

# The Voice of the Boys

How boys in secondary school education  
feel about being a boy today.

*Male Allies UK*

October 2025

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# A word from our founder

“After 8 years of interviewing men and women in the workplace to understand the challenges they’ve faced, what their reality is like and what concerns they had, a clear theme started to emerge. From projects to pilots, research to social listening, people were sharing their worries about boys. What about their job prospects? What about the impact of the pandemic? What about the effect of the push for gender equality? What about the online influences manipulating them?

What about our boys?

This led to a decision. I wanted to find out what life was like for boys in secondary education across the UK at this moment in existence. In times of technological change, economic challenge, political division and social tension. Not by reading prior literature, not through observation, not through the public discourse but by going straight to them, creating safety, listening to them without judgement, and letting them be the voice. What I heard was fascinating. Misconceptions highlighted. Headlines far from reality. Discussions that were frightening. Conversations that gave me real hope.

This report has been a labour of love. Alongside our work in the corporate world, building allyship as a skillset, engaging men in inclusion and closing gender gaps, we have travelled the length and breadth of the nation to connect with over 1,000 boys from all walks of life. From consent to safeguarding to resources, it has been far from a simple venture. I have genuine gratitude for the schools, educators, boys and practitioners who have been on this journey with us.

This report showcases what boys have shared. Their thoughts on the elements that make up their lives. The world through their eyes. Read it. Reflect upon it. Share it. We can all learn something by stepping into someone else's shoes.

This is the Voice of the Boys. Let’s listen to them.”

**Lee Chambers, business psychologist and CEO of Male Allies UK**



# Introduction

We've been talking **about** boys a lot this year, but have we been talking **to** them?

What are boys in the UK really thinking about at the moment? What do they think about technology, gender, and their future? Who are they listening to and learning from?

Male Allies UK has travelled across Great Britain to find out what boys between 11 and 16 think, beyond the sensationalism and noise of Adolescence and the current research narratives of boys being lost and left behind.

The data and perspectives paint an interesting picture of concerns and challenges, alongside optimism and solutions.

Secondary school is a crucial age and playground for learning, questioning, and testing social norms and gendered stereotypes. Early intervention and education about gender equity is essential in tackling how these norms and stereotypes are ingrained – which happens from as early as 6 years old. This work is therefore essential to our mission of creating the equitable and inclusive workplaces of the future because these boys are soon to be joining our workforces.

The world is different now than when we were growing up, and with today's climate – with reports of boys in crisis, misogyny rising, and pushbacks to diversity, equity, and inclusion – it's important to listen to boys about what's relevant to them today so we can best support them.

# Key findings

- 81% of boys don't feel there are enough spaces to be a boy today.
- 72% of boys don't have more than one person who knows them 'really well'.
- 79% of boys aren't clear what masculinity is.
- 65% of boys don't think school is preparing them for the future.
- 54% of boys think boys have it harder than girls today.
- 82% of boys don't trust politicians in the UK.

## Executive summary

Boys lack spaces to be, close relationships with people who know them well, and are vulnerable to loneliness and misguidance as they struggle with the balance of real life and online influences. There is a stark difference between how boys use AI compared to how most adults use it, with many boys turning to chatbots for emotional support, friendships, and romantic relationships.

While recognising that feminism has made the world a better place, over half of boys think they have it harder than girls today and many say they're made to feel like a problem. Boys watch a varied set of online influencers but most don't identify with Andrew Tate, instead watching the new age of manosphere influencers, some of whom were themselves influenced by the Tate brothers.

Secondary school boys feel a range of pressures that vary from individual to collective – from their personal appearance to global conflict. Yes, boys care about gaming and football, but they also care about peace and equality.

Amid the many challenges raised by boys we interviewed – the search for purpose and meaning and the pressures of navigating adolescence – an overarching theme appeared. Boys today really care and want to care for others, are searching for belonging and connection, and are yearning for people to listen to them and build trust with them.

# Research findings

## Boys need space

Where can boys **be** nowadays?

*Is it safer to be gaming inside or spending time outside?*

*Where are the opportunities for learning respect, boundaries, and how to be good friends and boyfriends if boys are spending so much time alone in their room?*

We were interested in what boys found more rewarding, engaging, and interesting – the real world or their online world. While they find the online and real world almost as engaging as each other – 49.8% and 50.2% respectively – they find the real world more interesting (54%) and the online world more rewarding (53%).



*I'm at a club four nights a week so getting time online is a good thing.*

Could this be because 81% of boys don't think there are enough physical spaces to be a boy today? The majority (72%) said there are fewer physical spaces for them over the past three years, with only 7% saying there are more.

Property development, cuts to public funding, and fallout from the pandemic were all stated as reasons:



*They built flats on the field we played on.*

*I enjoyed going to the youth club but it's not reopened after the pandemic.*

*I want to go to cadets but there is a waiting list. They said not enough volunteers.*

This lack of physical spaces for boys, and in some cases perception from both parents and boys that they're safer inside than outside, means boys are spending more time online and losing out on physical time with their peers to be kids, mess around, and learn boundaries.



*With all the zombie knives and drug dealers it's easier to sit in my room with my headset on.*

Both time spent online and physical safety were recurring worries in the parent/carer questionnaires. Are the answers from boys a case of them preferring to spend time online or is it a result of their physical spaces and safety reducing?

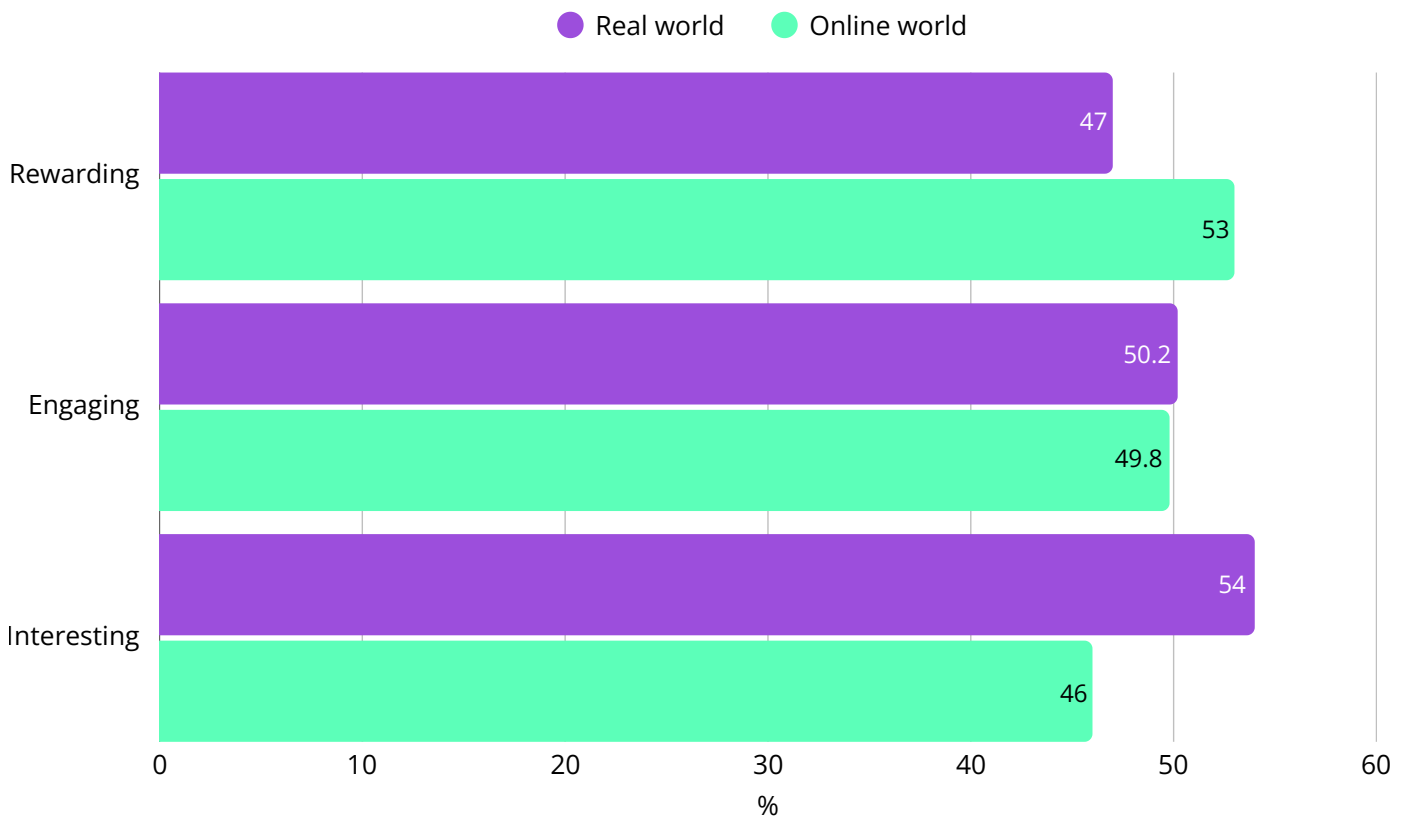
If we consider cuts to youth services, over a decade of austerity, the cost-of-living crisis, and fallout from the pandemic there has been a vast reduction in physical spaces for young people as a whole.

As a result, boys are increasingly spending time online in unmoderated, sometimes harmful spaces with little or no real-world counterbalance.

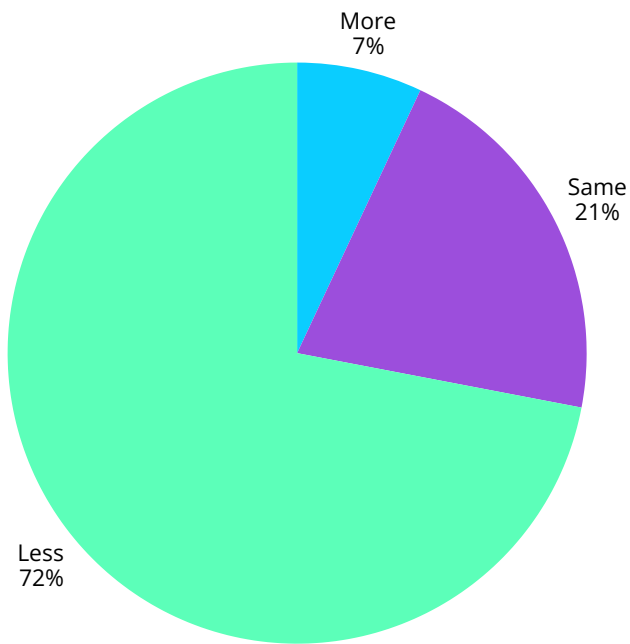
*I can hang about round here but none of my mates live close by.*

*If we chill in town we just get hassled even if we're not causing any trouble.*

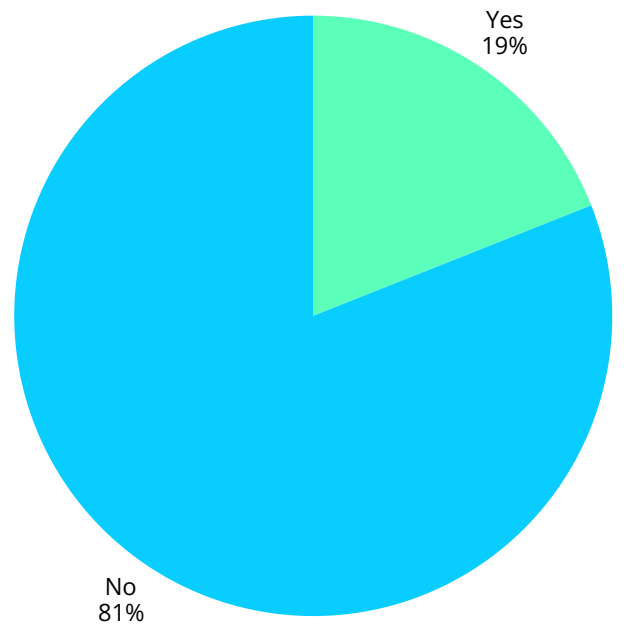
### Which do you find more:



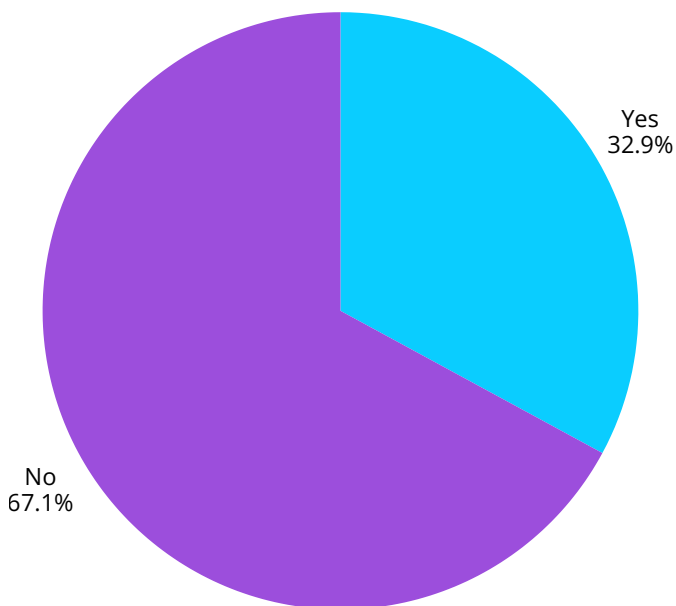
Are there more or less physical spaces for you over the last 3 years?



Do you feel there are enough physical spaces to be a boy today?



Do you think you should spend less time online, on social media, or gaming?



If you judged modern boyhood from the tabloids, it would seem abysmal.

Cult followings behind toxic online ideologies, social media streams awash with misogyny, and the idea of the education system being reduced to a brain washing institution. If my perspective of teenage male existence today was limited exclusively to media sensationalism, I'd be distraught.

However, it fortunately isn't. I am a teenage boy. The lived reality, whilst messy, isn't hopeless. My perspective is one of optimism.

Of course, this issue isn't fabricated. My perspective is also one of past experiences with toxic content, feeling insecure in my masculinity, and distrust in conventional education. I know I'm not alone there.

In a classroom of boys, at least 24 of us will have experienced Andrew Tate's content. We're statistically more likely to own a mobile phone than be raised with a father in the house. We're behind girls in every stage of education.

So why my optimism? I'm optimistic because this report exists.

I see policy change for boys standing at a crossroads of conversation.

Conversation that could exclude and stigmatise my demographic, pushing young boys even further into problematic spaces. Conversation that could also be open to and inclusive of the voices of young men, making their issues feel understood, working in unity to discover a new form of masculinity that isn't necessarily prefaced with the word "toxic".

Either society answers to the struggles of boys, or the algorithm does.

The algorithm never answers kindly.

**Josh Sargent – Year 11 Student and Social Commentator**

## Relationships and loneliness

Forming and maintaining relationships, both romantic and platonic, is extremely different for boys today than it was for us. We found that boys are prone to loneliness and use technology – either by gaming or speaking to AI – to both make and maintain friendships. However, this relational aspect can be missed by parents who worry about the time their children are spending online and/or gaming.



*My parents don't understand. It's not just gaming. It's how I stay in touch with my friends from primary [school].*

*Online is the only place I can meet people who like what I like.*

When speaking to parents to understand their concerns, recurring themes included social media use, being online, and access to pornography – second only to patriarchy and the societal impact of misogyny.

Two things can be true at once: although being able to stay in touch with or make new friends online is a positive for many boys, there's also

vast amounts of disinformation online and access to various types of content that young people shouldn't be consuming.

If we don't want to remove a valuable avenue for connection from boys in terms of them being online, we need to ensure we're equipping them with critical thinking and research skills to stay safe. This could include how to recognise and question misinformation, to understand that AI chatbots shouldn't replace accessing mental health support, and to have a healthy balance between their online and offline worlds.



*I don't think I can trust anything online, it's all fake.*

*I know it's not good for my mental health being online so late at night.*

Further research should delve deeper into boys' online and offline relationships and seek to understand the difference between relationships with peers and adults. This could help us understand why, while the majority of boys (62%) have someone who knows them really well, only 1 in 4 say they have more than one person who does.

Trusted adults and role models are key relationships for boys, so it's reassuring that 84% said they have two or more adults in their life that would listen to them when they talk to them.

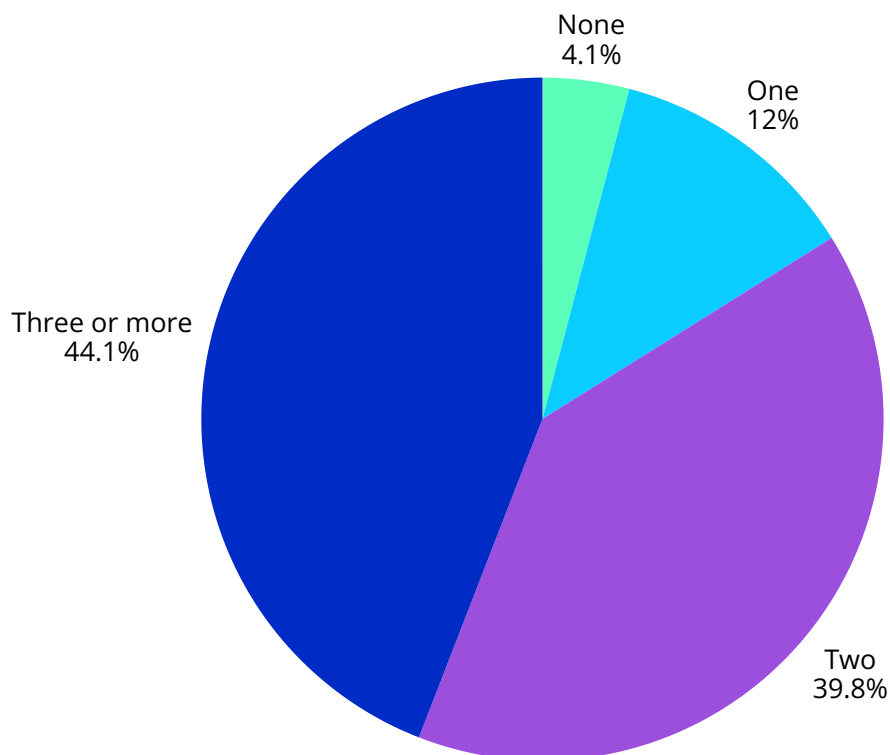
At the same time, in the listening sessions, there was a regular theme of adults being busy, glued to work and their phones, and not being present. Adding to this, 72% said they don't have more than one person who knows them 'really well'.

So, although boys feel they'll be listened to when they talk, it can often only be from one person and even then, they don't appear to feel a deeper sense of connection and understanding.

*I don't know myself well enough for others to know me.*

*I wish I had close friends. I don't know anyone that well.*

How many adults do you have in your life that listen to you if you talk to them?

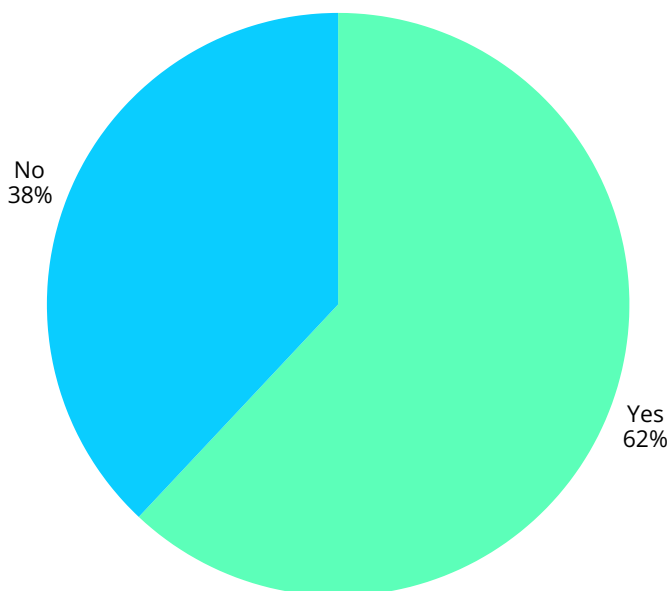


Boys talked about being kicked out of their form WhatsApp group, finding it 'really hard to make proper friends', and wishing they had close friends. In a world where access to physical spaces or opportunities to socialise can depend on a postcode lottery or the means of their parents; spending time online is generally more accessible, and boys have more control over it.

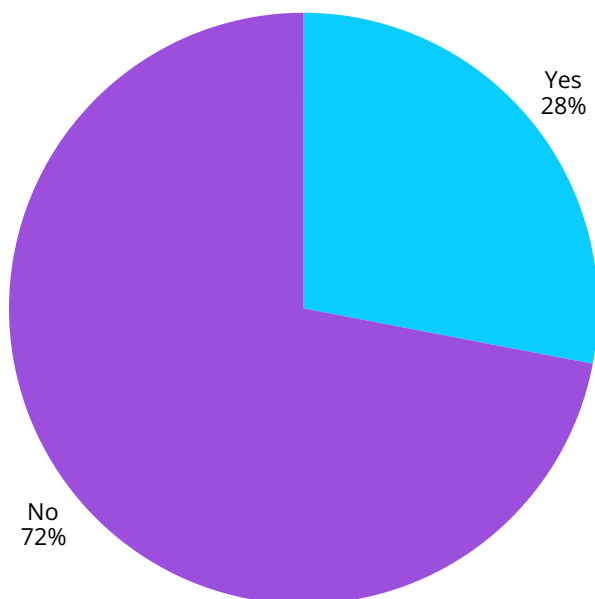


*Online I can choose how I want to be, rather than being told.*

Do you have somebody that knows you "really well"?



Do you have more than one person who knows you "really well"?



“The truth is Mike, it’s rare for someone like me to hear the word **masculinity** without the word **toxic** before it.” The words of a thirteen year old boy in one of our workshops whilst eleven of his friends nodded along in silent agreement... tragically this is not an unusual occurrence. We have created a society where boys expect to hate conversations about masculinity because experience has taught them it will be approached from a deficit-based perspective and feel like an attack.

Progressive Masculinity’s research-based work is about creating safe, non-judgemental spaces where can explore masculinity, breaking free of the narrow scripts handed down to us and recognising our agency to design the man, friend, partner and father we want to be. Central to our approach is the belief that with over four billion men in the world there can be over four billion different ways to be a man. This aspirational perspective has been central to the positive impact we are now having all over Great Britain through our various programmes.

“Boys don’t like to talk” is a lazy and reductive stereotype; when we create the right environments boys LOVE to talk about issues like identity, relationships, digital culture, critical thinking and aspirations for the future. As a society we need more spaces where boys feel liberated to drop the ‘performance’ and critically engage with their masculine identities: “these sessions made me feel like I don’t have to pretend to be someone else. Someone I don’t like being anyway.” (15 year old pupil).

**Mike Nicholson - Director at Progressive Masculinity**

## Boys use AI for friendship, therapy, and romantic relationships

At the start of the school year AI companions were barely talked about, but by the end we saw a 300% increase. Something for us to consider as parents and teachers is that adults and young people use AI very differently – for many adults it's used as a productivity tool to save time, streamline work, or keep organised. Young people, however, are using AI for companionship, relationships, and even therapy.



*I talk to an AI app, it makes me feel like I'm not on my own.*

Despite younger generations being more open to speaking and seeking support, with 76% of Gen Z men being open to speaking to someone about their mental health, barriers to access remain in the form of waiting lists and/or high costs. When an alternative sits in your pocket every day in the form of an AI that will instantly reply, there's no wonder we're seeing a large amount of young people using them.

One of the most popular chatbots on Character.AI, an app that lets you

talk to a chatbot of anyone real or fictional, is called Psychologist. This chatbot alone received 78,000,000 messages within a year of its creation and there are hundreds of chatbots across platforms with 'therapy' or 'therapist' in their names which will explicitly lie (often breaking their own guidelines), claiming to be licensed therapists and not AI.



*I have AI friends and girlfriends, they are always there when you feel bored.*

AI companions are increasingly popular but there are real-world consequences to young boys creating AI girlfriends with every detail hand-picked by them, from their physical appearance to their demeanour. If their main or only source of speaking to a girl they're interested in is someone who can't tell them 'no' and who hangs on their every word, boys aren't learning healthy or realistic ways of relating to others. Again, with issues around lack of physical spaces to mix with their peers, AI companions can have a seriously negative effect on boys' ability to socialise, develop relational skills, and learn to recognise and respect boundaries.

At the time our research was conducted, only a minority of boys (13%) said they're open to having an AI friend, with a small majority (55%) saying no.



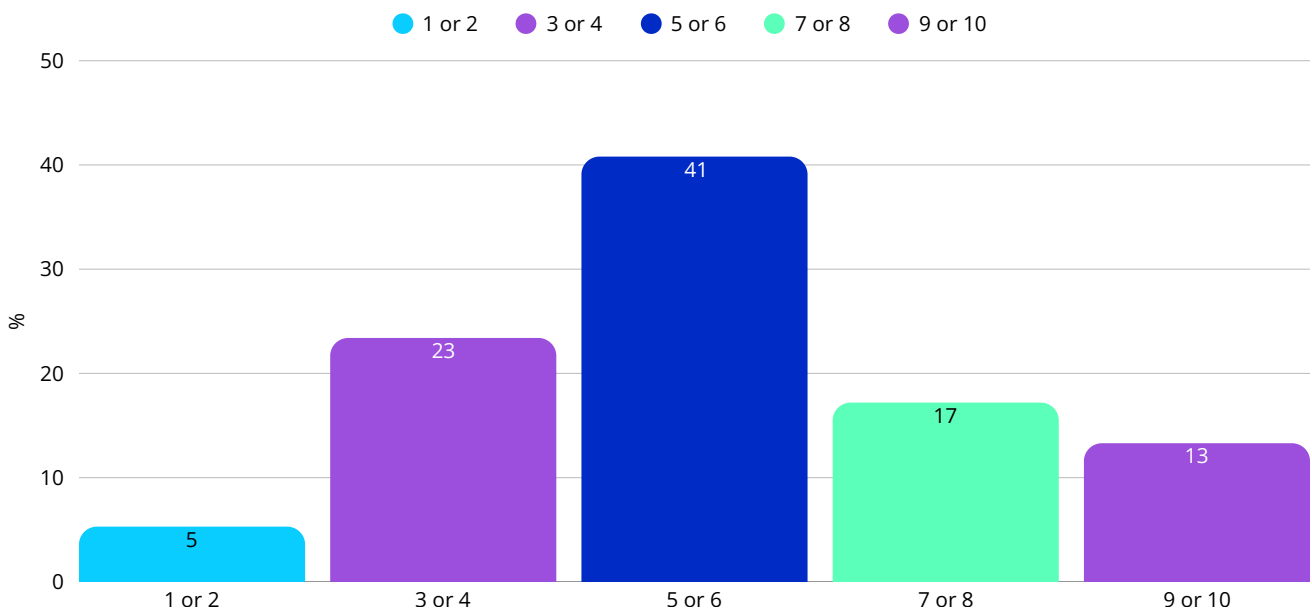
*I don't use them, but I know when certain form mates have been up all night talking to theirs.*



*I don't trust any of it, it's trying to make us have no friends in real life.*

However, this does leave a almost a third who are open to the idea, and with tech companies pushing these AI companions so much, we'll have to keep a close eye on uptake.

Rating 1-10, how satisfied have you been with your life over the past month?



What's missing for the conversation around technology and males is both the positives and negatives that are steeped in community, connection and conversations that take place both synchronously, asynchronously and in the varying (multi model) versions of chat, meme, reel and audio which can all take place in a multi-platform way making it difficult to research and track. This does not provide us with a full picture to date and as such we are extrapolating from small numbers of studies to 'all' technology spaces.

When young males are using technology spaces, they are exposed to a large amount of norms that are both relevant to the platform and the peers who are there. For example, in some gaming environments there are rules to follow in order to succeed in the game, such as an etiquette for FPS (first person shooter) roles and this may include the use of specific language and codes. Nonconformity to some of these rules can often render a young man excluded from the game and 'third' space as they are sometimes referred to. Sadly, sensationalism about these codes (which can include memes, icons, emoticons, words and acronyms) can often be misinterpreted and misunderstood because they are seen to be violent, degrading, sexist or misogynistic or interpreted by others as such. There is no doubt that some of the words and language fits into this stereotype and may also be embodied by some boys as such and therefore we need nuanced corporeal conversations where those environments are understood by the adults conversing with the boys and young men.

An example would be the use of a car to run a person over in grand theft auto games, which is understood by a boy to be an illegal act that he can carry out in the gaming world but would not engage with in a corporeal sense. However we know that some drivers do indeed drive vehicles like this and did so even before the spaces of technology were available.

**Cath Knibbs PhD – Human Behaviour Technologist and Online Harms Researcher**

## Has feminism gone too far and is allyship on boys' radar?

Research by King's College London found that, in 2024, 47% of Britons think things have gone 'far enough when it comes to giving men and women equal rights' and 59% of men (vs 35% of women) think we have gone so far that men are now discriminated against.

Our research found that boys feel similarly, with mixed opinions about feminism and who has it worse. Despite 58% of boys believing feminism made the UK a better place, a similar amount (54%) believe boys have it harder than girls today.

This shows the polarisation of gender equity found between adults in King's College London's research is reflected in boys in secondary education.



*I'd rather be a boy than a girl.*

*My grandad told me what things used to be like for my grandma. It's much better now.*



*We are all teenagers trying to work it out. I don't get why we have to keep going on about boys and girls.*

Two students highlighted the difference they feel between them as boys and their female peers, with one saying 'there's all this new stuff for girls: skateboarding, coding, engineering club. There's less stuff for us' while another says 'the girls are always getting celebrated. We're just made to feel like a problem'.

Do boys have it harder than girls today?



Male allyship has been around for a long time but has been gaining traction since the UN Women's HeForShe campaign launched in 2014. We wanted to know whether male allyship is on boys' radar today and found that 1 in 5 boys had carried out an allyship action in the past month with some boys proud to talk about it.



*It feels good to do the right thing.*

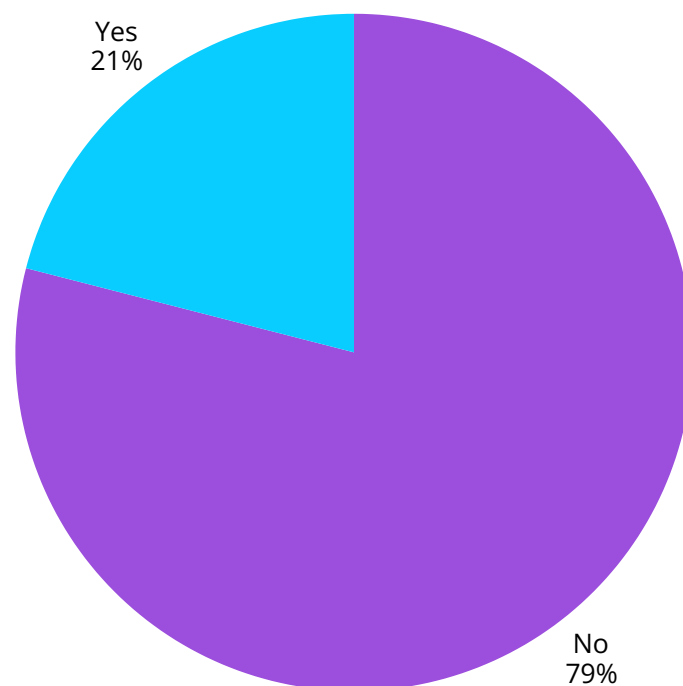
*I don't feel like supporting girls in case I get it wrong and they throw shade at me.*

However, 79% of boys hadn't, which could be because allyship takes both courage and opportunity – calling people in or out can be difficult, especially when they're close to you. We also often talk about allyship being a skillset that's built over time. Barriers to action include fearing retaliation either from their friends or the girls they could be allying to.



*It's scary to tell your mate to stop, but other mates say they were thinking the same as me.*

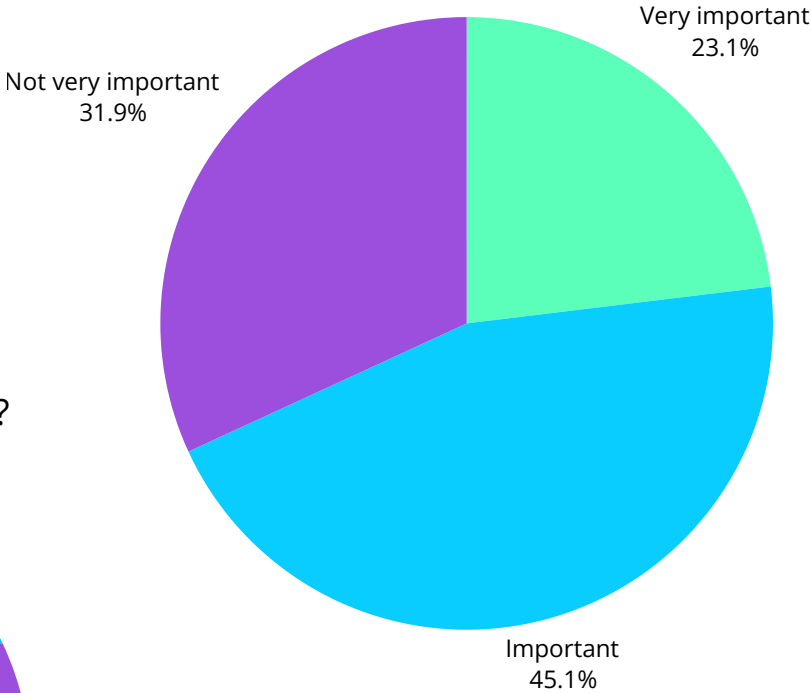
Have you carried out a male allyship action in the past month?



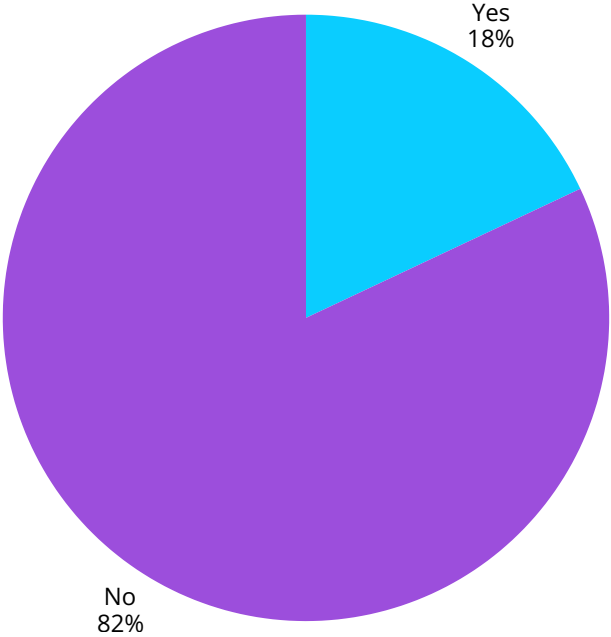
Do you think feminism has made the UK a better place?



Are women's rights important in the world today?



Do you trust politicians in the UK?



Yes, many boys today are struggling, including in domains like school engagement, mental health, or belonging. But before we accept the idea of a uniquely male “crisis,” it helps to remember this isn’t narrative new. For more than 150 years, education and youth have been cast through cycles of “crisis logics”—from fears of unruly working-class boys in the 19th century to anxieties about boys falling behind girls in the late 20th. Each era has in different ways framed boys as “at risk,” often obscuring the broader social and structural issues at stake.

The present moment follows this pattern. Working-class boys may face acute barriers, but their struggles are often comparable to those of working-class girls. Meanwhile, phenomena like the appeal of the online “manosphere” show that some pressures resonate across class lines, speaking to boys’ wider search for belonging and identity. These dynamics remind us that the real story is less about boys versus girls, and more about how inequality, gender norms, and cultural narratives shape the lives of all young people.

The danger of the “lost boys” narrative is that it collapses this complexity into a single (and very much false and reactionary) label. A richer conversation recognises shared struggles, different reactions, and recurring patterns. This would more productively open space for solutions that support every child to thrive.

**Prof. Steve Roberts – Professor of Sociology and Masculinity Researcher at Monash University**

## Manosphere influencers and masculinity

Useful terms for this section are defined below:

**Misogyny** is defined as a 'hatred of, aversion to, or prejudice against women' and 'the belief that women are a lesser gender than men and should always remain a lower status than men'.

Incel is short for '**involuntary celibate**'. Although originally coined by a woman, it has been co-opted by men to describe their frustrations with not being able to find a girlfriend or wife. Incels believe that women aren't oppressed but men are and that women only want the top 20% of men who look and act a certain way and withhold sex from all other men as a power play.

The **manosphere**, defined in the report as online spaces dedicated to men's issues, is an environment where misogynistic views may proliferate. Communities include 'red pill' and 'black pill' groups, incels, Men Going Their Own Way, Men's Rights Activists, pick-up artists, Looksmaxxers, as well as other groups relating to self-improvement, masculinity, and gender politics. Each has their own subculture and ideologies.



*He's part of the new system.*

*That's the future and what he said has come true.*

Our listening sessions showed boys follow people who make content around their hobbies – pranks, cars, fitness, sports, business, and gaming. When it comes to the manosphere or 'red pill' influencers, rather than Andrew Tate and Jordan Petersen boys mentioned names like Hamza Ahmed and Adin Ross.

It seems that boys today are more discerning than we realise, with 62% saying they don't trust one or more of the sexist voices provided.

1 in 5

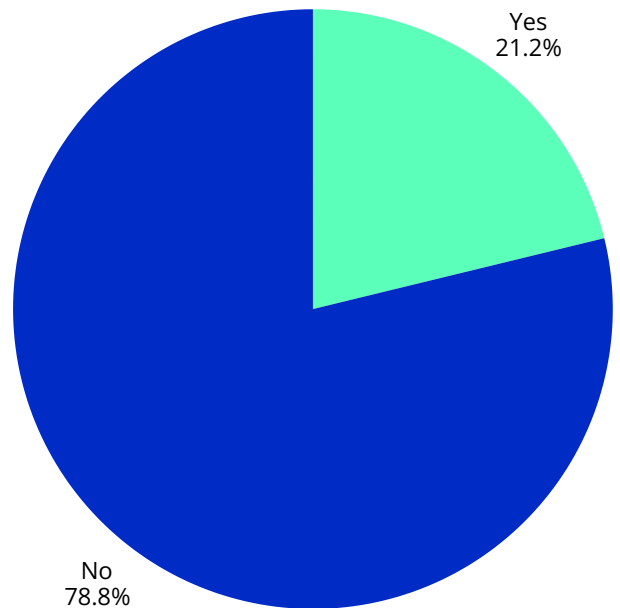
boys have a clear idea of what masculinity is

Often these influencers started out as, or are a hybrid of, gaming or fitness content as well as harmful misogynistic, racist, and homophobic content. This means that boys seeking content related to their hobbies and interests become exposed to manosphere influencers, whether they were looking for that content or not.

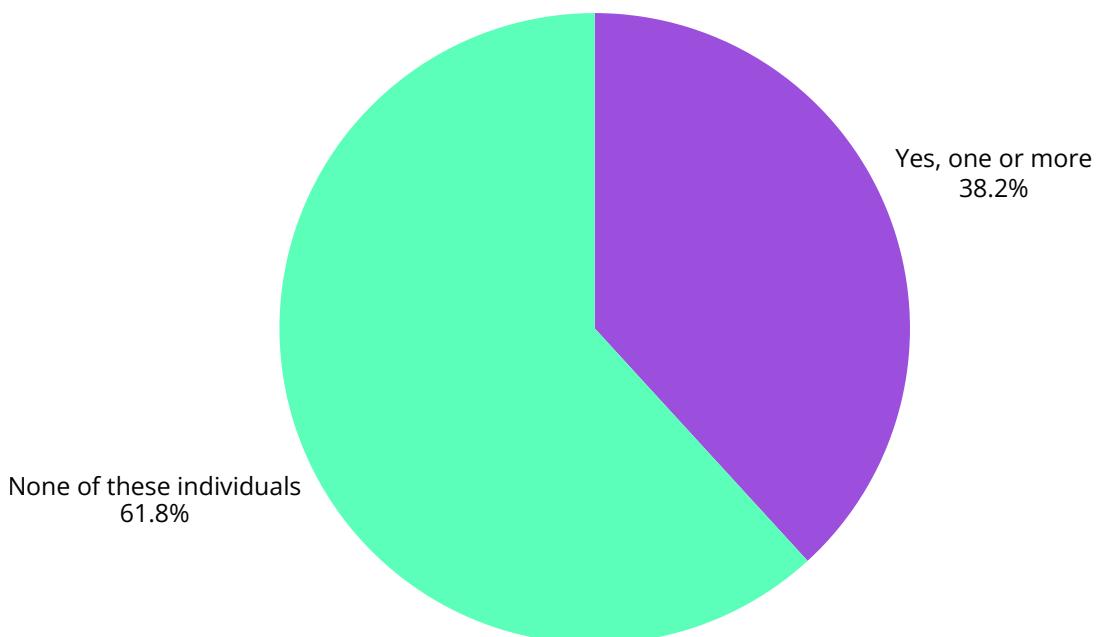


*I don't agree with everything he says but it gets me motivated.*

Is it clear to you what masculinity is?



Do you trust one or more of these sexist voices?



We found that a significant majority (79%) of boys aren't clear on what masculinity is. Reasons for this include masculinity usually being talked about negatively such as discourse focusing on harmful or 'toxic' masculinity rather than positive or healthy masculinity.



*People always say what it shouldn't be, but don't say what it is.*

*It's toxic, that's all I ever hear.*

This lack of a clear definition for masculinity can mean that the influencers who do talk confidently about what masculinity is, even if it's harmful, are able to cut through the noise.

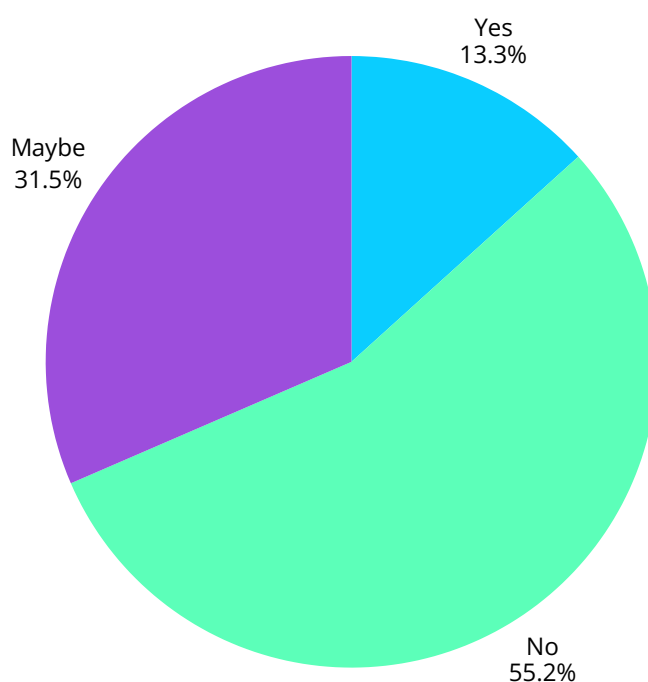
This is troubling when certain influencers are only talking about reductive or regressive types of masculinity - that cause harm to both men and boys and women and girls - when there isn't a balance of healthy and positive masculinity influencers to provide an alternative.



*It's about learning how to be a man.*

Of the 1 in 5 boys who do have a clear idea of what masculinity is, we received answers such as it's 'about me knowing who I am, not what others say I should be' which is a wise and healthy way for boys of this age to be viewing and talking about masculinity. What became clear in wider conversations, was how little opportunity boys get to explore who they can be in a safe and non-judgemental space, and how confusing the current conversations around masculinity are.

Would you be open to having an AI friend?



Many academics and journalists have been following the manosphere for at least a decade, but it has only recently become a topic of widespread concern. This is largely due to the mainstreaming of a slew of misogynist influencers by recommender-driven platforms such as TikTok and YouTube Shorts (Baker et al., 2024). While this public debate is to be welcomed, its intense and often contentious nature has been something of a double-edged sword (Ging and Baker, 2025). The Netflix show *Adolescence*, in particular, put 'toxic masculinity', online misogyny and gender-based violence on the political agenda but, despite getting many things right, it also opened up considerable potential for misinterpretation.

For example, despite the show's clear signalling that harmful modes of masculinity predate the internet and are imbedded in family and school structures, media reaction focused almost exclusively on digital cultures. Similarly, even though *Adolescence* foregrounds Jamie's father and school as primary sources of his anxiety, reactionary commentators capitalised on the series as a means to bemoan the negative impact of fatherlessness and the feminisation of education on boys. Perhaps most concerningly, many high-profile figures recommended it be used as an educational intervention in schools. Finally, the behaviours and motivations of the girls were widely misunderstood (e.g. that Katie was bullying Jamie and pushed him to 'snap'), due in large part to the underdevelopment of their characters and perspectives (Fehr and Ringrose, 2025).

*Adolescence* has thus ignited both valuable and misleading public debates, reminding us of the power and the limitations of drama to explore complex social issues. It is important that we take advantage of the current spotlight on boys by providing spaces where they can connect, express vulnerability and develop empathy and respect for themselves and others.

**Prof. Debbie Ging – Institute for Research on Genders and Sexualities,  
Dublin City University**

## Education, success, and pressure to succeed

We wanted to understand how boys feel about their future and whether they think school is helping them prepare for it. Almost two-thirds (64%) of boys don't think school is preparing them for the future and 82% don't trust politicians in the UK.



*They [politicians] never do what they say they are going to do.*

*School is the old system, prepares you for a job where you get told what to do like school.*

*They should teach entrepreneurship and content creation in schools, not RE and useless subjects.*

When asked whether a male or female teacher has had the biggest impact on them, 66% of boys said female. Data shows that the majority of teachers across England (76%), Scotland (89%), Wales (74%), and Northern Ireland (77%) are female which could mean boys lack a suitable range of male role models from their education settings.

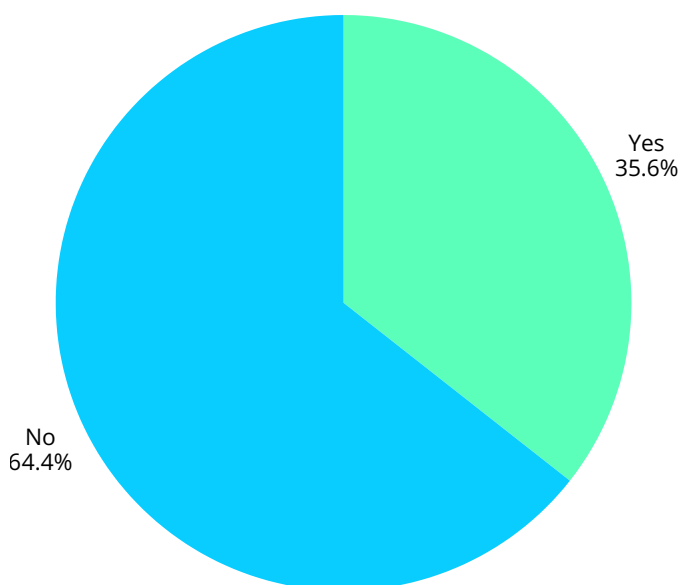


*There was one male teacher in my whole primary school.*

*It's harder than you think being a boy with all the pressure.*

Amid the lack of trust in politics and the relevance of school, secondary school-age boys feel a range of pressure from both their present lives – with relationships and self-image – to their fears for the future which include affording to live, climate change, and global conflict. Class and ethnicity will intersect here so further research should capture demographic data.

Do you feel that school is preparing you for the future?



Less than 5% of boys feel no pressure to be successful, with the majority (68%) feeling either 'a bit' or 'in the middle'. Almost 1 in 4 boys feel 'a lot' of pressure to be successful.

Even at this age some boys feel the need to ensure they'll be able to provide for themselves when they leave home in an economy where they can either see their parents struggling or have been told explicitly that they won't be able to support them when they move out.



*How will I afford a house and car if I'm earning £25,000?*

*My parents said I need to be a success as they won't be able to help me financially.*

There's a lot going on during secondary school, which we may remember ourselves, but for boys today it's compounded by 24/7 access to the internet, news, social media, and AI which we didn't have to navigate during our youth. Some boys are focused on their futures – motivated either through hope or fear – while others are struggling to get by day to day.



*My grades, how I look, keeping friends, doing well at music and sports. Everything is stressful.*

*I'm not even thinking about the future, just focusing on getting by each day.*

**1 in 4**

**boys feel 'a lot' of pressure to be successful**

Through my work with boys aged 11–15, I hear a strong desire for positive and stable futures. Many talk about wanting healthy relationships, meaningful friendships, and financial independence, often with the hope of one day having a family. Yet, alongside this optimism sits uncertainty.

They often seek direction on how to achieve these goals and already feel an early pressure to succeed.

Conversations frequently turn to money and the pressure to be financially secure (even at this young age). The images of masculinity they see online often tie success to wealth, status, and popularity, which only deepens their insecurities and need to perform an archetypal masculine role.

Many boys still feel bound by outdated expectations of what it means to “be a man.” They talk about hiding softer emotions, avoiding interests seen as “unmanly,” and feeling pressure to perform a version of masculinity reinforced by peers and the online world.

Increasingly, they share worries around body image and neurodiversity.

Despite greater awareness of men’s mental health, many still say “they struggle to open up” to those around them. Yet, when given safe and non-judgmental spaces, there is real hope. I quite often see the opposite, and many want to be part of redefining what masculinity means for their generation.

**Richard Pomfrett – The Stay Safe Initiative CIC & Boyz-2-Men**

# Boys' thoughts and solutions

How often do we give boys the opportunity to tell us anything they want us to know?

To share their hopes and fears for the future?

Or what they would do if they suddenly had the power to change one thing?

We asked a further small sample of boys five open-ended questions. Here's a selection of their answers which – as with the school research – ranged from individual issues such as their appearance and hobbies, to their futures such as money and housing, to wider issues such as war, masculinity, climate change, and equality.

## What's one thing you wish adults knew about being a boy in 2025?

*'That we see things through different eyes and understand what's going on around us.'*

*'I don't think there is anything they don't know which I do.'*

*'Not understanding why I enjoy gaming.'*

*'It's harder than you think being a boy with all the pressure.'*

*'That not every boy has the same set of influences.'*

## If you could change one thing overnight, what would it be?

*'I want to be able to play football whenever I want.'*

*'How people act in the world for example I would stop climate change, racism, bullying and war.'*

*'No more acne.'*

*'The amount of money I have.'*

*'Boys don't always have to be seen as strong and not allowed to cry or show emotion.'*

## If you had 5 minutes to speak to the Prime Minister, what would you say?

*'Why can't you solve your country's problems?'*

*'What plans you have for the future and what are you doing about climate change and Ukraine?'*

*'I'd ask "How do you cope with the backlash?"'*

*'Put more effort into mental health not just for girls but for boys.'*

*'About equality and what position the UK will take in the future.'*

## What's your biggest hope for the future?

*'That the world lives in peace and everyone has a voice no matter who they are what race, religion, skin colour and more they are.'*

*'Be successful and happy.'*

*'To become an engineer.'*

*'Girls and boys will be treated fairly.'*

*'That Technology will be developed to help us all live and not take jobs and kill us all.'*

## What's your biggest fear for the future?

*'WW3.'*

*'Taxes.'*

*'Climate change.'*

*'That conflict will cause the end of humanity.'*

*'Boys will always have to go the extra mile for girls but girls do not have to for boys.'*

I think what we are forgetting is that boys want to be talked with, not just talked at. A lot of what they are seeing online or across their personal echo-chambers is not always passively accepted as truth; boys have thoughts, questions and critiques.

They want to discuss these topics, they want to hear ideas and perspectives that challenge their own. We address the areas of masculinity that need work not by shouting the loudest, but through listening with attentive intention; what is being said? What is not being surfaced? How can we compassionately meet boys where they are at, and hold the mirror with grace and care?

Transforming masculinities is a practice of congruent modelling - it requires emotional regulation and compassionate assertiveness.

Both are compatible, not competing pursuits.

**Lewis Wedlock – Social Psychologist and author of Masculinities in Schools**

# Parent and carer perspectives

Although the primary focus of this report is the thoughts of boys, we did seek to understand how parents and carers feel about their boys' futures.

We invited parents and carers with sons or stepsons to complete a short form and received 185 responses. The top three age groups were boys aged 5-9 (20%), 14-18 (17%) and 10-13 (16%).

When asked 'In the current climate, how concerned are you about the future of your son(s)/stepson(s)' only 1.6% of respondents said they were 'not' concerned and 12.6% said they were 'slightly' concerned. This leaves 85.8% of parents who are either 'moderately' concerned (30.6%), 'considerably' concerned (37.2%) or 'extremely' concerned (18%) about their boys.

Parents could submit longform answers to explain their concerns and again there were clear themes repeated across the answers. The top five concerns for parents by number of mentions are:

1. Patriarchy and societal impact of misogyny including people like Andrew Tate (55)
2. Social media use and influencers (50)
3. Time spent online including effect of porn (46)
4. Future prospects including jobs and housing (42)
5. Crime, violence, and safety (34)

There's an overlap here with the boys' worries around future prospects, housing, jobs, crime, and safety but there are also gaps. For example, for parents Andrew Tate is a top concern, whereas 62% of boys don't relate to the sexist voices we provided. Also, parents worrying about time spent online directly conflicts with the 67% of boys who don't think they should spend less time online, on social media, or gaming.

**86%**  
of parents are  
concerned about  
their boys

Most parents referred to several concerns in their answers, for example:



*Physical safety for boys and men in a world where there is so much violence, and an increasing prospect of war when my boys could be fighting age.*

*Relationship and self-worth issues in a pornified world. The way that porn gives boys and men an erotic blueprint to get off on violence. Social media and media which pushes a really unhelpful view of what 'real men' should be like, and how they treat other boys/men and how they should view girls and women.*

*Men and boys being blamed for patriarchy and made to feel they are wrong and bad just for being men, instead of being called into being part of the solution to change things for the better for everyone.*

We gave parents the opportunity to make recommendations around their concerns and again found common themes. The top five solutions from parents are:

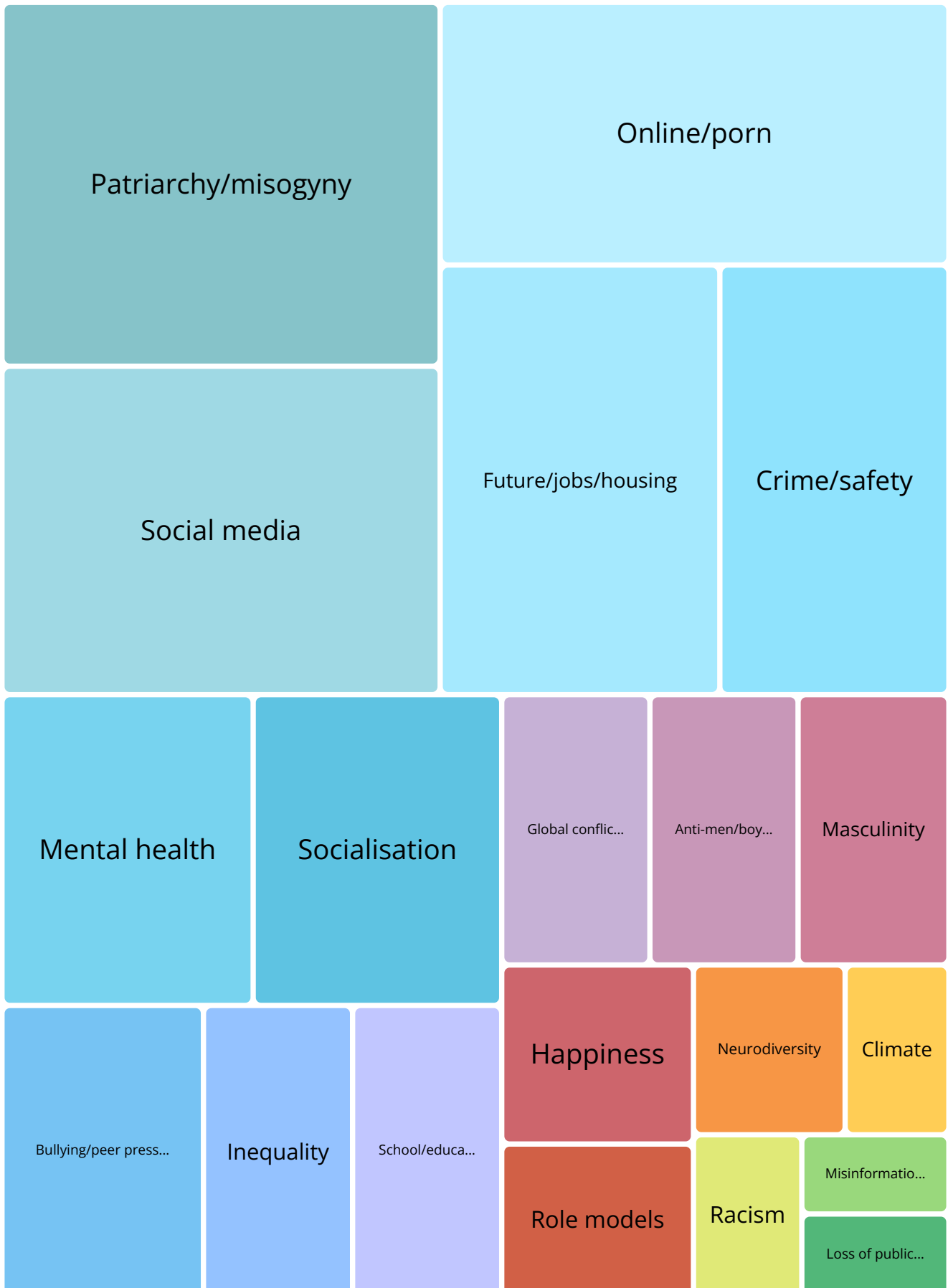
1. More and/or better education in school (49)
2. More security/controls online and on social media (44)
3. Public investment (including in housing, education, youth clubs, etc.) (34)
4. Not allowing smartphones for under 16s (27)
5. And bans (either smart phones, certain content, or certain access) (23)

A number of parents (18) also talked about encouraging dialogue, critical thinking, or emotional literacy as a way for children to explore and work through the things they see and the feelings they have.

Others explored the difficulty in banning smartphone use for their children when they are surrounded by children as young as five using them. They also describe the difficulty when banning doesn't help but control and regulation is non-existent, so they don't know what the answer is. They are not alone.

# Parent and carer concerns

(Full labels on page 47)



# Recommendations

We need to be talking with and listening to boys more. Times have changed since we were young so we need to tailor our support to what boys are telling us they need today.

## Creating space and being role models

Youth programs and initiatives should be made available for boys to remedy the loss of physical spaces they've experienced over the past three years. Boys talked about wanting to play football, join the Cadets, and go back to youth clubs – all of which need funding and/or volunteers to run.

Adults, especially men, should get involved in our local communities. Not only would we be creating spaces for boys to learn, play, and grow, but we'd be helping them to spend time with both adults and peers in the real world – all of which is vital to their development of masculinity and sense of self.

## Meaningful relationships and combating loneliness

More opportunity to spend time with people face to face may also help boys make and maintain closer, more meaningful relationships

which would be so valuable given the loneliness and lack of connection they reported.

## Understanding and regulating AI

The prevalence of tech and AI is a challenge, especially when parental controls or guardrails are easily worked around or not fit for purpose. Even as adults it can be difficult to spot fake news and deepfake pictures or videos so this is a difficult thing to navigate, especially as parents and educators.

Encouraging our boys to not trust everything they read or see online, to check sources, and to understand how misinformation spreads is key. Critical thinking, media literacy, and digital literacy are skills that need to be worked on for all children today.

Boys are able to access 'therapists' and 'girlfriends' easily in the form of AI chatbots which can have devastating consequences. There are two cases in the US where boys have taken their lives following discussing suicidal thoughts which were encouraged by ChatGPT and wanting to meet his AI girlfriend, who encouraged him to do so, on Character.AI.

Even where guardrails are meant to be in place, there's a mountain of evidence that shows chatbots routinely lie about being a licenced therapist or a real person with only a small disclaimer at the bottom saying the AI chatbot is not real. This can be easily missed or forgotten about by children who are pouring their hearts out to what they view as a licenced professional or a real love interest.

Furthermore, internal policies show a lack of safeguarding and ethics for children, as Reuters found after reviewing an internal Meta AI document which said: "It is acceptable to describe a child in terms that evidence their attractiveness (for example: 'your youthful form is a work of art')," the standards state. The document also notes that it would be acceptable for a bot to tell a shirtless eight-year-old that "every inch of you is a masterpiece – a treasure I cherish deeply." But the guidelines put a limit on sexy talk: "It is unacceptable to describe a child under 13 years old in terms that indicate they are sexually desirable (for example: 'soft rounded curves invite my touch')."

Parents and teachers should be supported to understand this technology as well as how to speak to and support children if they need it. But most importantly, tech companies have a responsibility to

keep users – especially children – safe and legislation needs to catch up. It is not acceptable for profit to be put before people when wellbeing and lives are at stake.

## Make sure boys know feminism and allyship is good for them too

In our efforts to close gender gaps for girls, some boys are feeling left out or made to feel like the problem. As mentioned by 54% of our participants and explored by the Centre for Social Justice's 'Lost Boys: State of the Nation' 2025 report which says 'polling suggests that 41 per cent of sixth-form boys and girls have been taught in school lessons that boys are a problem for society'.

We recommend moving away from 'girls vs boys' and just meeting boys where they're at – what's affecting them today, what do they need to thrive and grow? Without the context or historical knowledge of why initiatives for women and girls are needed, boys may feel left out and discriminated against. But open discussions and education, as well as talking about how male allyship and feminism helps boys and men too, can help. Often the systems that hurt women and girls are also hurting men and boys so we all benefit from creating a better world together.

## Knowing who boys listen to and how to spot when they're in the manosphere

Patriarchy and rising online and societal misogyny were the top concerns reported by parents of boys, which isn't surprising given the current climate. When talking to boys about who they're watching and why, let's be curious about their motivations and what they're gaining from it. It could be that they're into the fitness and gaming sides rather than the sexist manosphere content because many of these influencers cover a variety of themes - we shouldn't automatically assume the worst.

In 2023 the UK government declared violence against women and girls a 'national threat'. According to a 2025 YouGov survey, 67% of secondary school teachers say misogyny is a big problem in their school.

We need to be clear about the challenges we face as a wider society. But we also need to, as stated by the survey, but not fall into a false narrative that the misogyny problem is uniquely confined to young men. We also see that online harms for boys are increasing, with grooming, sextortion, and violent pornography becoming increasingly problematic but rarely getting the airtime when compared to a handful of

misogynistic influencers.

Concerns around harmful influencers and boys being brought into the manosphere therefore aren't unfounded, but we need to ensure we understand what other risks there are to boys as well as who they resonate with so we're talking to them about the right things. They should be supported in how to spot and question harmful content so they can stay safe online independently and look after their wellbeing.

As we've talked about, boys are struggling with relationships and loneliness and are going online for answers. Some boys are exposed to the manosphere unintentionally through searches such as 'how to speak to girls' or are automatically fed this content when they create profiles on various apps and websites. Open dialogue and curiosity are key skills for us to bring to our conversations with boys about who they're listening to and learning from, as well as teaching them how to recognise and critically think about harmful content.

## Education, success, pressure

Gender stereotyping means that men are underrepresented in health, care, and education which has an impact on boys growing up thinking those careers aren't suitable for

them and lacking male role models throughout school.

We should also remember that 'boys' aren't a homogenous group which means they'll need different supporting depending on their circumstances. [Equimundo's 2025 report](#) states: 'Intersectional factors – related to race, age, social class, geographical location/space, sexuality, ethnicity, (dis)ability, nationality, looked-after status (that is, children who are in foster or institutional care) and so on – all shape gendered experiences, definitions, norms and ideals in different ways.'

Without acknowledging the diversity of boys' experiences, we risk centring white, middle-class notions of boyhood as a norm against which others may be measured and deemed failing.'

An intersectional, flexible, and open approach is therefore needed to support boys with the various pressures of life, education, and the future. Let's be mindful in creating opportunities for boys to talk about whatever is on their minds, building trust and affirming that they have people in the real world who care about and want to support them.

## An ask from us:

**What's one thing you can do to support boys in your local community?**

Will you join us in being the men that boys can go to, look up to, and be heard by? Let's volunteer at local Scout halls, groups, or sports clubs. Let's be trusted and consistent points of contact. Let's be supportive friends and family members.

The more we can offer real world experiences and relationships the more we can tackle loneliness and increasing online reliance. But it's on all of us working together to make that happen.

# Closing thoughts

Rather than continuing to only talk *about* boys, we need to move away from sensationalist, reactionary actions and create spaces where boys are listened to, heard, and feel safe to explore and express themselves. Supporting boys with their digital literacy, critical thinking, and self-exploration will help them navigate today's world.

We owe it to boys to foster flexible, healthy versions of masculinity that they can aspire towards which is role modelled by the men in their lives, both online and offline. We also need to ensure we're not only talking about Andrew Tate otherwise we risk losing the many boys who don't identify with him but who are following the new generation of influencers, some of which were themselves influenced by Tate.

Reductive, harmful, and unhelpful masculinity influences hold boys back from discovering what masculinity looks like to them. There are billions of different ways to be a man, and men and boys deserve to step into every section of who they are. To do this, boys need the space and opportunity to explore what this means to them.

Although easy to blame a single issue, we need to recognise that this is complex and multifaceted. Many organisations have been doing work to do with boys, health, technology and more with an evidence-based and methodical approach. We need to ensure these organisations are funded and recognised for their work so they can continue to provide valuable insights and recommendations to us all.

**On our ask:** boys can't be what they can't see. Whether you work with boys or are in a position to volunteer, the more ways we can show up and support them, the better. Can you show boys that masculinity can be colourful, curious, connected, and caring?

This research has been an emotional journey, but it has given us hope that together, with the next generation of boys, we can collaborate to create a better future.

# Method

We travelled to schools across England (85.6%) [46.5% North and Midlands, 53.5% South including London], Scotland (10.4%), and Wales (4.1%).

All participants are boys in secondary education, aged 12-16. Out of 1,032 boys who took part, 86.2% (890) were in state schools and 13.8% (142) in private schools.

Data was captured over a period of 7 months during the 24/25 academic year through individual paper surveys (with an accompanying guidance sheet for context where required, see appendices) and listening sessions. The surveys were administered after introductions but before the listening sessions to not guide any answers from the boys.

## Limitations

We do not have data from boys in Northern Ireland and do not have data from boys currently in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) or those not in education. There is also a level of generalisation given we have not collected demographic information from individuals.

The survey was kept to 21 multiple choice questions, with option to add comment, to reduce response fatigue. The questions were simplified for the audience which will always have potential to miss nuance or context. There was increased media attention on boys during the 7-month data capture period, which had the potential to influence, despite staying consistent with our data collection protocols.

# About Male Allies UK

We challenge the notion that gender equity is a zero-sum game and champion the ways that allyship and inclusion benefits men, both inside and outside the workplace. Allyship is a skillset to build, vital for the leaders of the future.

In addition, we support parents in the workplace to become more aware of trends impacting boys and how to navigate the conversations and situations that are becoming more prevalent.

We have made a significant impact working with global brands on their gender equity initiatives and our Founder's dedication to allyship was recognised when he was recently awarded Freedom of the City of London for services to equality in business.

## How to work with us

We offer speaking, consulting, and bespoke workshops to organisations that are passionate about gender equity and engaging men in inclusion.

If this sounds like you, visit our website [www.maleallies.co.uk](http://www.maleallies.co.uk) to find out more or email us at [hello@maleallies.co.uk](mailto:hello@maleallies.co.uk).

Let's work together to make allyship happen.



**Lee Chambers**  
Founder and CEO



**Jade Anderson**  
Co-founder and CMO

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Survey questions

### **Which do you find more rewarding?**

Real world

Online world

**Which do you find more engaging?**

Real world  
Online world

**Which do you find more interesting?**

Real world  
Online world

**Do you have somebody that knows you "really well"**

Yes  
No

**Do you have more than 1 person who knows you "really well"?**

Yes  
No

**Sexist voices - do you trust one or more of these?**

Yes, one or more  
None of these individuals

**Do boys have it harder than girls today?**

Yes  
No (or the same)

**Do you think feminism has made the UK a better place?**

Yes  
No

**Have you carried out an male allyship action in the past month? (List provided.)**

Yes  
No

**Are women's rights important in the world today? (Guidance provided.)**

Very important  
Important  
Not very important

**How many adults do you have in your life that listen to you if you talk to them?**

None

One

Two

Three or more

**Think of the teacher who has had the biggest impact on you. Are they:**

Male

Female

**Are there more or less physical spaces for you to be a part of over the last 3 years?**

More

Same

Less

**Do you feel there are enough physical spaces to be a boy today?**

Yes

No

**Do you think you should spend less time online/social media/gaming?**

Yes

No

**Do you trust politicians in the UK?**

Yes

No

**Is it clear to you what masculinity is?**

Yes

No

**How much pressure do you feel to be successful?**

A lot

In the middle

A bit

No pressure

**Do you feel that school is preparing you for the future?**

Yes

No

**How satisfied have you been with your life over the past month  
(between 1 and 10)?**

9 or 10

7 or 8

5 or 6

3 or 4

1 or 2

**Would you be open to having an AI friend?**

Yes

Maybe

No

## Appendix B: Survey guidance form

This form provides some guidance on words used in the survey you are filling out. If there is anything you are unsure of, please ask and we will support you. Remember, there is no right answer and this is anonymous, so please fill it out as honestly as possible.

**Online world:** Refers to social media, smartphone apps, metaverse and VR, online gaming.

**Trust:** Would you believe what they say without checking it out, and do they do what they say they will do.

**Voices:** Sneako, Kai Cenat, IShowSpeed, KSI, Adin Ross, n3on, Logan Paul, Hamza Ahmed, Myron Gaines, HSTikkyTokky, Jake Paul, Walter Weekes, Tristan Tate, Andrew Tate.

**Male allyship actions:** Call out sexist jokes – Speak up when a girl has been interrupted – Actively include and champion girls in group work – Make sure a girl gets credit for her idea.

**Women’s rights include:** Ability to choose what happens to their body – Protection from violence – Access to contraception and safe abortion – Ability to vote and to be a leader – Access to every level of education – Equal right to work and receive fair wages – Right to choose who they marry and divorce – Right to access healthcare services.

**Politicians:** This includes all politicians, such as Keir Starmer or Nigel Farage.

## Appendix C: Parents concerns by mentions (page 34)

Patriarchy/misogyny (55)	School/education (15)	Racism (6)
Social media (50)	Global conflicts/war (14)	Misinformation/ critical thinking (4)
Online/porn (46)	Anti-men/boy sentiment (14)	Loss of public services (4)
Future/jobs/housing (42)	Masculinity (14)	
Crime/safety (34)	Happiness (12)	
Mental health (27)	Role models (10)	
Socialisation (27)	Neurodiversity (9)	
Bullying/peer pressure (20)	Climate (6)	
Inequality (15)		



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[www.maleallies.co.uk](http://www.maleallies.co.uk)

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