

Lesson Plan for Online Messages on Manhood

Recommended ages: 12-14



This lesson helps middle school students explore how online messages influence their understanding of manhood and masculinity. Co-developed by [Equimundo](#) and [FUTURES Without Violence](#), and reviewed and tested by [Prepare Inc.](#) in New York classrooms, it aims to foster critical thinking and healthy perspectives on gender roles. It's at the facilitators discretion to stretch this lesson over 2 classes if necessary. The priority is that the learners are engaged in the conversation and can be exposed to various aspects of online content.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand what "masculinity" means.
- Notice positive and harmful online messages about being a man.
- Think about how online messages can affect feelings and behavior.
- Talk about how to handle harmful content.

VOCABULARY STARTER (10 minutes)

Complete one of the following quick activities:

- Hand out a short vocab sheet or do a quick matching game on the board.
- Have them use the word in their own example "An influencer I watch is ____."

Word	Simple Definition
Masculinity	Ideas about what it means to be a boy or a man.
Manosphere	Parts of the internet where people talk about men's issues, sometimes in a negative or disrespectful way toward women.
Influencer	Someone online (like on TikTok, YouTube, or Instagram) who shares ideas and gets lots of people to listen.
Algorithm	A tool used by apps to suggest videos or posts they think you'll like.
Body Image	How you feel about how your body looks.
Self-esteem	How you feel about yourself.

INTRODUCTION (5 minutes)

Today, we're talking about the kinds of messages boys and men get online — and how they can be positive or harmful.

The internet can be awesome for learning and connecting with people. But sometimes, it also shows us unrealistic or unhealthy ideas about what it means to be a man.

Quick Discussion Questions:

- What's something you hear or see online about what it means to be a "real man"?
- Have you ever seen posts or videos that make fun of women or girls?
- Do you think the stuff we watch online can affect how we feel about ourselves or others?
(this may require some extra probing, be prepared with some examples to talk with them about)
- Do you think influencers that focus on "tough guy" content blame women for problems that men face?

Discussion points may include:

- "You have to be super tough all the time."
- "You can't show emotions."
- "You have to be rich and muscular."
- Sometimes influencers are helpful, but sometimes they use fears or insecurities to sell products or ideas.
- "Influencers validate some of my worries and give me guidance on how to help myself."

ACTIVITY 1: AGREE/DISAGREE GAME (10-12 minutes)

Read each statement aloud and ask learners to show whether they agree or disagree. They can do this by moving to one side of the room or simply raising their hand. Once everyone has chosen their side, you can invite a few people to share their reasons

If the previous conversation covered many of these points, consider doing the Optional Activity at the end of this lesson instead of the Agree/Disagree Game

Statements:

- "Social media influencers can make guys feel worse about themselves."
- "It's fine to watch 'tough guy' videos — it doesn't change how I feel about myself."
- "There's only one way to be a 'real man': brave and strong."
- "Seeing pictures of 'perfect' bodies online can make people feel bad about their own body."
- "Social media sometimes unfairly blames women for men's problems."

After each move: Ask: *Why did you stand where you did?*

ACTIVITY 2: LIVER KING ARTICLE (15 minutes)

Read the article about the Liver King with your group. Students can either read it independently or follow along as you present the content in a slideshow format to break it up. (Feel free to use alternative article that fits the discussion questions)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2022/12/06/liver-king-steroids-apology-ancestral-diet/>



Discussion Questions:

- What message is this person selling?
 - What do you think this person is trying to say about what it means to be a man?
 - How could seeing these kinds of images or videos affect someone?
 - What impact do you think these influencers have on how we feel about ourselves?
 - Where else have you seen different kinds of guys shown in a good way?
-

CLOSING: ACTION AND AWARENESS (5 minutes)

End with a short clip or example of a positive influencer that your students are familiar with. Encourage them to identify other influencers or social media pages that provide positive examples of masculinity.

- What are some ways people respond from influencers online?
- How can you help a friend who's feeling bad because of stuff they see online?
- Can you think of any positive influencers who show healthy ideas of being a guy?

The manosphere unfairly blames girls and women for struggles that some boys and men face — like feeling stressed, falling behind in school, or having a hard time with friendships. But these struggles aren't because of girls. It's really important to think carefully about what we see online, and not get pulled into messages that blame everyone else instead of addressing the real issues.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

The Butterfly Project: RESET

<https://youtu.be/eFv9qQBov0o?feature=shared>

Show The Butterfly Project: RESET video which features boys and young men discussing body image issues, eating disorders, together with some experts "talking heads" on this topic.

Discussion Questions:

- What stood out to you about the way the boys and young men described their experiences with body image?
 - Why do you think topics like eating disorders and body image are often not talked about when it comes to boys?
-