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Briefing for Educators: Supporting Boys in the Age of Online Influencers and Gender Backlash



Schools across the world are grappling with a rising concern: adolescent boys are increasingly drawn to harmful online messages about masculinity, identity, and gender roles. Influencers like Andrew Tate and broader online spaces known as the *"manosphere"* promote misogyny, entitlement, and a distorted view of strength and success. The audiences of this content are becoming increasingly younger, with upper primary and middle school (10-14 years old) students already exposed to these harmful messages online.

While schools are taking important steps to address gender-based violence, many boys feel left out or blamed by these conversations. Without trusted spaces to explore their identities, boys often turn to the internet – where the loudest voices are frequently the most toxic.

At the same time, many school systems, teachers, and administrators are unsure how to engage boys in conversations about gender, respect, and wellbeing. These topics can feel sensitive, complex, or politically charged, and educators often lack training or practical tools to navigate them constructively. As a result, harmful narratives fill the vacuum, while schools miss critical opportunities to connect with and support boys in meaningful ways.

What We Know

- **Boys are listening – but not always to us.** Online influencers offer bold (but often harmful) narratives of power, belonging, and control that fill a gap many boys are trying to navigate.
- **Not all online content is harmful.** There is a growing ecosystem of creators and platforms offering positive, affirming messages that help boys explore healthy masculinity, mental health, empathy, and emotional expression. Schools can play a key role in helping boys find and engage with this content.
- **Shaming often backfires.** When boys feel attacked or blamed, they shut down. What works is listening, connection, and inviting them into honest conversations that build trust.
- **Teachers want to help.** Many educators recognize the problem but lack the training, tools, or confidence to respond effectively and constructively.
- **Boys need guidance, not punishment.** They deserve opportunities to talk openly about masculinity, identity, and relationships in safe, structured, and supportive environments.

Equimundo's Online Courses to Support Educators

It's critical to equip educators with the tools to understand and engage boys in conversations about gender, respect, and identity. On Equimundo's website, we offer various self-paced, free eLearning courses for many audiences. These courses are meant to provide concrete ideas about how to work with men and boys and meet them where they are.

How to Design Programs to Engage Men and Boys

A 13-module course that takes learners through the rationale of working with men and boys and provides strategies of how to do it in a community and school setting.

Beyond Gender Stereotypes: Teacher Training Curriculum

A set of free online courses tailored for teachers, school leaders, and parents. Although designed for audiences in the UK, it can be generally applicable to other contexts.

Many Ways of Being Overview

A 3-module course that provides an overview of our sex ed program – but also covers topics related to boys' online lives and what teachers can do to help foster critical thinking.

Reach out to Equimundo's program team for more training guides or options for your teachers or school administrators.

Supporting Boys Through Curricula and Conversations

There are a ton of opportunities in school settings to give boys space to unpack harmful online content and explore healthier models of masculinity through both structured lessons and informal conversations.

Launch school-based or after-school programming focused on healthy masculinity, life skills, and relationships. Some example programs include:

- Manhood 2.0: A curriculum engaging adolescent boys on gender norms, sexual health, and violence prevention.
- Many Ways of Being: A sex education and digital literacy curriculum emphasizing empathy, equity, and healthy relationships.

Build digital media literacy into lessons so students learn to critically analyze what they see online:

- Equimundo's Lesson Plan on Online Masculinity
- DCU Influencer Resource Pack
- Andrew Tate Schools Toolkit (GHLL)
- The Manosphere Rewired Research Report
- The City of London's Ignore the Noise Toolkit

Foster open conversations with empathy using resources like:

- 10 Tips for Talking to Kids About Radical Influencers
- Illustrated Conversation Starters
- Mashable's Guide: Helping Your Son Navigate the Manosphere

These tools help boys reflect on what they're hearing online and build a sense of self grounded in connection, care, and accountability.

Key Takeaways for School Leaders

Creating a safer, more inclusive school environment means recognizing the role that gender norms and online influence play in shaping boys' behavior, relationships, and sense of identity. The goal is not to discipline boys into silence, but to support their growth with empathy, guidance, and practical tools. Here are a few guiding principles to keep in mind:

This is not about policing boys – it's about supporting them.
Most boys want to do the right thing but are often navigating mixed messages about masculinity. They need safe, supportive spaces to reflect, ask questions, and build healthier ways of relating to themselves and others.

Small steps can make a big difference.
You don't need to transform your entire system overnight. A single training, pilot lesson, or facilitated conversation can open the door to lasting cultural change.

Everyone benefits from this work.
Fostering healthy masculinity improves the emotional wellbeing, safety, and engagement of all students – boys included – and helps build a school culture rooted in respect and empathy.

For more information and resources, visit our websites at equimundo.org or boyhoodinitiative.org.