

Misogyny – explaining and responding to it in school

In recent years there has been a worrying increase in misogynistic views and behaviours. In 2024 the National Police Chiefs’ Council and College of Policing released their [National Policing Statement](#). The statement outlined the scale of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and deemed that it had reached epidemic levels in terms of its scale, complexity and impact on victims. VAWG is rooted in misogyny and there is an undeniable correlation between the rise in misogyny and violence against women and girls.

The prevalence of misogynistic content, coupled with the ease with which it can be accessed, has indoctrinated many children and young people. The harmful rise of toxic views seeks to normalise hatred towards women and justify further violence. Children are not immune to what they see nor do they have the cognitive awareness to question the views that are presented to them. As such, the popularity of this type of content in schools is incredibly damaging and further embeds misogyny and misogynistic behaviour into younger generations.

What is misogyny?

Misogyny is the hatred of women. It can manifest as contempt for, prejudice against or violence towards women and/or girls. Misogyny is rooted in the belief that women are inherently inferior because of their sex. It propagates harmful gender-based stereotypes on what a woman should or shouldn’t do in society. Like other biases, misogyny can be conscious or unconscious and it can present in many different ways, ranging from cat-calling to extreme violence. It’s important to recognise and challenge all expressions of misogyny, even the seemingly ‘smaller’ signs, as when left unchecked these can grow into more violent, extremist views.

A problem for adults as well as children

Misogynistic language and behaviour isn’t confined to children and young people. As adults we need to ensure that we aren’t modelling and encouraging gender stereotypes, through the language we use, our own actions and the expectations we have of boys and girls.

Misogyny in schools

There has been a significant increase in misogyny in schools as young people are exposed to toxic misogynistic content online. The views expressed in this content negatively impacts young people’s behaviour and attitudes towards women. In 2025, the University of York [published a report](#) that explored the influence of misogyny in schools. They gathered data from 200 teachers, 100 of whom were based in secondary schools and 100 of whom were based in primary schools. 76% of secondary school teachers and 60% of primary school teachers reported that they were extremely concerned about the influence of online misogyny in their school.

Misogynistic behaviour in schools can manifest as:

- [Cyberbullying](#)
- [Sextortion](#)
- Physical violence
- Casual sexism or more vulgar language/cat calling
- Sharing intimate images without consent
- [Harmful sexual behaviour](#)
- Exclusion of female pupils from certain spaces or groups

These behaviours have a detrimental impact on female students and female members of staff and can lead to them feeling powerless, angry and unsafe around their male counterparts. It can also negatively affect a young person’s perception of what [healthy relationships](#) look like.

How are Children Exposed to Misogyny?

Children can be exposed to misogyny in many different ways. They may live in households where misogynistic views are often expressed and rarely challenged, or they may be exposed to misogynistic content on television or online. The charity [Rape Crisis](#) notes that because sexual violence and abuse against women and girls has been so normalised in our society, it is often glamorised in popular music, TV shows and films. When children are exposed to this type of media, they are also exposed to misogynistic views. The prevalence of this type of media then serves to normalise this violence as a ‘man’s right’ under the guise that women and girls are inherently less deserving of respect, autonomy and power.

One of the most prominent ways in which children are exposed to misogyny is online via [social media](#). Extremely controversial figures such as [Andrew Tate](#) are often idolised by young boys who consume his sexist content and adopt his misogynistic rhetoric. Tate, who is currently under investigation by Romanian police for forming an organised criminal group, human trafficking, trafficking of minors and money laundering, has risen in popularity despite his harmful, polarising views. Tate’s popularity has been directly linked to rises in misogyny and in July 2024, Deputy Chief Constable Maggie Blyth argued that Tate played a notable role in the radicalisation of young boys online.

How to Tackle Misogyny in Schools

It’s vital that misogyny in schools is challenged and misogynistic views and opinions undermined. In so doing, schools can help to protect female students and members of staff and change views before they become violent and aggressive. Whilst tackling misogyny is everyone’s responsibility as it manifests in all facets of society, teachers are well placed to educate young people and encourage them to question the veracity of what they see online.

Challenging these views diminishes the power of the echo chamber and reiterates to young people that these views are not only unacceptable, but also that they have no place in the real world.

Implementing a whole-school, zero tolerance approach

As mentioned above, misogyny in schools does not only impact secondary school children. By implementing a whole school, zero tolerance policy you can raise standards across the entire school and set the expectation from a young age that misogynistic views will not be tolerated. Restorative practice is really important when it comes to tackling misogyny in primary schools. Simply giving children consequences for poor behaviour related to misogyny will not help them to understand why their actions are not acceptable.

Children must be given the chance to talk to someone about their behaviour who can name it as misogynistic (where appropriate) and use it as a teaching point to support development. This could be addressing a certain set of behaviours with a whole class, or it could be a one-on-one intervention of mentoring with a specific child.

Learning to recognise the signs

Misogyny can be insidious and whilst it is not always expressed loudly, it is still festering under the surface. As such, it’s important that you learn to recognise the signs. For example, incel culture uses a very specific vocabulary to derogatorily refer to different people. These include ‘Chad’ to refer to a man who is sexually attractive to women or ‘Stacy’ to refer to sexually attractive women who are viewed as unintelligent and promiscuous. In isolation these may seem like harmless words or nicknames and without a proper understanding of the context, a teacher may overhear this language and not recognise the deeper meaning.

The same is also true of [emojis](#) which have become a popular way for young people to communicate without adults knowing what they are discussing.

Other signs of misogynistic views can be sexist jokes and inappropriate comments that are laughed off as ‘banter.’ When this ‘banter’ is left unchecked, it normalises the views shared and indicates to perpetrators that they will not be reprimanded for their behaviour which can embolden them to take more aggressive steps.

Teaching about healthy relationships

When children consume misogynistic content it can warp their idea of what a healthy relationship looks like. When they enter an echo chamber that pushes one specific viewpoint as ‘normal,’ they are encouraged not to question what they see or entertain other viewpoints. As such, [teaching pupils about healthy relationships](#) can help to challenge what they have seen online and encourage them to question what they have been taught is normal.

Pupil voice

Speak to children and find out what their lived experience of school is. See if you can spot trends to help you target support and improvements? Ask questions such as:

- What is it like to be a girl at this school?
- What is it like to be a boy at this school?
- Are there any differences in experiences?

Sport, PE, and play-times

Sport is still strongly connected to ideas of masculinity and is often made to feel important to the identity of boys. These stereotypes often go unchallenged in many different sporting contexts, from primary school PE to elite sports.

It is important that staff members out on duty are challenging sexist language and ensuring that there is structure to play-times meaning that there is more than just football on offer.

Children playing football and other games need support around winning, losing, and challenging each other with kindness and not a toxic level of competitiveness, which tends to be dragged into the classroom, affecting learning – often for the rest of the day!

Staff members should be actively facilitating play (or even better, playing with the children themselves), modelling the inclusion of others and great sportsmanship, positive language, and congratulating others when they win.

Ensure that opportunities for sporting events are offered to a range of children, in a range of sports and that these are celebrated with an equal weighting in assemblies and the like.

Speak with parents

It is important that parents are included in the conversation about misogyny and what the school does to tackle this. This can be done in several ways: half-termly newsletters from class teachers to parents and carers informing them about what is being taught and including key vocabulary and their definitions.

Engaging with external educational resources

In 2021, Everyone’s Invited published their first list of schools from which they had received testimonials of sexual abuse. The list contained almost 3,000 schools and led to responses from the police and government that more needed to be done to prevent sexual assault. The publishing of the list was monumental and shone a light on the far reaching consequences of inadequate sex education in schools. As part of their continued work to challenge rape culture, Everyone’s Invited offers an [education programme](#) of talks and workshops through which they go into schools and work with students and staff to challenge rape culture and misogyny.

Furthering your own understanding with training

Educating yourself through training is one of the best ways to tackle misogyny as you will gain the knowledge and understanding to recognise the signs and act accordingly. Comprehensive training such as our [Online Safety & Harms](#), [Harmful Sexual Behaviour in Schools](#) and [Prevent Duty Training](#) courses can provide you with vital training to deepen your understanding of topics relating to misogyny. Training can also boost your confidence by giving you the tools to handle misogyny head on in a meaningful and effective way.

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Tips for primary school teachers

Here's how you can tackle sexism in the classroom.



1. Tackle gender stereotyping

Gender stereotypes can be challenged through the resources students use, the activities they do, the visual environment they see each day and the conversations they have with teachers and peers. For example, when you see or hear gender stereotyping in the classroom, use it as a 'teachable moment' – an opportunity to have a discussion with students on the issue. Encourage inclusive language (e.g. 'firefighter' rather than 'fireman'), and use display boards to counter stereotypical images and provide a diverse range of role models.



2. Challenge sexist language

Ensure you are familiar with your school's policy and procedures relating to sexist language. Consistently challenge sexist language when you hear it and, where appropriate, use incidents as 'teachable moments' by having a discussion with the class about the language and the impact it has.



3. Promote equal participation

Monitor students' participation in activities and group discussions. If group discussions, play areas or resources are dominated by or associated more with boys or girls, look for ways to challenge barriers to participation and open up involvement. For instance, you could select students to speak or participate in activities, rather than waiting for volunteers, and establish ground-rules to facilitate a respectful environment.



4. Champion a whole school approach

Embedding comprehensive, long-term change requires a 'whole school approach'. This means that action to promote equality between girls and boys is guided by an over-arching framework and involves all members of the school community. Propose the whole school approach to your senior leadership team. Use UK Feminista's resources to highlight why this approach is necessary and how it can be implemented. UK Feminista can provide additional training, advice and resources to schools wanting to develop a whole school approach to tackling sexism.



For classroom activities and resources on how to tackle sexism in schools visit:
ukfeminista.org.uk/resources-hub/

Tips for laying the foundations at key stages 1 and 2:

- With younger pupils, the aim is to develop respectful attitudes by focusing on learning that supports inclusion and belonging rather than covering specific types of discrimination, such as misogyny.
- At key stage 1 this might include exploring how everyone is equal and deserves to be treated with respect. Also, recognising and celebrating people’s similarities and differences.
- This may extend to learning about stereotypes in early key stage 2, including gender stereotypes and how these can be unfair.
- Then at upper key stage 2, pupils could explore how these stereotypes can have negative effects on a person’s behaviour, aspirations, and feelings about themselves.
- Teaching should also reflect younger children’s early experiences online and begin to develop digital literacy skills to identify trusted sources, false information, and negative influences.
- This will all help to prepare pupils for more specific learning about discrimination (including discrimination based on gender) in the later primary years and in secondary school, as they access digital platforms with increasing independence.

<https://pshe-association.org.uk/guidance/ks1-5/addressing-misogyny-toxic-masculinity-and-social-media-influence-in-pshe-education>

Additional guidance and further reading

- Addressing misogyny, toxic masculinity and social media influence through PSHE education <https://essexprimaryheads.co.uk/files/addressing-misogyny-toxic-masculinity-and-social-media-influence-through-pshe-education.pdf>
- <https://www.internetmatters.org/issues/online-hate/what-is-misogyny/misogyny-in-schools-guidance-for-teachers/>
- <https://www.headteacher-update.com/content/best-practice/tackling-misogyny-in-the-primary-school/>
- UK Feminista <https://ukfeminista.org.uk/resources-hub/>
- “It’s just everywhere” A study on sexism in schools and how we tackle it <https://rm.coe.int/report-its-just-everywhere-neu-uk-feminista/168079cee0>
- The school’s equal opportunities policy and related policies, including Behaviour Management Policy.