

SAFEGUARDING



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Welcome to our Safeguarding Newsletter

A list of local outreach support services in Reading. This can be found on the school website [here](#).

Shore—A safe space for teenagers worried about sexual behaviour

Shore, launched in 2023 by The Lucy Faithfull Foundation, is an anonymous support platform designed to assist teenagers concerned about sexual thoughts or behaviours. It offers guidance on managing these concerns and promotes safe living both online and offline.

The website provides resources on topics such as healthy sexual relationships, understanding and changing harmful behaviours, and supporting others facing similar issues.

Shore features real-life stories to help users navigate their challenges. For those seeking direct assistance, confidential expert advice is available via email. By addressing these sensitive matters, Shore aims to prevent harmful sexual behaviours among young people. The website can be accessed [here](#).



Self Harm

There are many reasons why a young person may self-harm. They may also struggle to verbalise the reason for this.

Some experiences or emotions that may lead to a young person self harming could include:

- Experiencing depression or anxiety or having low self-esteem
- Being bullied or feeling alone
- Experiencing physical, sexual or emotional abuse, or neglect
- Grieving
- Friendship or family issues

Some signs may include:

- Covering up more than “normal”
- Unexplained bruises, cuts, burns or blood stains on clothing or tissues in room
- Avoiding friends/family and being home
- Changes in emotional state

Further information on self harm and supporting young people through this can be found on the [NSPCC website](#).



The rise of the “aggro-rithm”

Vodafone have created a video titled “The rise of the Aggro-rithm”. This highlights how harmful algorithms within social media apps can target young boys. These promote misogyny and other harmful views. The video, and further information, can be found [here](#)





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Navigating Masculinity

The Media's Influence on Young Males

Masculinity

Understanding masculinity is key to comprehending how it could become negative. Masculinity is a term for qualities or behaviours that people associate with being a boy/man. Being strong and brave are examples of what society traditionally expects from men. **It is important** to note that not all masculinity is toxic. It is ok for boys and men to be strong and brave in healthy ways. However, it becomes an issue when some of these ideas of 'being a man' become more extreme.



Toxic Masculinity

The phrase toxic masculinity refers to when the ideas of masculinity and 'being a man' become harmful and extreme. People who promote toxic masculinity believe to 'be a man' you must:



- 🚫 **Never show any feelings or emotions:** This means being strong all the time, not crying or feeling sad – even if you are.
- 🚫 **Be aggressive and tough:** You must always be ready to fight or be in charge, even if it hurts others.
- 🚫 **Hide your weaknesses:** You can never ask for support/advice or admit you are wrong – that makes you vulnerable.
- 🚫 **Think you are stronger and better than girls or women:** This is disrespectful and untrue.

Recently on social media, the more harmful extremist views of what defines masculinity have increased in popularity.

Core Messages of Toxic Masculinity

Young men can be influenced into these harmful communities through the promotion of ideals such as:



Advocating for Dominant Male/Submissive Female Roles - promoting exaggerated male characteristics like physical strength, focusing on the idea of the 'alpha male'. This is usually paired with the ideal that women are meant to be obedient and submissive to men.

Men's Rights - focusing on promoting 'men's rights', framing their content as a 'solution' to the increase of women's rights. This can seem relatable to young men who feel excluded by the equality movement, especially regarding feminism.

Emotional Engagement - claiming to empathise with the struggles that young men face such as exclusion, rejection or confusion about society's expectations. They often promise a future of wealth and relationships if their promoted lifestyle is followed. This makes content relatable for vulnerable young people while also giving them hope.

The buzz around Netflix's Adolescence sparks discussions on the impact of negative masculinity portrayals on young people.

The show highlights a growing concern: young males whilst online, are increasingly exposed to harmful, extremist views of what it is to be masculine. To address this, it's crucial to promote healthier models of masculinity, emphasising emotional expression, self-awareness, and helping young men critically engage with, rather than be unquestioningly influenced by online content.

Signs a Child May Be Affected by Toxic Masculinity



Although valuing masculinity is not always toxic, it is important to be aware of the signs that a child may be influenced by extremist views.

- ▶ Withdrawal from friends/family
- ▶ Repressing emotions and rejecting support
- ▶ Low self-esteem and insecurity
- ▶ Speaking negatively about women (e.g., appearance, relationships)
- ▶ Excessive time spent on specific websites/apps
- ▶ Obsession with physical appearance

Top Tips for Having Supportive Conversations



Engage in conversations about:

- ✓ **Healthy relationships** and treating girls/women respectfully.
- ✓ **Healthy masculinity**, model emotional expression and self-awareness.
- ✓ **Use parental controls** on social media to monitor screen time and limit harmful content consumed.
- ✓ **Ensure** the young people in your care know who their trusted adults are, that they can confide in if they are anxious about content they find online.
- ✓ **Introduce** positive male role models who embody healthy masculinity.
- ✓ **Educate** the young people in your care about how they can critically evaluate online content.

Language and Symbols



Discriminatory language and harmful emojis used in extremist online communities play a role in creating a culture that normalises harmful views of masculinity.

- 🔴 **Red pill** – A reference to the film The Matrix. If you are a 'red pill', you are 'waking up' to a 'reality' of the world being against you because women are in charge/only attractive men are successful.
- 🔵 **Black pill** – This refers to accepting the belief that women choose sexual partners based on predetermined genetic features and a man cannot change this.
- 🟢 **The 80 to 20 rule** – The belief that 80% of women are only attracted to 20% of men.
- 🟡 **Kidney bean/coffee beans** - Used to call someone or self-identify as an incel (involuntary celibate).
- 👑 **Alphas and Betas** - Alphas are believed to be confident men who are leaders. Betas are believed to be submissive, weak men.

Feeling anxious?

Try these 5-minute techniques



333 Rule

Identify 3 objects around you of varying sizes. Identify 3 sounds. Identify 3 things you can touch or move.

Box Breathing

Close your eyes and imagine a square shape. Slowly breathe in, hold, breathe out, hold, for 4 seconds each. With each step, slowly draw the lines of the square. Repeat as needed.



Distraction Techniques

Consciously practicing distraction techniques can help ease anxiety.

- Doodling or mindful colouring
- Drinking cold water
- Listening to music

To learn more about anxiety, visit:
mentalhealth-uk.org/aboutanxiety

'Just'
Anxiety?

Feeling anxious?

Try these 10-minute techniques



5,4,3,2,1 Grounding

Name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste.

Adrenaline Burn-Off

Undertake something physically active for 10 minutes to burn off the excess adrenaline your body is making.



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

In a quiet place, take a slow deep breath in, tensing an isolated muscle and then slowly breathing out to relax it. Start at your feet and work up through the body to your eyes.

To learn more about anxiety, visit:
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'Just'
Anxiety?

Exam Stress

5 Tips To Thrive This Exam Season

Do you recall the stress of exam season when you were at school? Hours of studying, sleepless nights and then the big day arrives; you find your place in the exam hall, turn over the page and try desperately not to crumble under the pressure.

For young people today, exam stress is no different – although it could be speculated that, if anything, it's worse. The pressures of social media, the impact on mental health from the pandemic and lockdowns and the interruptions to their education from the same, may all have their part to play in why increasing numbers of children and young people are turning to organisations like Childline for help with exam anxiety.

Good vs Bad Stress?

Some people will experience good stress that motivates them to revise and work hard, allowing them to perform at a higher standard. This sort of stress can be well within some young people's coping abilities. Bad stress refers to when someone experiences feelings of anxiety, mental suffering, affliction or it has negative implications.

How Can You Help?

1. Talking and Listening.

One of the first factors to consider is choosing your timing - don't pick a time in which they might feel rushed or distracted.

It may feel logical to ask a young person to come sit on the sofa or at the dining room table, but this could create an atmosphere of intensity – or, even worse, like they're in trouble! Instead, try open a conversation when you're in a more casual setting and with perhaps less intense eye contact! For example, when on a walk, out for dinner or in the car.

Ask open questions, i.e., questions that don't have a 'yes' or 'no' answer. Open questions allow space for the person answering to talk, rather than just give a short response that could 'kill' the conversation.

If you can, acknowledge that this might be a difficult time and that you know exams can cause stress and emotional upset.

For Example

I'm sure going through this period of your life with exams and studying must be very stressful – how are you feeling?

I remember being very stressed when I was doing exams and I could have used some extra support – what would you like me to do to support you through this time?

2. Know the Signs and What to Do.

Don't be afraid to seek support for children in your care if they display a number of the following signs that may be indicative of exam stress:

- Inability to sleep, eat and/or socialise.
- Uncontrollable feelings of anxiety, anger, stress and/or worry.
- Panic attacks, self-harm behaviours, and emotional outbursts.

If you are concerned about them, knowing where to turn to next is important – talk to the young person/people you support about organisations that can help, such as Childline.

3. Be Understanding.

Be flexible when it comes to your expectations; chores may have to take a backfoot for a while. If the young person in your care is struggling to cope, they may not have enough emotional 'room' to deal with other issues or situations – they aren't being selfish, their emotional capacity is simply 'full'.

It is important to remind young people to keep exams in perspective – they are short term and will eventually end, meaning the feelings of pressure and stress they have will end too.

4. Use Tech for Good.

Phones, laptops and gaming consoles are a big part of young people's daily lives – but in times of stress, they can become a force for good or for bad.

Look together at apps and websites that could potentially help to minimise their anxiety about exams, such as yoga and mindfulness apps. Understand that their screens may be the escape they require, despite it appearing outwardly unproductive. Connecting through social media, watching Netflix or playing a game may be the 'off-time' they need to keep them balanced and avoiding burn out.

5. Support Healthy Routines.

Alongside healthy screen time routines, it's important to make sure other aspects of a healthy lifestyle are being maintained, such as sleep hygiene, healthy eating habits and exercise.

Ensure your young people are aware of their own boundaries and when they need a break - there are apps available for this purpose. It can assist in ensuring they are revising in manageable amounts; not too much and not too little!

It's thought that when we sleep, our brains process information to create memories, a vital function when learning and retaining information. Physical activities like exercising, going for a walk or playing with your dog can be the break from school and screens that a young person needs. Exercise has many benefits to our physical and mental health.