useful resources	51

Introduction

This toolkit has been created to support teachers, school leaders and education support staff in Somerset to lead a whole-school approach to challenging restrictive gender norms about masculinity. Its aim is to help schools build cultures where boys can understand and question harmful expectations about “what it means to be a man,” and where all pupils benefit from a safer, fairer and more inclusive environment. The toolkit offers practical steps for embedding positive masculinities and gender equality as lived values across policies, curriculum, relationships and everyday school life.

Beyond Equality is a UK organisation specialising in gender-transformative work with men and boys. We are best known for delivering workshops across schools, universities, workplaces and sports environments, where we create compassionate, non-judgmental spaces for boys and men to reflect on how stereotypical masculinities can limit their wellbeing and harm others. Our approach helps participants examine attitudes and behaviours without shame, understand how gender norms shape everybody’s lives, and find healthier, more equitable ways of expressing masculinity. The principles underpinning this work inform the guidance in this toolkit.

Rather than providing a fixed blueprint, this toolkit presents adaptable strategies that schools can tailor to their community, leadership structures and existing priorities. You can read the document in full or use the contents page to go directly to the areas most relevant to your role. Each section stands alone while contributing to an overall whole-school framework.





Why does this work matter?

Across the UK, boys and young men receive powerful messages about what it means to be a man. Whether through peers, social media, family expectations or wider cultural norms, many learn a version of narrow, rule-bound masculinity. This cluster of norms varies across communities but typically includes expectations to be emotionally stoic, dominant, self-reliant, heterosexual, physically strong and always in control. Some researchers and commentators describe this constellation of norms as ‘the Man Box’.

In Beyond Equality’s work with schools, boys repeatedly tell us that staying inside these expectations feels necessary to avoid ridicule, exclusion or shame. National research reflects this reality. Equipundo’s 2023 study found that adherence to rigid masculine norms, including beliefs that men should dominate romantic relationships or avoid anything associated with femininity, has increased since 2017.

Boys who hold these views are more likely to report poor mental health. This is concerning given that many men struggle to access help with their mental or physical health: Equipundo and Beyond Equality’s 2025 State of UK Men report shows men are less likely than women to seek help with their health, while Movember’s Real Faces report shows that many men face gender bias from their healthcare practitioners, putting them off seeking further help.

Rigid masculine norms do not only harm boys. When masculinity is defined in opposition to femininity, and when empathy and vulnerability are discouraged in men and boys, women, girls and gender-diverse people are disproportionately affected. Research from the Fawcett Society shows that 69% of men believe gender stereotypes negatively shape children's understanding of masculinity, and men themselves often report that these expectations damage their relationships. Research by Ofsted and by the NEU has shown a rise in misogynistic behaviour carried out by boys and directed at girls and at women teachers and school staff.

Boys' online lives play a key role here, too: research shows rising exposure to misogynistic online content (Movember, UCL and University of Kent), with boys who consume this content more likely to view controlling or violent behaviour in relationships as acceptable (Women's Aid). Increasing exposure to misogynistic ideas amongst boys has real-world consequences for their peers and classmates, especially for girls: Ofsted reports that 92% of girls experience sexist name-calling at school, and Girlguiding finds that more than half have experienced sexual harassment in the past year, with sexual harassment often beginning in primary school.

We want to see a world where men and boys get to choose how they explore and express their masculinity, rather than feeling pressured to conform to a narrow set of norms: this is what we mean when we talk about 'positive masculinities'. Rethinking masculinity in this way gives boys a roadmap toward healthy relationships, self-expression, care and connection - without forcing them to take a particular path.



The Somerset Context

Somerset schools operate within a distinctive rural setting that shapes the challenges young people face. The county's dispersed geography, reliance on private transport, patchy connectivity and reduced service access create additional pressures. **Somerset faces:**



High absence (15% of primary pupils and 28.3% of secondary pupils persistently absent)



Pockets of significant deprivation, with 8.4% of residents living in areas that are amongst the 20% most deprived areas in England



591 looked after children and above-average exclusion levels



Wellbeing concerns, with 30% of boys reporting that they do not talk to anyone when worried and 8% reporting thoughts of ending their life



Gendered harm, with 9% of girls and 4% of boys reporting sexual harassment in the last school year, and fewer than a quarter of pupils feeling incidents are managed effectively

These pressures interact with rigid masculine norms in ways that amplify harm. Boys who feel unable to express distress may withdraw, act out or turn to unhealthy peer groups. Girls face rising levels of misogynistic behaviour, shaped in part by online content and peer dynamics. Without coherent intervention, these patterns risk becoming entrenched.

Source: Somerset Council

Why take a whole school approach?

A whole school approach is a coordinated, school-wide method that aligns policy, curriculum, staff practice, pupil culture and community engagement around a shared goal. In this context, it means ensuring that every aspect of school life reinforces healthy attitudes about masculinity and challenges the restrictive norms that cause harm.

This type of approach is beneficial because:

- **It creates consistency.** Pupils encounter the same expectations and messages across lessons, pastoral systems and informal spaces.
- **It builds staff confidence.** All adults in the school understand the aims they should be working towards, know what's expected of them within the scope of their role and feel equipped to challenge harmful behaviours.
- **It addresses root causes rather than symptoms.** Instead of reacting only when incidents occur, the school reshapes the culture that enabled those incidents to happen in the first place.
- **It supports both prevention and early intervention.** Small concerns can be identified and addressed before they escalate, saving time and resources and reducing harm.
- **It improves safety and wellbeing for all pupils.** When boys feel freer to express themselves, and harmful norms are challenged, relationships across the school become safer and more respectful.
- **It embeds long-term change.** The work becomes part of the school's ethos, not dependent on individual staff champions or short-term initiatives. This future-proofs the work, ensuring it doesn't fall by the wayside as staff move on to new roles or projects come to a close.

For Somerset schools - where rurality, service pressures and isolation can intensify vulnerability - a whole-school approach ensures no pupil falls through the gaps. It creates a coherent, stable framework in which boys can rethink masculinity in ways that support their own wellbeing and contribute to a safer environment for girls and the wider community.

Aspects of a whole school approach

1: Policies

School policies play a central role in building and sustaining a whole school approach to challenging restrictive masculinities and promoting gender equality. Policies communicate to pupils, staff and families how your school expects members of the community to behave, conduct themselves and treat one another. In difficult conversations or moments of conflict, well written policies act as a stable reference point that helps staff respond consistently and confidently. Policies cannot create culture on their own, but they provide the shared foundations on which a whole school approach is built.

There is no single set of policies that every school must change. We encourage schools to review their own suite of policies and decide which ones have the greatest potential to strengthen this work. However, most schools find it helpful to begin with their RSHE policy, behaviour policy and anti-bullying policy.

Updating the RSHE Policy

The statutory guidance for RSHE states that schools must have an up-to-date written policy and must publish it.

When updating your RSHE policy to incorporate work on masculinities and gender equality you may wish to include:

- A clear statement of why this teaching matters in your school context – for example how it aligns with your school values; how it contributes to safer relationships for all pupils; how it supports boys wellbeing' and contributes to a more equitable school culture where all pupils can thrive
- An outline of what you teach about these topics at each Key Stage

You can use the following suggested wording as a starting point, adapting it for your own context or using it to kickstart your thinking.

RSHE: Example policy wording:

Teaching about positive masculinities and gender equality

Teaching about **positive masculinities** and **gender equality** as part of RSHE reflects our school values of **[example values: respect, compassion and love of learning]**. This work promotes **respect** by challenging harmful gender norms, encouraging pupils to treat others with dignity and supporting boys to express themselves in healthy, non-violent and non-stereotyped ways. It supports **compassion** by helping pupils recognise how gender expectations can affect wellbeing, empowering them to understand others' experiences and to respond with kindness, empathy and allyship. It fosters a **love of learning** by encouraging open discussion, critical thinking and curiosity about how identities are shaped and how relationships can be safe, equal and positive.

This teaching forms an important part of our whole-school commitment to equality. It helps create a culture where all pupils - including boys, girls and those who identify differently - can thrive without limitation from stereotypes or discrimination.

It also contributes directly to pupil safety and wellbeing. For boys, it offers space to explore pressure around masculinity, develop emotional literacy and learn safe, respectful ways of managing relationships and conflict. For girls, it supports a safer school environment by addressing attitudes that contribute to misogyny and peer-peer sexual harassment. While Ofsted point out that peer-peer sexual harassment is disproportionately experienced by girls, it's worth noting that some boys can also be victims of this type of violence - and this work helps them too, by providing them with strategies and tools to seek help.

For all pupils, this work builds confidence in challenging disrespectful behaviours, and supports the development of positive peer relationships and peer group cultures. Together, this work strengthens a community where every pupil feels valued, protected and able to flourish.

Updating the Behaviour Policy

Your behaviour policy is an opportunity to be clear about the kinds of behaviour that are unacceptable in your school and the consequences that pupils may face. This should include sexist and misogynistic language and behaviour and sexual harassment.

Policies should include definitions of key terms, along with specific, contextually relevant examples of unacceptable behaviours, so that everyone understands what these behaviours look like in practice. It may also be helpful to explain how staff will respond to incidents and how the school will work with pupils to prevent further harm.

Behaviour: Example policy wording:

1. Definitions

Sexism

Behaviour or language that discriminates against someone because of their sex or gender. This includes stereotypes, unequal expectations or comments that undermine, ridicule or exclude.

Misogyny

Prejudice toward, dislike of or contempt for women and girls. This may be expressed through behaviour or language, including (but not limited to) insults, assumptions about inferiority or sharing misogynistic content online.

Sexual Harassment

Unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that violates a pupil's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. It can be verbal, non-verbal, physical or online.

These definitions reflect KCSIE guidance and Ofsted expectations on harmful sexual behaviour and discriminatory attitudes.

2. Examples of Unacceptable Behaviour

Sexism

- Gender-based stereotypes
 - e.g. "Girls aren't good at maths" or "Boys shouldn't be emotional"
- Gendered insults
 - e.g. "man up", "you're acting like a girl"
- Ignoring or dismissing someone due to gender

Misogyny

- Derogatory language directed at women or girls
 - e.g. "slag", "bitch", "gold digger"
- Promoting or praising content, influencers or messages that demean women, including online
- Supporting behaviour that humiliates or targets girls

Sexual Harassment

Verbal

- Sexual comments, jokes or name-calling
- Remarks about someone's body or sexual activity
- Intrusive sexual questions

Non-verbal

- Staring, leering, gestures
- Sharing sexualised images, rumours or messages
- Rating or commenting on someone's appearance in person or online

Physical

- Unwanted touching, including so-called jokes
- Deliberate invasion of personal space
- Pressuring someone for sexual images
- Upskirting or taking a photo of someone's underwear, genitals or buttocks without their consent, usually by placing a camera under their clothes

These behaviours are harmful even when framed as “banter” and will always be addressed by staff as safeguarding concerns.

What Staff Will Do

All staff are expected to challenge sexist, misogynistic or sexualised behaviour whenever it is seen or heard, including casual language. Staff will:

- Interrupt and challenge the behaviour immediately and explain why it is unacceptable.
- Record concerns in line with the school's safeguarding and behaviour procedures.
- Report incidents to the appropriate pastoral or safeguarding leads.
- Ensure that the pupil affected is safe and offered support.
- Ensure the situation is followed up and monitored.

Staff understand that dismissing behaviour as “jokes” minimises harm and contradicts safeguarding expectations.

Support for Pupils Affected

Pupils who experience this type of bullying or harm will be offered:

- A safe space to talk with trained staff.
- Pastoral support, mentoring or counselling where appropriate.
- Practical arrangements to help them feel safe in school.
- Clear information about how the school will respond.

Support and Challenge for Pupils Who Have Caused Harm

Pupils who engage in sexist, misogynistic or sexually harmful behaviour will receive a response that combines clear consequences with education designed to change attitudes and prevent repetition. This may include:

- Targeted pastoral or behaviour support.
- Restorative conversations where appropriate and safe.
- Work on respect, consent and healthy relationships.
- Behaviour monitoring or agreements.

Updating the anti-bullying and Peer to Peer Abuse Policies

Your anti-bullying policy and any policies about, or including, peer to peer abuse can also support this work. It may be the case that you include peer to peer abuse in your safeguarding or child protection policy, rather than having a standalone policy about this issue - this is fine if it's what works best for your school.

Policies that address bullying and abuse should be reviewed to ensure they clearly mention sexist and misogynistic behaviour and language, as well as sexual harassment and peer-peer sexual abuse. Policies should contain clear definitions of relevant terms, examples, explanations of what staff should do if they witness this behaviour between pupils, and clear reporting routes for pupils who experience or witness this.

Although most perpetrators of sexual harassment are male, boys can also be victims and there are perpetrators of all genders. You could consider:

- Using gender neutral language to describe people's rights and responsibilities, including how consequences will be applied and what support is available
- Explicitly stating that the policy protects people of all genders and from all backgrounds
- Pointing out that experiencing other kinds of marginalisation can make someone additionally vulnerable to sexual harassment
- Acknowledging that, statistically, boys most often perpetrate this kind of violence - but pointing out that boys can also be victims and that there are perpetrators of all genders.

You may want to align the language and wording you use in these policies with what you've used in your behaviour policy, so that your position is consistent across all documents.

Tip: Consider consulting pupils and staff about barriers to reporting and take steps to ensure that procedures are accessible to everyone, including boys who may feel stigma or shame when seeking help.

Many schools find it helpful to create a pupil version of this policy which uses simplified, age-appropriate language. Some schools use pupil voice channels such as Prefect teams or School Councils to help them develop these pupil-facing policies. Some also display these policies in classrooms, canteens, assembly halls and other public or communal spaces, as well as including copies in pupil planners or homework diaries. This helps pupils digest the policy and enables staff to refer to it easily when managing pupil behaviour.

Anti-bullying: Example policy wording

Statement on sexism and misogyny

The school is committed to providing a safe, respectful environment where all pupils can learn free from bullying, discrimination and harm. Sexist and misogynistic bullying, sexual harassment and peer-on-peer sexual abuse are unacceptable and will not be tolerated in any form. These behaviours undermine pupil safety, wellbeing

and equality and are treated as serious safeguarding concerns. In most cases, it will be necessary for the school to report incidents of discrimination.

Definitions

Sexist Bullying

Sexist bullying is bullying someone because of their gender. Examples include:

- Using gender-based insults such as "man up" or "you throw like a girl".
- Mocking or excluding someone because they do not fit stereotypes about their gender.
- Excluding, mocking or demeaning someone by saying or suggesting that their gender is inferior.

Misogynistic Bullying

Misogynistic bullying is bullying that targets girls and women and is based on contempt for, dislike of or hatred of women. Examples include:

- Using derogatory gendered terms such as "slag" or "bitch".
- Mocking, excluding or demeaning someone because they are a girl or a woman.
- Sharing or praising online content that mocks, embarrasses or demeans girls.
- Spreading rumours or encouraging attitudes that portray girls as inferior.

Sexual Harassment and Peer-on-Peer Sexual Abuse

Sexual harassment and sexual abuse can be verbal, physical, non-verbal or online. Examples include:

- Sexual comments, name-calling, "jokes", unwanted remarks about someone's appearance or body.
- Unwanted sexualised touching, invading personal space or attempting to undress or grab someone.
- Pressuring someone for sexual images, sharing sexual images without consent or spreading rumours about sexual activity.
- Staring, leering, making gestures, rating peers' appearance or sending unwanted sexual messages.

These behaviours are harmful even when framed as "banter" and will always be addressed as bullying and safeguarding concerns.

A Note on Gender and Patterns of Harm

Ofsted's 2021 review found that boys are most often the perpetrators of sexist and sexually harmful behaviour, and that girls disproportionately experience sexual harassment. However, the school recognises that boys can also be victims, and all pupils, regardless of gender, are entitled to safety, dignity and respect. Our response never assumes gendered roles and focuses on the needs and rights of those affected.

Going further: Updating the Equalities Policy

Your equalities policy provides a formal place to affirm your commitment to gender equality and to show how your work on positive masculinities aligns with your responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Schools can outline how they promote equal opportunities, challenge discrimination and ensure that all pupils are protected and respected.

You may also choose to include commitments to boys' wellbeing as part of your wider work to improve outcomes for all groups.

Many schools choose to reflect this work in their published equality objectives. These could include goals such as reducing incidents of sexist bullying, increasing pupils' confidence in reporting harm or improving staff confidence in teaching about gender equality and positive masculinities.



2: Managing Behaviour

A whole school approach in Somerset must recognise the specific challenges young people face in a largely rural county with pockets of significant deprivation, limited transport links and barriers to accessing external services. These pressures can heighten social isolation and make peer cultures more influential. For some pupils, especially those managing complex home lives, school may be the primary environment where they encounter clear expectations around respectful conduct. Clear, consistent behaviour management is therefore essential for helping boys develop positive masculinities, respectful relationships and healthy peer group cultures.

What's more, when misogyny and unhealthy relationship behaviours tied to rigid masculine norms around control and dominance go unchallenged, the consequences for girls' wellbeing are severe: 9% of girls in Somerset have experienced sexual harassment at school and 10% have experienced physical abuse in relationships (compared with 5% of boys). Six times as many girls in Somerset as boys have experienced sexual abuse in relationships and girls are significantly more likely to experience coercive and controlling behaviours from a romantic partner.

In our teacher training at Beyond Equality, we encourage schools to think about pupil behaviour as influenced by:

- Pupils' social context and peer group relationships (including how their peers' opinions and reactions shape their behaviour)
- What pupils understand about the kinds of behaviour that are and are not acceptable at school
- Pupils' emotional literacy, including their understanding of their own emotions and the extent to which they understand the impacts their behaviour can have on others

We encourage schools to take a multi-level approach to behaviour management, which includes:

- Clear expectations about what behaviour is and isn't acceptable, including appropriate consequences for poor behaviour in line with the school's behaviour policy
- Support for young people to help them understand why they behave in the way they do

- Interventions to support positive peer relationships and peer group cultures that can reinforce positive behaviour

The following guidance may be useful in helping you build an approach like this at your school.

Clear Expectations

Schools in Somerset report high rates of persistent absence, concerns about peer dynamics and a growing need for clarity around respectful behaviour. Given these pressures, it's really important that all pupils understand what's expected of them in terms of behaviour.

As discussed above, policies can support this work. In addition to policies, class contracts or codes of conduct can be a useful tool in setting expectations for class groups or tutor groups. These documents give you an opportunity to establish the rules of engagement in your classroom.

Class contracts should explicitly set out that sexism and misogyny are unacceptable. Making these expectations visible is particularly important for pupils who may have limited access to wider extracurricular or community networks where positive norms can be reinforced.

You could support pupils to take the lead in shaping their class contracts themselves, or provide them with a few ground rules of your own and then encourage them to develop the remaining rules themselves, with your input.

Consider creating a display copy of your class contract to be hung up centrally in the classroom and having all pupils sign it to indicate their agreement to follow these ground rules. Alternatively - or additionally, depending on what works best for your class - include copies of the class contract in planners or workbooks.

When managing behaviour in the classroom, refer back to the class contract, reminding pupils that this is a shared agreement about how members of the class will treat each other and behave.

Example class contract:

- We treat everyone with respect in our school and wider community
- We do not accept bullying behaviours at this school
- We do not hurt, mock or disrespect someone because of who they are. This means we stand up to all forms of discrimination, including racism, sexism, misogyny, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and ableism.

- We listen to each other and value different experiences
- We take responsibility for our behaviour and say sorry when we have done something wrong
- We support one another so that everyone can learn and feel safe

Understanding what drives boys' behaviour

While it's really important to respond to unacceptable behaviour consistently with appropriate consequences, it's also important to be curious about what might be behind this behaviour.

Across Somerset, many boys report loneliness, worry about school and difficulty expressing emotions. Somerset wellbeing data shows that almost one third of boys do not talk to anyone when they have a problem and that 8 percent have thought about ending their life. Boys receive consistent messages from society, media and social media about how being a 'real man' means being tough and stoic, handling your problems by yourself and never letting your feelings out. In this context, it can be very difficult for boys to open up and ask for help. Feelings of loneliness or anxiety can therefore be externalised as resentment, frustration or acting out for attention.

Understanding these pressures allows staff to design interventions that are more effective. A boy who lashes out because he feels excluded or anxious needs both a clear boundary and appropriate consequence for his behaviour, and structured support to help him regulate emotions and manage underlying issues.

Talk with your staff about the importance of having empathy for boys' struggles and engaging with them in good faith - as well as the importance of helping boys take responsibility for their own and each other's harmful behaviour, when this happens.

Look for training and CPD that can help staff understand boys' needs more fully. Don't forget to consult with your staff team about their training needs - this includes teaching staff and support staff across roles, not just staff with pastoral responsibilities. Consider using a simple gauging activity to find out how confident staff feel doing work on positive masculinities and gender equality within the scope of their roles: ask them to rate their confidence with these topics out of 10, then ask more specific questions about particular topics or issues, so that you can build up a picture of exactly where staff need training, development and support. This helps you make efficient use of your CPD budget.

Think about whether you can provide anonymous or confidential channels for staff to give feedback on their confidence levels and make requests for training - for

example, using participatory software like Menti or [Sli.do](#) during a staff briefing or INSET training.

Beyond Equality has trained hundreds of teachers and education professionals across England: visit our website to find out more about training packages for your school.

Taking a restorative approach

Many schools adopt restorative practice when it comes to managing conflict and responding to poor behaviour.

Restorative approaches focus on repairing harm, restoring relationships and promoting understanding, rather than just punishing pupils for their behaviour. They give pupils the opportunity to:

- Reflect on the impact of their actions on others
- Take responsibility for their behaviour
- Make amends and restore trust
- Develop skills in communication, empathy and problem-solving

In practice, restorative approaches may involve structured conversations, mediation, or facilitated discussions between those involved, supported by staff. Restorative practice is especially valuable in Somerset communities where pupils often remain together across long educational journeys. In smaller or rural settings, social groups may be tight knit and conflict can have lasting effects. Restorative conversations help pupils repair harm, rebuild trust and maintain healthy peer relationships.

Shared scripts or reflective question sets can be helpful in maintaining a consistent approach to restorative practice. This is particularly useful for schools with high staff turnover or those covering large geographical areas where teams do not always meet face to face. Many schools find that shared scripts or conversation structures also improve staff confidence in behaviour management, helping staff feel assured that they're taking an effective approach.

Suggested structure for restorative conversations

1. Set the Scene

- Choose a private, safe space.
- Explain the purpose: to understand what happened, the impact of the behaviour, and how to make amends.
- Establish a calm, respectful tone.

2. Invite the Pupil to Tell Their Story

- Let the pupil explain in their own words what happened.

3. Explore Impact

- Help the pupil understand how their behaviour affected others.

4. Responsibility and Reflection

- Encourage the pupil to reflect on their choices and the impact on the school community.

5. Repair and Next Steps

- Discuss what actions could make things right and how to prevent it from happening again.
- Agree on any follow-up support or monitoring.

Suggested reflective questions/prompts

- Can you tell me what happened from your perspective?
- What were you trying to achieve or express at the time?
- How do you think your words/actions affected the other person or the people around you? [If nobody else was there] What do you think someone might have thought if they'd walked past when you were saying/doing that and witnessed it?

- How would you feel if someone said or did the same thing to you?
- What could you do to make this situation right?
- How can you act differently in the future to show respect and support equality?
- What support do you think would help you reflect and change your behaviour?

Calling In and Calling Out

Calling in and calling out remain essential strategies. In Somerset, where some boys face significant barriers to help seeking and may fear ridicule for showing vulnerability, a call in approach can be particularly effective for establishing trust. Persistent or serious incidents should be called out clearly and linked to the behaviour policy.

What's the difference?

Calling someone in means inviting them into a reflective conversation in order to challenge their problematic or harmful behaviour. This conversation might be 1-1, but could also happen in a group setting. A call-in centres curiosity about the other person's perspective and experience, and offers a chance to collaborate with them to find a way forward.

Calling someone out means drawing attention to their problematic behaviour. A call-out centres on clearly naming unacceptable behaviour and may also involve setting boundaries with the other person or asking them to apologise or make amends for their behaviour in ways that are in line with the school's behaviour policies and procedures.

How do you know which one to use?

We'd recommend starting with a call-in - but if someone has already been called in several times and is still repeating the same harmful actions, it may be necessary to call them out.

What does each approach look like?

Exactly what each approach looks like will depend on the situation, but some features of each might be:

Calling in:

- Centres curiosity and invites the called-in person's perspective. This might involve exploring the other person's perspective, for example by saying something like 'I'd like to explore what you meant when you said...' - or asking questions like 'What did you mean when you said...? What were you thinking/feeling when you did...?'
- Offers explanation about why the highlighted behaviour is problematic
- Invites shared reflection and collaboration around positive change. This might involve asking questions like 'What would you do differently next time?'
- Might include offering ongoing support with learning in order to embed positive change

Calling out:

- More likely to involve explicit statements such as 'What you said/did was not acceptable because...' - rather than reflective questions
- May involve a clear boundary, for example 'If you say/do that again, I will remove you from the classroom' (or take another action in line with your school's behaviour policy)



3: Pastoral Approaches for boys

Somerset data shows high levels of loneliness, worry and emotional distress among boys, combined with a reluctance to seek help that may reflect the stigmas of vulnerability for men and boys.

In combination with...

- a strong policy base
- behaviour management that combines restorative and reflective approaches with clear expectations
- A curriculum that teaches about gender equality and positive masculinities and reinforces respect as a lived value

...gender-sensitive pastoral approaches help create a safer, more inclusive school environment for all pupils.

Staff Skills and Somerset specific pressures

Local wellbeing data indicates that:

- 47 percent of boys sometimes feel lonely and 6 percent always feel lonely
- 58 percent sometimes feel unhappy and 6 percent always feel unhappy
- 30 percent of boys do not talk to anyone when they are worried
- 8 percent have considered ending their life

These figures show a clear need for targeted pastoral support. Pastoral staff should take a balanced approach that combines empathy with high expectations. Boys need staff who understand the pressures they face, including:

- limited access to mental health services due to rurality
- long travel times that increase isolation
- online peer culture that continues after school and intensifies conflicts
- like all young people today, increased exposure to misogynistic online content

Consider giving staff regular opportunities to learn about the issues that affect boys, and good practice in supporting them. Look for seminars or online events that staff could attend during time set aside for planning or CPD; or consider compiling research reports, toolkits and other relevant resources into a shared drive for staff to refer to. Include local, regional and national resources. You may find it useful to consult with pupils to get their thoughts on what they wish school staff knew about

their experiences, or how they'd like to be supported by staff - use this information to plan your staff CPD and development.

Building Emotional Literacy

Given the high levels of worry and loneliness among boys in Somerset, schools should embed emotional literacy across pastoral support and curriculum pathways.

As part of supporting pupil wellbeing, help your pastoral staff develop their skills in active listening and in cultivating emotional literacy in students, so that staff can help students identify the underlying feelings that may inform their behaviour.

Staff can model emotional language and use simple reflective prompts to help boys identify what they are feeling.

1. Modelling Emotional Language

- **During 1-1 conversations:** When a boy expresses frustration or anger, a teacher might respond:
 - “It sounds like you felt really annoyed when that happened.”
 - “I can see that situation made you feel embarrassed.”
- **Sharing their own emotions appropriately:**
 - “I felt frustrated this morning when I saw the timetable had changed, but I tried to stay calm and figure out a solution.”
 - This models that it's normal to have feelings and shows how to express them safely.
- **Naming subtle emotions:**
 - “You seem a bit tense – is that worry, irritation, or something else?”
 - This helps boys expand their emotional vocabulary beyond “mad” or “fine.”

2. Using Simple Reflective Prompts

- **Prompting reflection after an incident:**

- “Can you tell me what you were feeling just then?”

Tip: Some pupils might find it helpful to use a visual reference like a feelings wheel or diagrams of faces showing expressions that reflect different emotions. Some might find it helpful to be given a vocabulary list to choose from. Some might find it helpful to focus on feelings in the body, such as a tight chest or a racing heart, and then progress to identifying the emotion that is affecting their body. These strategies can be particularly useful for young people with special educational needs and disabilities, or neurodivergent young people, who may find it more challenging to identify emotions.

- “What was going through your mind when that happened?”
- “How did that make you feel about yourself or the situation?”

- **Linking emotions to behaviour:**

- “When you felt angry, what did you want to do? Did it help or make things harder?”
- “What might you do next time you feel that way?”

- **Encouraging empathy:**

- “How do you think your words or actions affected the other person?”
- “How might a younger pupil feel if they saw or heard you doing that?”
- “If someone else had done that to you, how would you feel?”

3. Classroom Activities to Support Emotional Literacy

- **Check-in circles:** At the start of lessons, boys name how they are feeling using one word or a simple sentence. Staff model language: “I’m feeling curious today” or “I’m feeling frustrated but ready to learn.”
- **Emotion scales:** Boys indicate where they are on a simple scale (e.g., 1–5) for emotions like anger, worry, or excitement, and staff model language for those feelings. Visual scales (such as faces showing different expressions) or vocabulary lists showing different intensities of emotion (such as ‘irritated, angry, furious’) might be helpful for some pupils.
- **Role-play scenarios:** Staff model phrases like:

- “I felt upset when you said that, and I want to explain why.”
- Boys practice using similar statements in a safe environment.

Key Points

- Keep language simple and concrete, especially when introducing new emotion words.
- Avoid shaming boys for how they feel; focus on helping them name and reflect on emotions.
- Pair language with actions: help boys connect what they feel with safe ways to respond.
- Use regular opportunities, not just moments of conflict - emotional literacy develops over time.

Encouraging Help Seeking

For lots of boys, the stakes of asking for help feel very high. It can be useful to provide private and discreet ways of finding and accessing support. Schools can reduce help seeking barriers by:

- offering anonymous feedback boxes or digital reporting options
- placing signposting material in toilets and changing rooms
- including helplines and QR codes in planners
- ensuring pastoral drop-ins are regular and well advertised
- Making sure that the rooms or spaces where pupils access pastoral support offer an appropriate level of privacy - or, where this isn't possible, providing a range of times during and after the school day when pupils can access pastoral support, so they can choose to visit support services at less busy times of day if they're worried about being seen by other people
- using assemblies to normalise asking for help

Local consultation is essential. Schools should ask boys directly what stops them seeking help and what would make it easier. This could be done through reflective questions with existing pupil voice groups such as School Councils or Prefect teams; via anonymous student surveys, such as annual wellbeing or anti-bullying surveys; through pastoral drop-ins, or reflection activities during assemblies or tutor time; through feedback gathered via reflection activities in RSHE, PSHE or Citizenship lessons; or through an anonymous suggestion box or similar. It may be worthwhile to

check with your Local Authority to see if they run a survey or another data-gathering opportunity that could help you understand more about what's going on for boys in Somerset - for example, Public Health in Somerset run an annual schools' wellbeing survey that could provide useful insights.

Because access to external services can be inconsistent across Somerset, schools should provide clear signposting to both local and national services. Posters, QR codes and resource lists help ensure that information is accessible even where broadband or mobile signal is limited. The signposting list at the end of this document can provide a starting point.

Identifying who needs help

Sometimes it may be necessary to lead 1-1 interventions for individual boys. Identifying which boys need additional support can be tricky, especially when boys feel reluctant to open up and ask for support. Working out who might benefit from some extra support may require triangulating information from pastoral teams, attendance data, behaviour logs and pupil voice. Over time, efforts to improve pupils' emotional literacy, normalise help-seeking and provide a range of clearly signposted support pathways will also make a positive difference.

Small group work can be effective in rural settings where peer groups are stable and boys may feel more comfortable opening up in familiar social environments.

One to one support is particularly important for boys managing complex emotions or mental health needs, or for those with SEND who may struggle to explain their feelings and may benefit from personalised support.



4: Teaching and learning

This section offers practical ways to weave positive masculinities across your curriculum. It includes general teaching tips, insights from boys who have worked with Beyond Equality and subject-based activity ideas. Use these as starting points, adapting them to your pupils and your wider curriculum plans.

What works for boys?

Pupils told us that the following approaches help them engage:

- A mix of activity types: personal reflection, small-group or pair work, and whole-class discussion
- Games as learning tools
- Opportunities to move around and use classroom space (e.g., standing at different points in the room to show levels of agreement)
- A “right to pass” on questions they find uncomfortable
- Examples and case studies relevant to their lives
- A kind, compassionate, non-judgmental approach
- Time to listen to peers’ views
- Permission to share honest opinions and disagree respectfully, with adults challenging unkindness or discrimination
- Space to explain their thinking
- Support to apply learning to their daily experiences
- Opportunities to consider practical strategies for positive change

General tips for teaching and learning

1. Reflect on your own values and perspectives before teaching these topics. How might they shape the way you engage with pupils? Ensure your approach aligns with your school’s agreed PSHE values.
2. Boys respond well to compassionate, curious, non-judgmental teaching. Use active listening and clarifying questions - “What did you mean when you said...?”, “Can you tell me more about...?” Confirm your understanding before offering challenge or alternative perspectives.

3. Choose diverse examples and role models, including Black men, men of colour, disabled men, LGBTQ+ men, working class men and men who are immigrants. Look for examples of men from similar backgrounds or contexts to pupils - and don't forget the value of highlighting examples of positive masculinity from within your own community, including your school community!
4. Consider not just what you teach, but how you create an emotionally safe learning environment. These topics can be sensitive or triggering for some pupils.
 - Liaise with safeguarding and pastoral staff in advance, making adjustments where needed, while remembering that some pupils may be affected even if they haven't disclosed this.
 - Offer a "right to pass" on personal or distressing questions, especially around issues such as gender-based violence.
 - Use content warnings and signpost support options, including safeguarding procedures and anonymous services like Childline and Shout.
 - Review the PSHE Association's guidance on creating safe learning spaces.

Responding to external events

You may need to respond to unplanned event, such as news stories related to gender equality or masculinities. These tips can help:

- Stay informed by following news alerts or newsletters.
- Share positive stories as well as challenging ones, e.g., men's allyship, men challenging stereotypes, women succeeding in male-dominated fields. Use assemblies, tutor time or lessons to create space for these.
- Invite pupils to find and share positive news stories. Provide newspapers or age-appropriate websites to support this.
- Use the school environment to highlight positive stories, e.g., a display board or digital screens.
- Ask pupils what issues they're discussing. Work with form tutors, Heads of Year and pastoral staff to build a picture of emerging concerns. School Councils or prefects can also help identify what pupils are noticing.

- Consider raising high-profile issues proactively, even if pupils haven't brought them up, provided this happens in a safe, structured space with time for discussion. Check what pupils already know, correct misconceptions, and signpost reliable information sources. Let pupils know when and how they can follow up or ask further questions.
- Teach critical media literacy. Help pupils evaluate information sources, recognise bias and intent, and spot emotional manipulation - whether for persuasion, profit or influence. Connect this to work in History (sources), English (persuasive writing), and subjects like Media Studies, Sociology or Psychology.
- When external events negatively affect your school community, use calling-in/out strategies to address unacceptable behaviour. Re-establish expectations using school values and class agreements. Explore a range of perspectives using distancing techniques - for example, age-appropriate articles or statements such as "Some people see this differently. They argue that..."

Tip: [Sign up to the Beyond Equality newsletter](#) for updates about our work and related issues.



How could you weave these topics through different subject areas?

English

- Explore depictions of masculinity in set texts from different historical periods - for example, look at father-son relationships in two texts from two different time periods and explore what these depictions tell us about masculine gender norms at the time the text was written.
- Have pupils carry out independent research on a topic related to gender equality and write a newspaper article or give a presentation on their findings.

Mathematics

- Analyse gender representation in statistical data sets, for example workplace participation or earnings gaps.
- Explore probability or survey design using questions about gender norms or experiences of discrimination.
- Use word problems that show men and boys challenging gender stereotypes - for example, a stay at home dad calculating the volume of ingredients required to adapt a cake recipe for a larger cake pan.

Science

- Discuss the impact of stereotypes on girls' participation in STEM subjects.
- Teach about the effects of different emotional states on the body and the nervous system, helping pupils learn about how to recognise emotional dysregulation.
- When teaching about health and disease, draw attention to the issues men face with help-seeking, exploring how shame and stigma might make it difficult for men to speak to a doctor early on when they are worried about their physical health. Identify the impacts this could have on disease progression.

Art

- Analyse how visual media represents gender roles in society.
- Explore how portraiture has depicted men and masculinity across different historical periods, comparing and contrasting portraits from different eras.

Music

- Explore the portrayal of masculinity in lyrics across genres.
- Learn about women and gender diverse composers and musicians and create pieces of music in their style.

Drama

- Write and perform dramatic monologues by figures from history who have campaigned for gender equality.
- Discuss examples of gender stereotypes and then use a body sculpture or living statues activity to have pupils visually depict these stereotypes (see the next chapter for an example of how to run this activity).

Physical Education

- Discuss and reflect on stereotypes about men's and women's participation in sports.
- Promote cooperative and inclusive team activities that value different strengths.

Technology / Design & Technology

- Have pupils conduct independent research on women makers and designers.
- Explore and map gender stereotypes about skills, interests, products and materials - for example 'girls are good at cooking and bad at woodworking', or 'boys can't sew'. Set pupils a challenge to design a product that challenges gender stereotypes.

Modern Foreign Languages

- Explore how different cultures represent masculinity and femininity through language, media or literature.
- Teach key vocabulary related to this topic.
- Have pupils research gender stereotypes in different countries and cultures.

History

- Carry out a project to compare and contrast masculinities across time - for example, looking at differences in men's dress, typical job roles, hobbies and pastimes throughout history. Incorporate primary source material (for example, advertisements for men's grooming products; extracts from published personal journals or letters) and secondary source material (for example, extracts from books or essays).

Geography

- Highlight [global disparities in access to education between boys and girls](#) and unpack the reasons why women and girls are globally less likely to attend school, looking at gender stereotypes and gender-based violence. Explore the social and economic benefits of women's education.
- Conduct research on natural disasters and the extent to which gender plays a role in how people are affected by these events, how easily they recover and what support they receive.

RSHE/PSHE

- When teaching about the importance of supportive friendships, help pupils identify and practise ways to challenge each other compassionately when they see or hear one another behaving inappropriately.
- When teaching about online harms and internet safety, discuss online misogyny and online sexual harassment as a class - what it is, how to recognise it and how to use blocking and reporting tools to stay safe online.
- When teaching about online safety, make sure to highlight that boys can also be targeted by grooming, harassment, online bullying and other kinds of abusive and harmful behaviours. Make sure all pupils know how to get support if they're worried about something they're experiencing online.

Activities to explore gender stereotypes:

The Man Box

This activity helps pupils explore how narrow ideas about masculinity can limit emotional expression, affect behaviour, and shape relationships. It encourages reflection on how pressure to “be a real man” can impact **respect, consent, boundaries, emotional wellbeing, and how boys relate to others**.

The activity is designed to align with statutory Relationships, Sex and Health Education requirements, particularly those relating to:

- Respectful relationships
- Consent and personal boundaries
- Stereotypes and equality
- Emotional literacy and help-seeking

Learning objectives

By the end of the activity, pupils should be able to:

- Identify common stereotypes linked to masculinity
- Reflect on how these stereotypes can pressure boys and men
- Understand how restrictive gender norms can affect friendships and romantic relationships, including issues of **consent, communication, and boundaries**
- Recognise that healthy relationships allow for choice, emotional expression, and respect for self and others

Seating and participants

- **Participants:** 6 to 30
- **Seating:** Small groups of 3 to 5
- **Duration:** 20 to 30 minutes

Resources

- Cardboard box
- Sticky notes and pens
- Optional video: The Mask You Wear

Process

1. Setting the ground rules

Before beginning, remind pupils of agreed classroom expectations:

- Respect different views
- No personal disclosures are required
- No naming or judging individuals
- Pupils can step back from discussion if they feel uncomfortable

Teacher guidance:

This supports statutory guidance on creating a safe learning environment. Emphasise that discussions are about ideas and social pressures, not about labelling boys or criticising masculinity itself.

2. Introducing the “Man Box”

Explain that the Man Box represents unwritten rules about how boys and men are often expected to behave, think, and feel.

Write the phrase “**be a real man**” on the board and ask pupils to consider:

- What messages do boys hear about how men should act?
- What emotions are men expected not to show?
- How are men expected to behave in relationships or around girls?

Optional: [Watch The Mask You Live In and reflect briefly](#).

Consent and boundaries link:

Ideas may emerge such as “men should always want sex”, “men should not say no”, or “men should be dominant”. These assumptions link directly to misunderstandings about consent and should be acknowledged without judgement for later discussion.

3. Group work: building the Man Box

In small groups, pupils write their ideas on sticky notes and place them on the cardboard box at the front of the room.

Read out a selection of notes and group similar ideas together, for example toughness, control, emotional restraint, or sexual confidence.

4. Whole-class discussion

a) Reflecting on expectations

- Which of these expectations might feel positive or helpful in some situations?
- Which might feel limiting or harmful?
- Does context matter?

Teacher guidance:

Acknowledge that qualities such as confidence or independence are not harmful in themselves, but that expecting someone to perform them constantly can be damaging.

b) Emotional impact and help-seeking

- How might it feel to try to live up to all these expectations?
- What happens if someone feels they do not fit?

RSHE link:

This supports statutory teaching on mental wellbeing, emotional awareness, and help-seeking.

c) Consent and boundaries

Ask pupils to think specifically about relationships:

- If boys are expected to be dominant, confident, or always “up for it”, how might that affect their ability to:
 - Respect someone else’s boundaries?
 - Say no themselves?
 - Ask for or give clear consent?

Teacher guidance:

Reinforce that:

- Consent is an active, ongoing choice
- Everyone has the right to change their mind

- Pressure to behave in a certain way can make consent more difficult, for boys as well as for others

d) Friendships and romantic relationships

- How might these expectations affect friendships between boys? What about between boys and girls?
- How might they affect romantic relationships?

RSHE link:

This aligns with statutory learning on **respectful relationships**, including kindness, mutual respect, and equality.

5. Stepping outside the box

Explain that most boys and men do not fully fit inside the Man Box and that this is normal.

Ask:

- What might stop someone from stepping outside these expectations?
- What could make it easier for people in this school to express themselves freely and respectfully?

Groups can brainstorm ideas such as:

- Challenging sexist or homophobic language
- Supporting friends who show emotion
- Respecting boundaries and accepting “no” without ridicule

Guidance for teachers

Responding to problematic comments

If pupils repeat harmful stereotypes, for example “boys cannot control themselves”:

- Acknowledge the comment calmly
- Challenge the idea without shaming
- Redirect to responsibility, consent, and respect

Example:

“Some people believe that, but healthy relationships and the law are clear that everyone is responsible for their own behaviour.”

Avoiding pressure to disclose

Do not ask pupils to share personal experiences. If a pupil discloses something concerning, follow your school’s safeguarding and child protection procedures.

Supporting teenage boys

Be aware that:

- Boys may worry about being judged or seen as weak
- Some may find it difficult to talk about feelings

Normalise:

- Emotional expression
- Saying no
- Asking for help
- Respectful, non-dominant ways of being a man or a boy

This supports statutory aims to help pupils build healthy, respectful relationships now and in the future.

The Man Box works best when framed as an exploration of pressures placed on boys, rather than a criticism of them. Making consent and boundaries explicit throughout helps pupils connect gender expectations to the real-life relationship skills they need.

Living Sculptures

In this activity, pupils use mime and movement to create “living sculptures” that represent common gender stereotypes about men and boys, as well as alternative sculptures that challenge these stereotypes. The activity encourages young people to reflect on the limits these stereotypes impose and to imagine new, healthier, and more authentic ways of expressing masculinity.

Learning objectives

By the end of this activity, pupils should be able to:

- Identify different gender stereotypes about men and boys
- Reflect on some of the personal impacts of gender stereotypes in their own and/or their peers’ lives
- Describe some of the ways in which stereotypical masculinity affects others, including women, girls, and gender-diverse people
- Suggest some ways to challenge and change gender stereotypes

Equipment and resources:

None required (optional: music player and speakers)

Participants:

6 – 30

Duration:

20 – 30 minutes

Process

Explain that participants will create frozen “living sculptures” using only their bodies - no speaking - to show the group what certain gender stereotypes look like and how they can be challenged. Reassure them that the goal is exploration, not performance, and that all contributions are valid.

Invite everyone to stand in a circle. Ask them to shake out their arms, loosen their shoulders, and take a breath. Then lead a very quick mime warm-up:

- “Show me with your body: someone carrying something very heavy.”
- “Show me: someone feeling proud.”
- “Show me: someone feeling nervous.”

This helps pupils become comfortable using body language.

Divide the group into smaller groups of 3–5 people.

On the board, write: **“What are some common expectations of how men and boys should act, look, or behave?”**

Prompt them with questions:

- How are men and boys expected to show emotions?
- How are they expected to behave with friends?
- What roles or activities are they expected to take on?
- What behaviours are they told they shouldn’t show?

Give groups 2–3 minutes to brainstorm.

Ask each group to choose **one** stereotype from their discussion and create a **living sculpture** to represent it.

They should:

- Use their bodies and facial expressions
- Freeze in position
- Avoid speaking (mime only)

Examples might include:

- A rigid, tough “strong man” pose
- A withdrawn figure hiding emotions
- Someone pretending to dominate or always take charge

Once sculptures are ready, invite the class to walk around and observe silently.

Bring everyone back together. Facilitate a discussion using questions like:

- What did you notice in the sculptures?
- How do these poses reflect expectations placed on boys and men?

- How might it feel to try to live like this all the time?
- Who benefits from these expectations? Who is harmed?
- How might these expectations affect friendships or relationships?

Ask groups to return to their positions and now create a new sculpture showing a way to challenge or break free from the stereotype they chose.

Encourage them to think of:

- Healthier expressions of emotion
- More equal or respectful interactions
- More flexible roles and behaviours
- Body language that shows comfort, openness, or connection

Again, have the class walk around and observe.

Lead another whole-group reflection:

- What differences did you notice between the two sets of sculptures?
- How did the “challenging” sculptures feel compared to the “stereotype” ones?
- What new possibilities do these sculptures suggest about masculinity?
- What might help people in real life move from the first sculpture to the second?

Highlight key points:

- Stereotypes can pressure boys and men to hide emotions, act tough, or follow narrow roles.
- These expectations can feel confining, like being frozen in a sculpture that isn’t really you.
- Challenging stereotypes opens space for more freedom, connection, and authenticity.

Ask:

“What could we do in our school or community to make it easier for people to step outside limiting stereotypes about masculinity?”

You can brainstorm as a whole class or have groups share ideas.

Points of interest

- Students often notice that stereotype sculptures feel stiff, tense, or isolating, while the alternative sculptures feel freer, more open, or more connected.
- Any individual behaviour (e.g., strength, confidence) can be positive but expecting all men and boys to behave this way at all times becomes restrictive.
- Using body movement helps pupils recognise how stereotypes are physically and emotionally limiting, and how challenging them can create space for healthier expressions of masculinity.

Alternative: Relationship Snapshots

In this activity, pupils work in small groups to create short “snapshots” (frozen scenes) that show how gender stereotypes can shape behaviour within friendships and romantic relationships. By comparing stereotypical scenarios with healthier alternatives, pupils explore how rigid expectations can lead to misunderstandings, pressure, or imbalance - and what more respectful, supportive relationships can look like.

Use this activity to:

- Explore how gender stereotypes influence friendships and romantic relationships
- Prompt pupils to reflect on healthy vs. unhealthy relationship behaviours
- Encourage critical thinking about emotional expression, communication, and respect
- Highlight how challenging stereotypes can improve relationships for everyone

Seating:

Small groups with open space for movement

Equipment and resources:

None required (optional: paper and pens for planning)

Participants:

6 – 30

Duration:

20 – 30 minutes

Process

Explain that pupils will work in small groups to create **two frozen scenes** (“snapshots”):

1. A relationship moment where gender stereotypes are influencing how people behave

2. A version of the same moment where the stereotype has been challenged and the interaction is healthier

Clarify that the scenes will be frozen poses - no acting or speaking - so the focus stays on body language, emotions, and power dynamics.

Reassure pupils that the scenes do not need to be romantic; they can be about friendships, classmates, siblings, or parent–child relationships.

Divide pupils into groups of 3–5.

On the board, write: “**How might gender stereotypes show up in relationships?**”

Prompt ideas with questions:

- Are boys expected to hide emotions?
- Are girls expected to be the “caring one”?
- Are boys pressured to always make decisions?
- Are girls expected to avoid conflict or be “polite”?
- Are non-binary people pressured to ‘pick a side’, or treated differently if their appearance or behaviour doesn’t fit conventional expectations?
- Do people assume that in same-gender relationships, one person must act “more like the boy” and one “more like the girl”?
- Do LGBTQ+ people feel pressure to act “more masculine” or “more feminine” to be accepted?
- Who is expected to apologise first?
- Who is expected to be jealous, protective, sensitive, or forgiving?

Groups spend 2–3 minutes listing possibilities.

Ask each group to choose **one relationship moment** where a gender stereotype is affecting behaviour - you can give groups the freedom to invent their own scenarios, or give them a list of examples to choose from as follows:

- A boy refusing to talk about feelings in a friendship
- A girl apologising when she hasn’t done anything wrong
- A boy acting controlling in a relationship because he thinks he “should”
- A girl pretending to like something to avoid upsetting someone

- A boy mocking a friend to avoid looking “soft”
- Someone assuming that in a same-gender couple, one partner must be “the man” and the other “the woman”
- A friend dismissing someone’s identity because it “doesn’t fit” traditional ideas about gender

Groups form a **frozen scene** showing the stereotype clearly through body language.

Have all groups present their frozen scenes while others walk around to observe.

Ask the class:

- What did you notice in these scenes?
- How did the stereotype shape the interaction?
- How might each person feel in this moment?

Groups now remake their scene but with the stereotype removed or challenged.

Encourage them to think of healthier alternatives:

- Open communication
- Shared decision-making
- Respectful boundaries
- Honest emotional expression
- Equal responsibility

Groups present their new frozen scenes.

Lead a discussion comparing the two versions:

- What changed from Snapshot 1 to Snapshot 2?
- How did challenging the stereotype improve the relationship?
- What skills were shown in the healthier scenes (e.g., listening, empathy, confidence, emotional honesty)?
- How do stereotypes negatively affect people and relationships?
- What can we do - individually or in school - to make it easier for everyone to behave outside restrictive stereotypes?

Points of interest

- Pupils often notice that stereotype-driven scenes involve tension, imbalance, or miscommunication.
- Challenging stereotypes usually results in scenes that appear calmer, more equal, or more supportive.
- Reinforce that gender stereotypes can harm **all** people by limiting emotional expression, communication, or identity.
- Emphasise that healthy relationships are built on empathy, respect, and equality - not on fixed ideas about how men or women “should” behave.

Word Race

In this activity, pupils compete in a fast-paced word-association challenge to reveal the gendered assumptions that often appear automatically when we think about men and women. After the race, the group unpacks why these words came to mind, how stereotypes shape our ideas about gender, and what we can do to challenge harmful expectations.

Use this activity to:

- Explore gender stereotypes
- Prompt reflection about the origins and impacts of gendered assumptions
- Consider how stereotypes shape ideas about men, women, and masculinity
- Encourage pupils to recognise, question, and challenge biased thinking

Seating:

Two teams lined up at the board or large sheets of paper

Equipment and resources:

Whiteboard or flipchart paper, pens, timer

Participants:

6 – 30

Duration:

15 – 25 minutes

Process

Explain that the class will play a fast word-association game. They will be given a word and have one minute to write down as many associations as possible.

Emphasise:

- They don't need to filter their ideas, but words must be appropriate and readable.
- They should be prepared to explain how each word links to the theme.

- The activity is not about blaming anyone for stereotypes—everyone has them, and the aim is to explore them together.

Divide pupils into **two teams**. Each team lines up in front of the board or a large sheet of paper.

Choose a neutral topic such as breakfast, music, holidays, or something topical. Teams have **one minute** to write as many related words as possible, one person writing at a time (relay style).

At the end of the minute, compare word counts and announce the winner of the round.

Repeat the race with the key word: **Men**.

Again, they have one minute to write as many associated words as they can.

Repeat the race with the key word: **Women**.

Ask volunteers (or selected pupils) to read out the lists from each round—this often boosts engagement.

Then lead a structured discussion, addressing both the patterns and the contrasts between the lists.

You can introduce the term stereotypes by asking:

“What are these words an example of... beginning with S?”

Use the following prompts to explore the lists in more depth:

- **Are there any words here that surprise you? Why?**
- **Where do these stereotypes come from?** (e.g., media, family expectations, peer groups)
- **What impact do these stereotypes have?**
 - Pick specific examples:
 - “If women are always associated with beauty, how might that affect them and others?”
 - “If men are expected to be strong all the time, how might that affect boys and men?”
- **Which list seems more ‘powerful’ or more positive? Why might that be important to notice?**
- **If we don’t agree with these stereotypes, how can we become more aware of them and challenge them—in ourselves and in school?**

It may help to reassure boys (and everyone) that:

- The activity is not about accusing anyone of being sexist.
- Everyone carries gendered ideas and biases because we all grow up in the same culture.
- The purpose is to recognise harmful assumptions and start thinking about how to challenge them.

Points of interest

- Pupils often notice that one list (commonly “Men”) includes more words linked to power and status.
- Highlight how stereotypes can limit everyone—boys, men, girls, women, and gender-diverse people.
- Encourage reflection on how shaping someone’s identity through stereotypes can affect confidence, aspirations, mental health, and relationships.
- This activity naturally opens up conversations about masculinity, expectations, privilege, and inequality.

Conclusion

Working toward positive masculinities and gender equality is a crucial part of creating communities that are safe and inclusive for everybody.

You may have noticed as you were reading this toolkit that you're already doing some of this work: all schools want the best outcomes for their pupils, and care about providing safe and inclusive learning environments - so it's very likely you're already taking positive steps in your setting. We hope this toolkit has provided some useful ideas for building on your existing work. As you think about your next steps, remember that even small changes can add up to big positive impacts over time.

In the concluding pages of this document, you'll find links to further resources that might be helpful in this area, as well as an action planning framework to help you map out your next steps. We wish you the best of luck with your ongoing work!

Further useful resources

Mental health and emotional wellbeing

[Childline](#)

[SHOUT](#)

[YoungMinds](#)

[Papyrus](#)

[Kooth](#)

[DfE signposting list](#)

The Somerset Mental Health Toolkit provides information and support about mental and emotional health & wellbeing including self-injury guidance, trauma support & ACEs and school support for emotional, mental health and wellbeing:

[Somerset children & young people : Health & Wellbeing : New Home](#)

Sexual health and healthy relationships

[The Mix](#)

[Brook](#)

Online safety

[Childnet](#)

[Internet Matters](#)

Educational resources

[PSHE Association guide to safe learning environments](#)

PSHE Association: [Addressing misogyny, toxic masculinity and social media influence in PSHE education \(pshe-association.org.uk\)](#)

UK Feminista: [Schools against sexism](#)

Men at Work: [For boys, young men and those who work with them](#)

Beyond Equality: [Rethinking masculinities](#)

[Bold Voices](#)

NSPCC: [It's Not OK: online teaching resources | NSPCC Learning](#)

Brook: [Countering online misogyny in the classroom – Brook](#)

NEU: [Breaking the Mould](#)

Children's Commissioner: Flyers for children about their [right to no discrimination](#) and their [right to be heard](#)