SAFER TOGETHER

WEST MIDLANDS VIOLENCE REDUCTION PARTNERSHIP

TIME TO TALK VAWG:

Working with boys and young men

REFLECTIVE WORKBOOK

SAFER TOGETHER

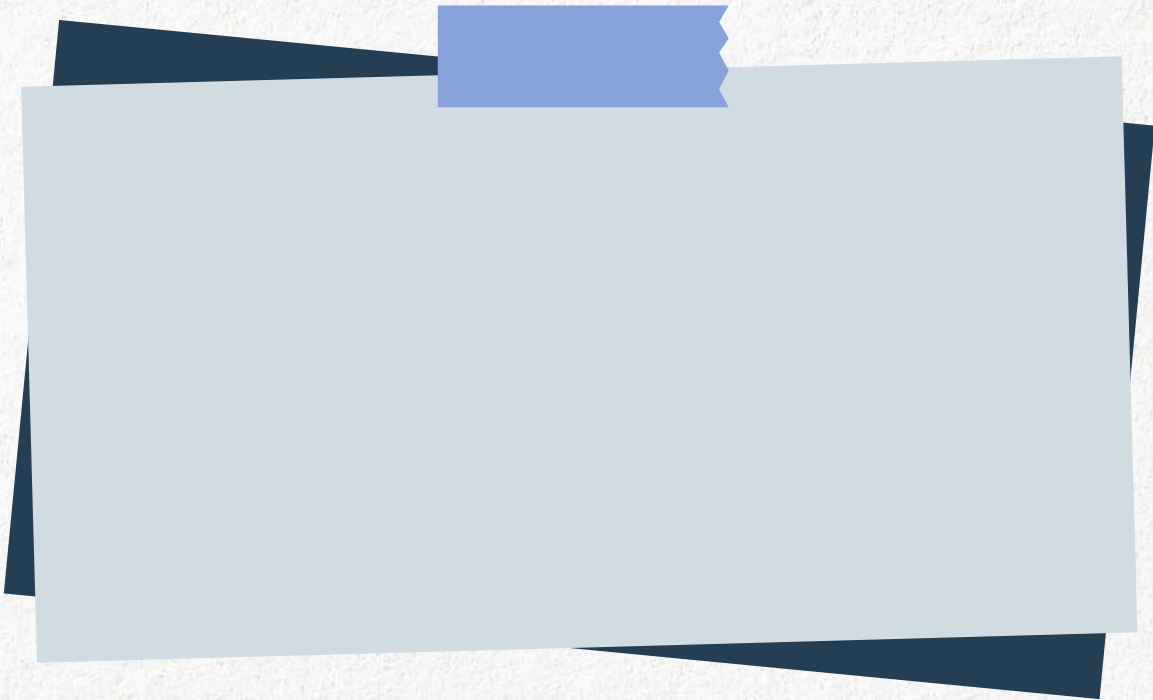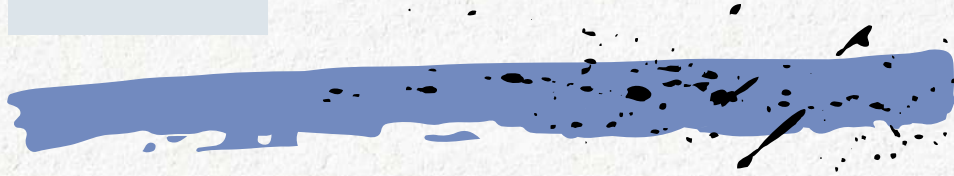**WEST MIDLANDS VIOLENCE REDUCTION PARTNERSHIP**

UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

NAME:

THIS RESOURCE:

This resource was commissioned by the West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership. (WM VRP)

The West Midlands VRP is committed to reducing all forms of violence across the West Midlands Region.

Much of the work of the VRP is centred on working to support children and young people. You can find more about the work of the WM VRP and the My Tomorrow campaign produced in conjunction with the Positive Youth Foundation to remind usof the importance of creating positive futures for young people here:

Creating a
tomorrow worth
fighting for.

MY TOMORROW

Create it.
Shape it.
Embrace it.

ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

This reflective workbook has been specially designed to accompany the webinar bought to you by The West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership.

It aims to provide you with some useful links to additional reading and resources, and space to capture your learning, thoughts and any questions you may have.

Whilst we recognise that you may have your own systems and ways to make notes and capture your reflections, we advise that you use this resource in conjunction with the webinar to support your learning.

There is no expectation to use this resource. We recognise that you may have your own processes and ways to make notes and capture your reflections.

You will see in this reflective workbook, a note (Pause and Reflect), that encourages you to pause the webinar to consider some reflective questions.

However, you may prefer to watch the webinar all the way through, and use this reflective workbook retrospectively; capturing your thoughts, feelings and learning after you have watched the webinar.
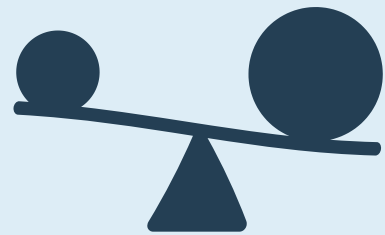
Please do what feels right for you.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Let's take a moment to pause and reflect upon
a) What you think the key issues are that drive VAWG and
b) how you feel in relation to talking about the issues that underpin VAWG and gender-based violence? (Remember there is no right or wrong way to feel!)

Pause & Reflect

What do you need to feel more confident and competent to explore key issues and topics such as pornography and misogyny?

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR WEBINAR:

The webinar has been especially designed to support you to feel more empowered and confident to hold critical conversations with children and young people about VAWG and the various factors that underpin this issue. **In order to get the most from this resource, please note the below top tips before you begin to watch the content.**

You can pause the webinar at any point. Do not feel the pressure to watch and listen the whole way through. There is no limit to the number of times you can access and watch the resource.

T I P S

Remember, there is no requirement to use this specially designed reflective workbook, but it may be useful to record your thoughts, reflections and to use your workbook as a way of capturing your learning as you navigate the learning content. The are links in your workbook that takes you to additional reading and resources.

Throughout this webinar there will be times where you are encouraged to pause and consider some reflective questions. They have been specially designed to support you to consider the issues covered by the webinar and to encourage you to think about how you may approach these issues with young people.

TIPS (CONTINUED)

It is advised that you watch this webinar in a place where you are comfortable and less likely to be uninterrupted. The topics explored, are highly sensitive, so if you are watching this at home, you may want to be away from curious little ears that may be around!

NOTE SPACE:
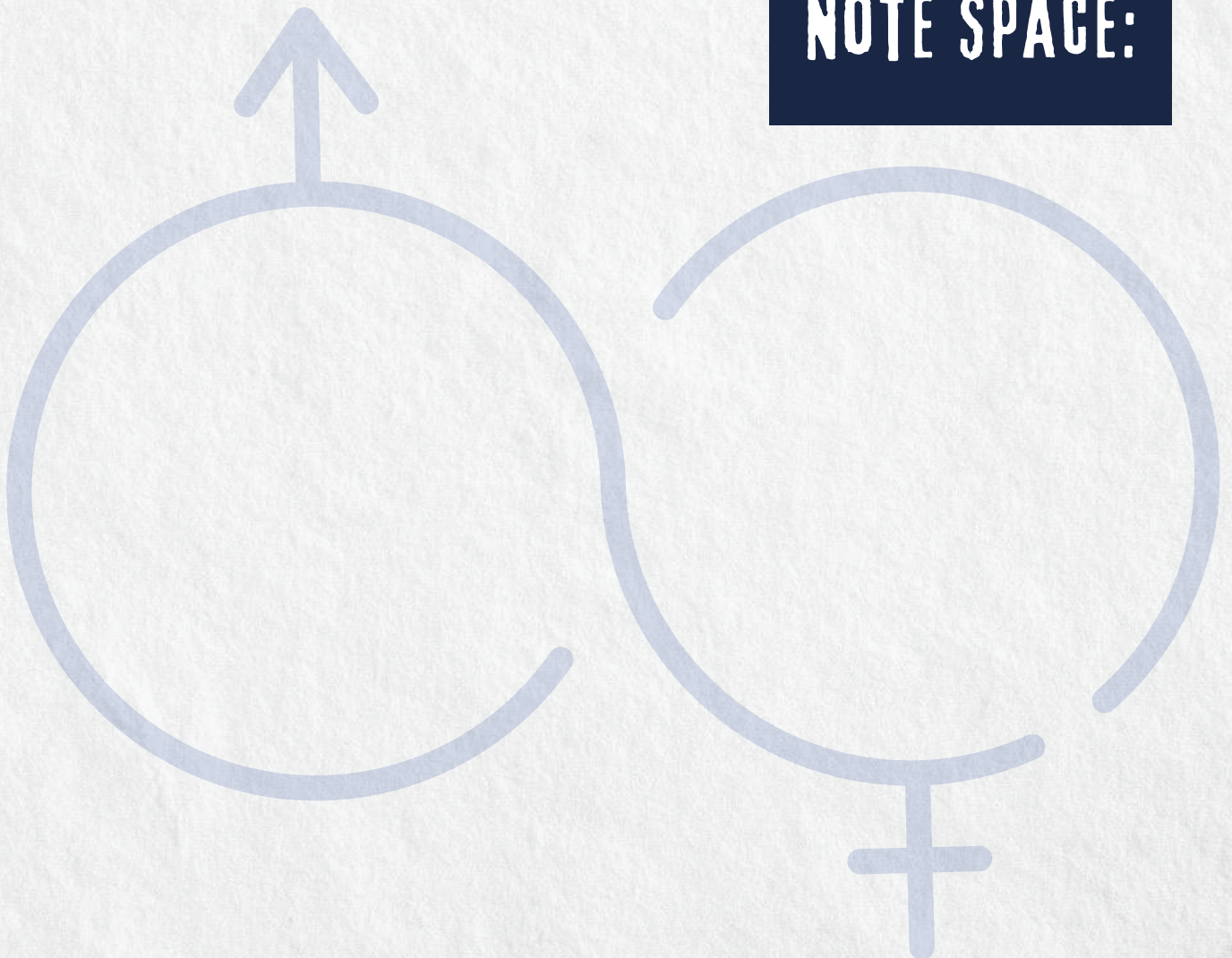
TRIGGER WARNING

Remember to take care of you. You may be triggered by the content of the webinar and questions you are asked to consider and explore. You may be reminded of your own lived experiences or events that have happened to a person you care about. Please do remember to take breaks if any content is upsetting and seek help and support.

SUPPORTING BOYS AND YOUNG MEN: PLACING THEM AT THE EPICENTRE OF CONVERSATIONS

How do you feel that boys and men may feel by the work and activism that is taking place to reduce gender-based violence?

Pause & Reflect

What benefits might we see by putting boys at the centre of the conversations that we have?

Who is likely to benefit from holding critical conversations with boys?

LETS TALK VAWG
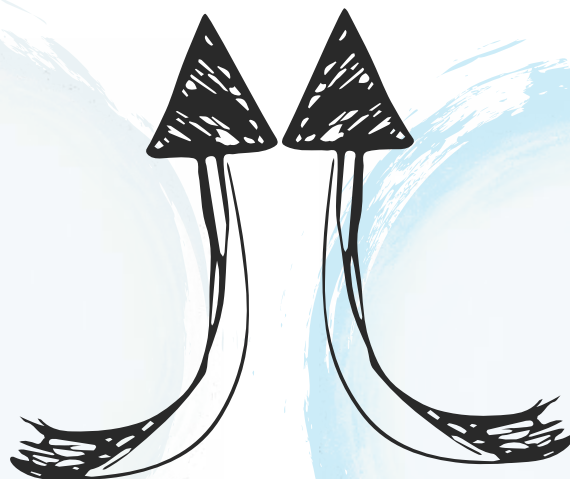
LETS TALK VAWG

LETS TALK VAWG

NOTE SPACE:

Pause & Reflect

VAWG

What drives VAWG? Take a moment to think about the factors that contribute towards violence against women and girls.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF CHALLENGING THE FACTORS THAT YOU HAVE IDENTIFIED?

-
-
-
-
-

WHAT'S MISOGYNY AND SEXISM?

SEXISM: A DEFINITION:

Discrimination based on sex or gender, or the belief that one gender is superior to another." It is important to note that a person can be sexist either consciously or subconsciously, and both women and girls, boys and men can display sexist attitudes.

MISOGYNY: A DEFINITION

Hatred, contempt and prejudice towards women and girls.

Misogyny and sexism are two terms that may sometimes be used inter-changeably but, whilst related, are two different concepts.
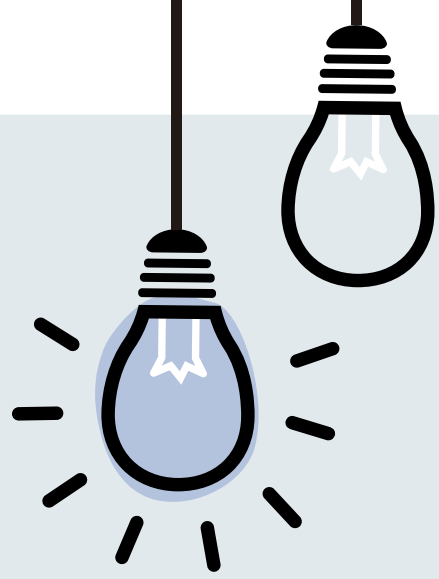
Sexism   Misogyny

NOTE SPACE:

DID YOU KNOW ...

01
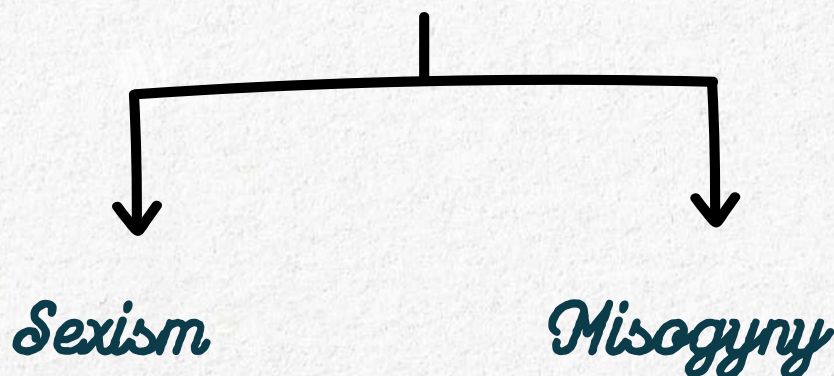
## Misogyny can be displayed by males and females.

Can you think of an example of ways that women and girls may display misogynistic behaviours?

Misogyny is a societal issue, not a feminist one, and therefore can impact boys and men as well as women and girls.

Can you think of ways that boys and men may be negatively impacted by misogyny? Write in and around the head space.

02
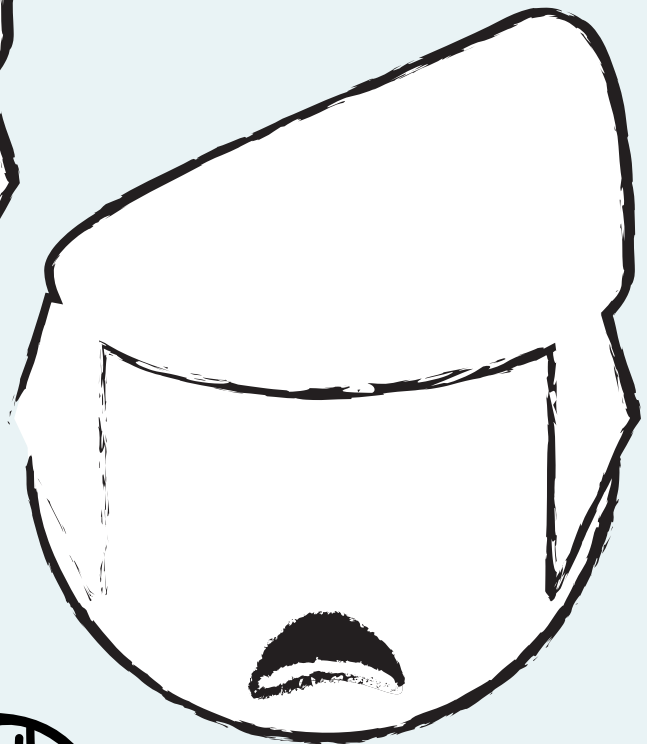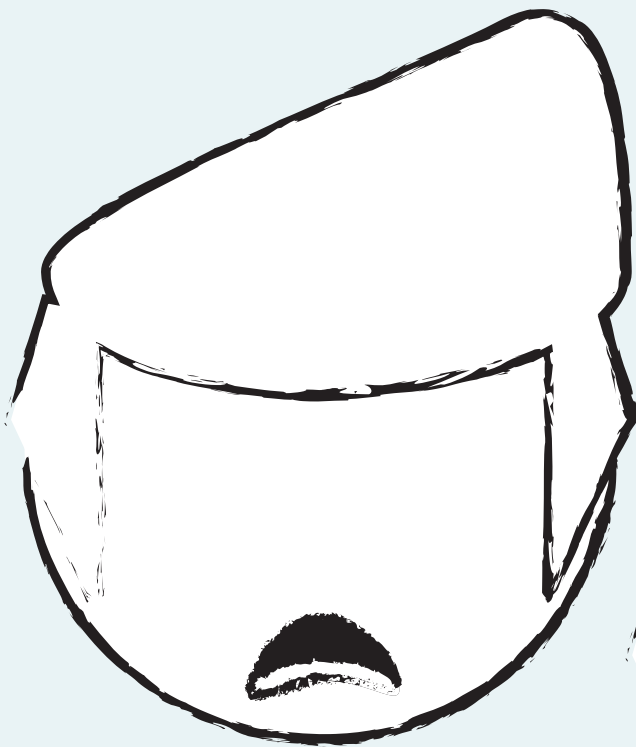
Misogyny is linked to the evolving role of the man.

How has the concept of masculinity and the role of the man changed in recent years?

Has there been enough done to support boys and men understand and navigate these changes?

03
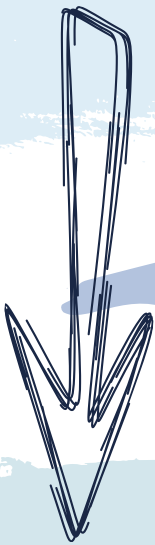
Now ...

Before ...

04

Acts of misogyny are wide-ranging and do not always involve overt acts of serious harm.

Can you think of more "subtle" acts of misogyny?

Are these more subtle acts of misogyny still harmful?
(Please consider the reasons behind your thinking)

SUBTLE ACTS ...

MISOGYNY

UNDERSTANDING PATRIARCHY

DID YOU KNOW ...

The term patriarchy is derived from the Greek word meaning "the rule of the father" and refers to social systems where power, control and influence were held traditionally by men.

Misogyny and sexism are problematic they are forms of prejudice that ensures women and girls have less status and power than boys and men. **This is called the patriarchy.**

Pause & Reflect

Whilst some may argue that women have more equal rights than ever before, other's still insist that gender inequality still exists in modern society.

What is your view? Can you identify examples of where girls and women still face discrimination due to their sex?

KEY POINT!

It is important to remember that when we are discussing concepts such sexism, misogyny and patriarchy, we have to also acknowledge that during adolescence, most children and young people will all feel a sense of powerlessness. Therefore, in order to keep our messages credible we need to acknowledge this key point.

Pause & Reflect

What are the factors that drive feelings of powerlessness during adolescence? Do these factors differ for boys and girls?

ONLINE SPACES

Our young people live in and navigate a digital world. This means that some young people will see content that is harmful and contributes to the formation of harmful ideologies and belief systems.

In recent years, there has been a great deal of concern about "influencers" that impart misogynistic narratives such as Andrew and Tristan Tate.
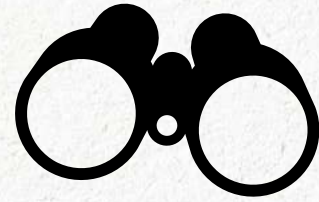
Why do you think that influencers such as Tate have been so influential to boys and young men?

Reflection space

WIDENING THE LENS

It is important to recognise that harmful online influences are much wider than influencers such as Tate and those that seek to emulate him.

A diverse range of harmful content may be accessible from **"the manosphere"**

The manosphere refers to a diverse network of websites, on-line forums, blogs and chatrooms that promote sexist and misogynistic beliefs and harmful perceptions of masculinity and extreme misogyny.

Men's Rights Activists

Men's rights activists (MRAs) lobby for political and societal change that will benefit men. Whilst this would not be problematic in itself, some of their campaigning and activism involves the harassment of feminists and prominent female figures who may work to challenge misogynistic ideologies.

Men going their own way

Men going their own way (MGTOW) Members of this movement position women as being harmful, toxic actors that should be avoided by men.

Pick-up artists (PUAs)

Pick-up artists (PUAs) teach men "pick up tactics" and ways of attracting women. However many of these "strategies" involve mistreating women, such as insulting them ("negging") or disregarding consent. Therefore promoting harmful and abusive relationships.

Involuntary celibates (incels).

Involuntary celibates (incels). Members of this group believe that they have a right to be in relationships with women and argue that gender equality and feminism is the reason why they have been unsuccessful in seeking an intimate partner. Some incels demonstrate radical and extreme beliefs and have perpetrated extreme violence and murder.

HOW IS THE MANOSPHERE ACCESSED?

Knowledge QR Code:

How is the manosphere accessed? – many assume that the manosphere is accessed by the "dark-web" but content created by communities that form part of the manosphere can be found on Reddit, YouTube, Tik-Tok and X (formally Twitter). It is important to note that young people may come across this content on their feeds without deliberately searching for it.

ENCOURAGING CONVERSATION

A common approach in response to conversations regarding influencers and harmful online content is to close the conversation down, and to tell children and young people that these messages are dangerous and not to be repeated without explaining why. BUT, before we do, let's take a moment to pause and reflect. Let's consider the following reflective questions.

By essentially banning certain conversations, does the issue(s) we are concerned about go away? Or are we inadvertently making certain topics and issues "taboo" fuelling further curiosity which may lead to young people exploring this content further?

Pause & Reflect

Is shutting down and avoiding conversations a missed opportunity to explore with young people what it is about these influencers that appeal to them and why? Please record your views and thoughts below:

Additional Note Space

PORNOGRAPHY

Harmful online content also includes pornographic material, that often depict degrading, violent and non-consensual sexual activity is also accessible in a just a few clicks.

Ofsted's Rapid Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges (June 2021) found that "Children and young people were rarely positive about the RSHE they had received. They felt that it was too little, too late and that the curriculum was not equipping them with the information and advice they needed to navigate the reality of their lives".

In order to fill the gaps in their knowledge and understanding young people are inclined to turn to their peers, social media and perhaps pornography as source of information in relation to sex and relationships.

A study carried out by the Internet Watch Foundation in 2021 found that:

- By the age of 13, 48% of young men had seen or watched porn.
- By the age of 15, 48% of girls had seen or watched porn.
- Boys are viewing pornography on average 3 years prior to their first sexual relationship, whilst girls are viewing pornographic content on average 2 years before becoming sexually active.
- 61% of boys and 41% of girls used porn as a source of sex education and to learn about relationships in the previous 12 months.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN:

Whilst viewing pornography may negatively impact children and young people and negatively influence their sexual scripts, it is important to also acknowledge that some young people, just like some adults, enjoy pornography. However, they often feel conflicted by this as pornography and sex is shrouded in shame. Shame is a powerful emotion, and may prevent young people from discussing things they are worried about, or seeking help, support and intervention. Simply emphasising the negatives associated with pornography may contradict the experiences of young people who find it enjoyable, causing them to feel alienated and us to lose our credibility

How can we tackle the taboo, and create environments where young people can feel safe to talk about the influences that shape their views of sex and relationships?

Pause & Reflect

UNDERSTANDING OBJECTIFICATION:

Objectification: A Definition – The act of treating a person as an object or thing.

One of the reasons that pornography may be problematic is the way that it frames women as "objects" for male desire and sexual pleasure and also objectifies the make sex drive – positioning men as instruments of sexual arousal and accomplishment. This may be troubling for boys and young men who may feel great pressure to "perform" and be "dominant".
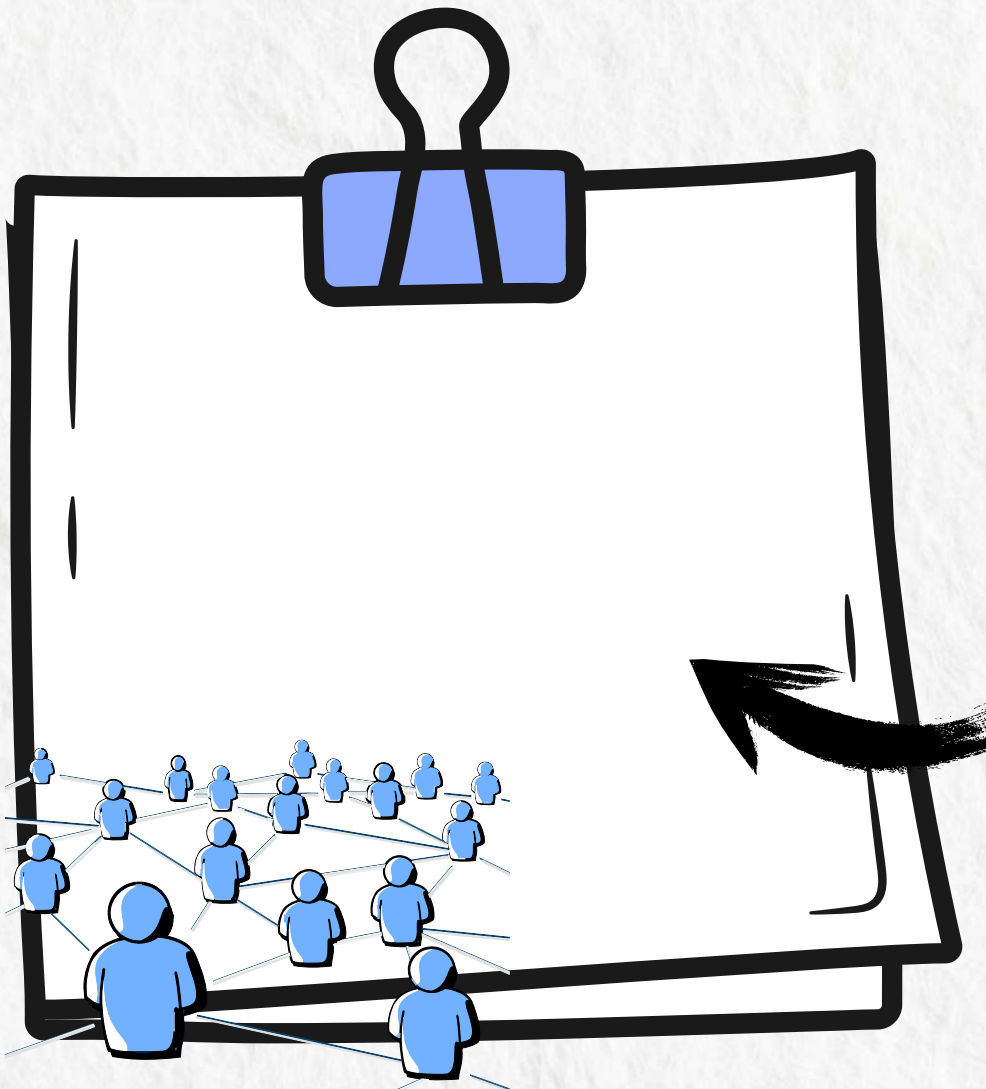
Pause & Reflect

Take a look at the examples of advertisements that have been used to promote the sale of goods ranging from fast food to perfume.
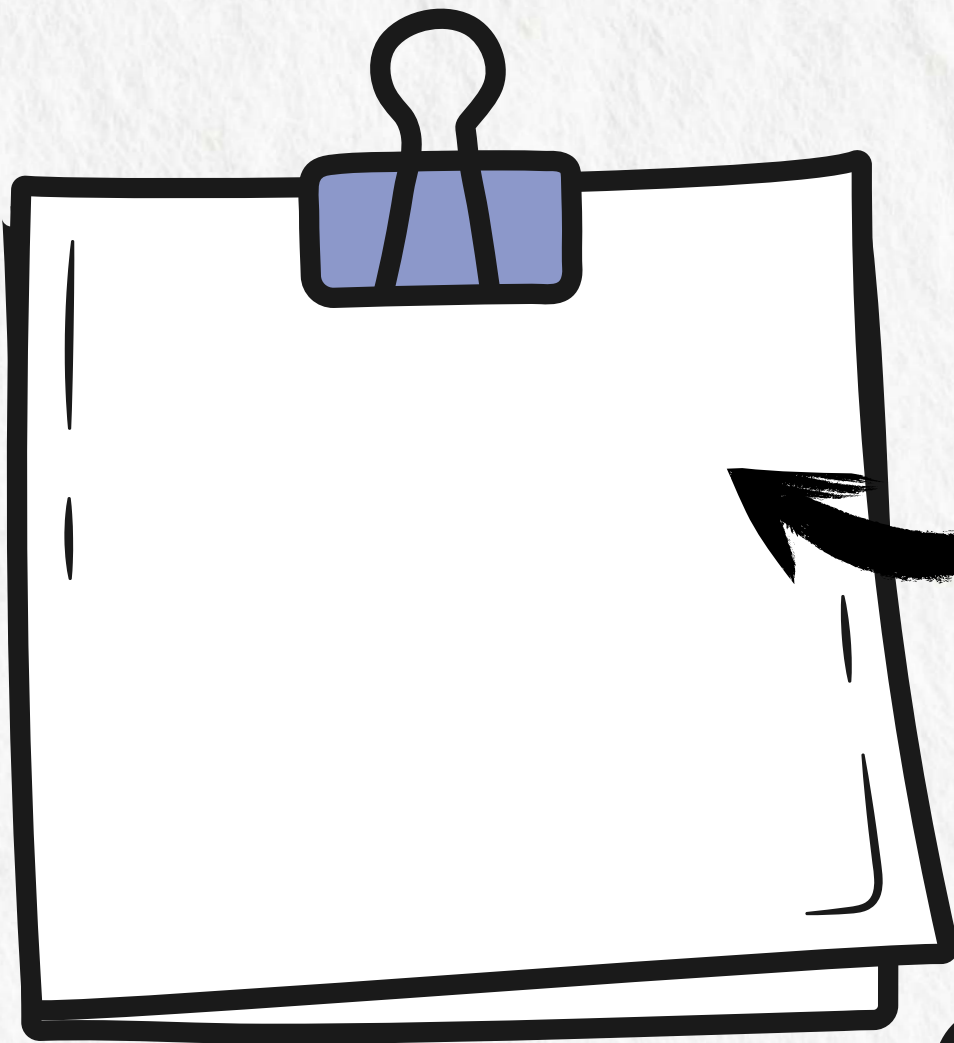
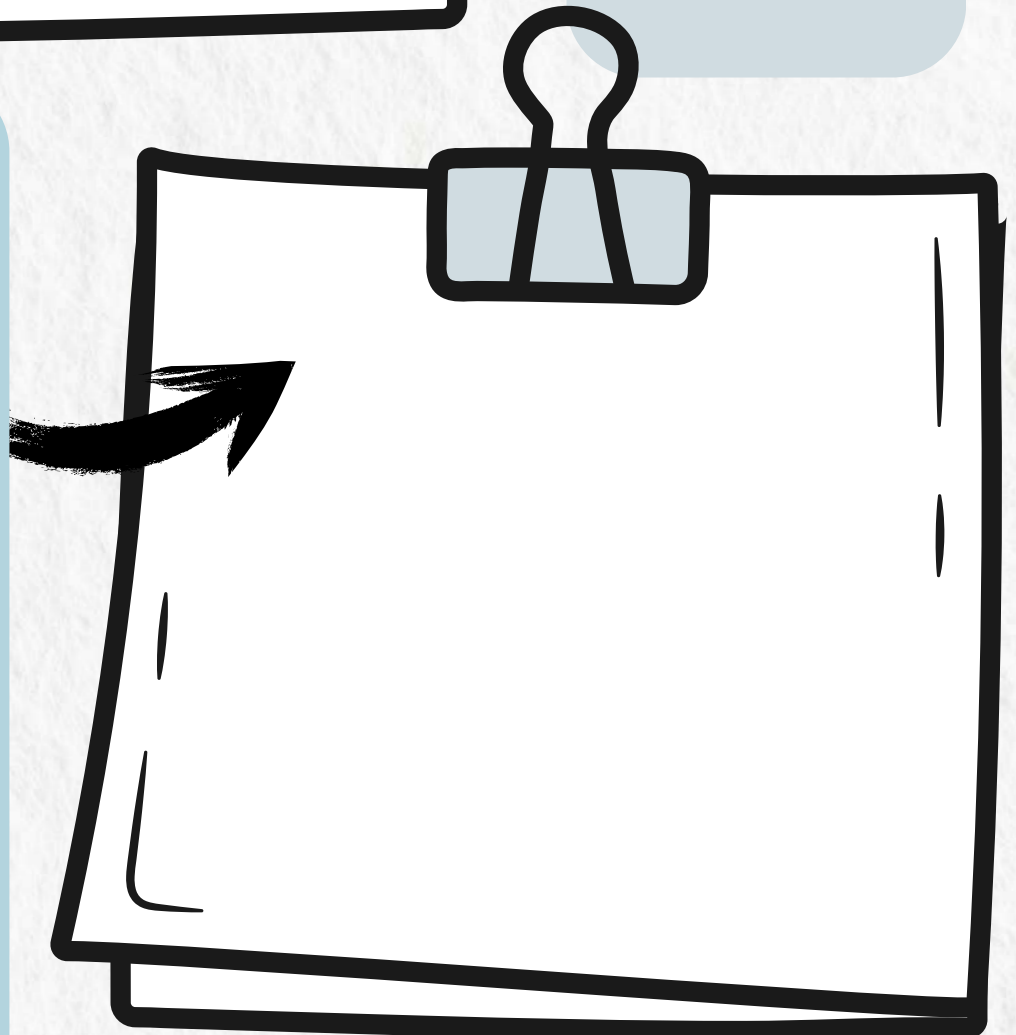What are your thoughts and feelings about these advertisements?

NEW PRODUCT

Pause & Reflect

How do you feel widespread advertising and media influences have
on the way boys view women and girls but also how girls view and position themselves?

WIDENING THE LENS

It is important to widen conversations with young people to recognise that objectification of young men can and does occur too.

One relevant example is the TV show Love Island, that is popular with young people. This show promotes specific ideals in relation to masculinity, often positioning men as dominant and emotionless, endorsing harmful, and limiting gender-stereotypes. There is also growing evidence which highlights how "gym culture" that can lead to issues such as body dysmorphia, is a growing problem among boys and young men. This too may be linked to the concept of objectification.
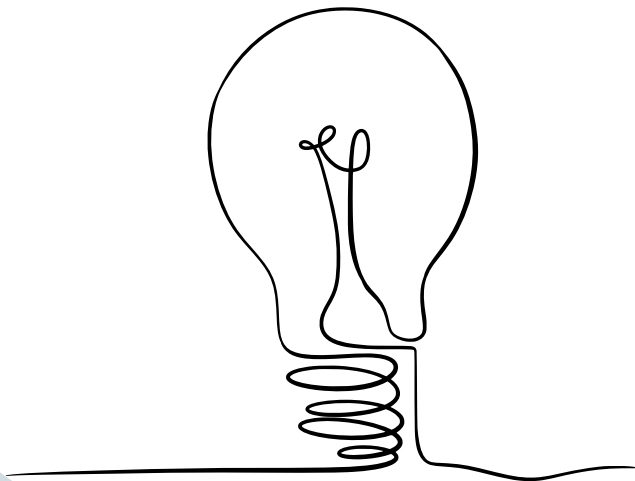
PEER NORMS & BYSTANDER EFFECT

"Peer norms and values play a key role in the formation of misogynistic values, norms and behaviours. Adopting peer norms that are harmful, may also decrease the likelihood of boys and young men identifying and calling out behaviour that is problematic and harmful.

It is important to remember that adopting peer norms is a normal part of development, and can help young people to navigate their way through school and college; spaces that can feel precarious in adolescence. But, problems arise when dominant peer norms normalise and accept misogynistic behaviours and harmful value biases.

Research has shown that exposure to peers that sexually objectify and overtly disrespect women and girls decreases the likelihood of prosocial by-stander behaviour – for example calling out and reporting behaviour that is harmful.

We should not also overlook the fact that girls may also display misogynistic behaviour to each other for example via behaviours such as "slut shaming".

Reflection space

THE IMPORTANCE OF SAFE SPACES

Creating safe, non-judgemental spaces is key to educate boys and girls in order to:

01 Support young people to recognise, understand and challenge harmful peer norms.

Provide a strong counternarrative and exposure to positive role models that display pro-social norms. **02**

03 Understand what it means to be a positive "upstander" and the role that young people play in deconstructing harmful and limiting norms and belief systems.

What are the factors that lead to young people being bystanders (being less likely to report and challenge harmful behaviours) and how can we overcome the factors and barriers you have identified?

Pause & Reflect

PREPARING YOUR APPROACH:

Before you approach these conversations, it is important to take time to consider and plan your approach. Here are some key things to consider to help you to hold safe, supportive and constructive conversations with the boys and young men you support.

Remember, you do not have to hold and know all the answers!

The best approach to safe, critical, reflective conversations is one where we commit to learning from each other and exploring concepts and issues together!

Be clear on the intent behind the creation of safe spaces and holding critical conversations

Highlight that it is recognised that boys and young men commonly feel that they are misunderstood and not heard so this is a place for them to have a voice.

Be brave!

As boys open up and share their frustrations and views about feminism and the wider VAWG agenda, there may be a temptation to shut down certain conversations. Pause. Listen without judgement and allow space to explore issues. The key is to allow them to be candid with their views but we do not have to validate them. Instead, offer a pro-social narrative and ask them to consider your opposing viewpoints.

Respect is key

Everyone should have space to share views and opinions but it is key to explain that the expectation is views are shared and debates are held in a way that means everyone feels heard but safe. Mutually creating and agreeing some ground rules is a way to achieve respect and safety.

Reframe the issue

Be clear that talking about VAWG is in the interests of everyone highlight how VAWG is not a feminist issue but a societal one. Invite conversations that explore how patriarchy and gender norms causes harm to boys too rather than having conversations that are focused on what boys and men are doing wrong. Explore how gender roles and societal expectations of masculinity can lead to boys being more commonly victims of serious youth violence for example, and how male mental health may be impacted by conforming to gender norms that places pressure on boys to suppress their emotions.

Consider use of language

Understand that terms like "toxic masculinity" position being male as inherently toxic and harmful. Unpick terminology with young people by helping the to recognise how masculinity and maleness is not the issue, but skewed expectations of what it means to be male is. Also allow boys to use the language and terms they would with their peers – it allows freedom of expression and opportunity to explore harm associated with certain language.

Be vulnerable!

Think about the power dynamics in the room – critical conversations work best in spaces were everyone feels equal. One way to achieve this is by being open and human, sharing your own experiences BUT only if it feels safe and appropriate to do so!

Praise

It is brave of boys and young men to contribute their views and discussions. Remember to acknowledge that and praise them for their contributions and candour!

Empowerment

Help boys and young men to see how they can play an important role in driving change that benefits them all. Give them clear examples of what it means to be a pro-social upstander! Encourage them to explore how they can lead and drive change and how this change may positively impact them and the important males in their lives.

Remember you are not alone!

Creating space for critical discussion and debate may bring all sorts of emotions to the surface and potentially result in disclosures and safeguarding issues. Remind yourself of your organisational safeguarding arrangements and key contacts before you begin and seek advice and support if you have any worries or concerns.
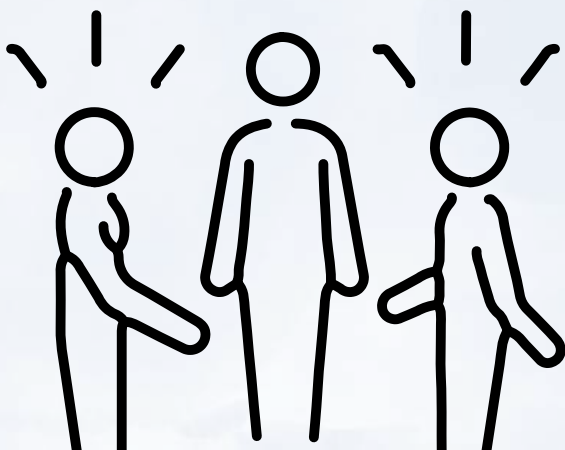
KEY TAKE AWAYS/CONCLUSIONS

We hope that this resource has been useful in supporting you to recognise why it is critical that we all play a role in ending VAWG, and how we all have it in our gift to lead critical conversations that support young people to consider the impact of their words, perspectives and behaviour.

Remember, you do not have to be experts in this field to make a real difference. It is normal to worry that by talking about these complex issues, you may do more harm than good. However, the reality is that the only way we can do more harm, is by shutting down critical conversations or avoiding them all together.

One thing to also consider, is that as well as positively influencing the behaviours or others, we need to pause, reflect and critically consider how our own attitudes, values and belief systems have been impacted and influenced by the world around us.

Considering how some of the language we use, and behaviours we display as adults and professionals may endorse problematic peer norms may feel uncomfortable, but remember we are all human and all leaning! Talking of learning, remember that there are lots of links to other sources of learning and resources in your workbook that may be useful in helping you initiate and steer those all- important conversations.

We would love to stay connected as you begin to lead the change we seek!

TIME TO TALK VAWG:

Working with boys and young men

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