



Refraining Masculinity



This fact sheet will help you understand more about Refraining Masculinity and what this looks like.

⚠ Warning ⚠ When researching this topic you may encounter material that is upsetting. Please speak to a teacher or a trusted adult if you are worried about anything you have seen.



What is Refraining Masculinity?

Reframing masculinity means changing how we think about what it means to be a boy or a man. Instead of sticking to outdated beliefs like “boys don’t cry” or “real men have to be tough all the time,” this approach encourages young people to see masculinity in a healthier, more balanced way.

It’s about recognising that being strong doesn’t mean hiding your emotions or acting aggressively. In fact, showing your feelings, being kind, and treating others with respect are all signs of real strength. Reframed masculinity allows males to be emotionally open without feeling weak, and supportive of others without worrying about how “manly” they look. It’s about embracing vulnerability, emotional intelligence, respect, and inclusivity.

Examples of Refraining Masculinity and their outdated phrases:

 Harmful Phrase	 Healthy Phrase
• “Man up.”	• “It’s okay to feel what you’re feeling.”
• “Don’t be a girl.”	• “Everyone has emotions—it’s human.”
• “Real men don’t cry.”	• “Crying is a healthy way to deal with emotions.”
• “Boys will be boys.”	• “Everyone should take responsibility for their actions.”
• “You’re weak if you ask for help.”	• “Asking for help shows strength and self-awareness.”
• “Be an alpha.”	• “Be confident, but treat others as equals.”
• “Only girls talk about feelings.”	• “Talking about feelings helps everyone grow.”
• “You have to be tough all the time.”	• “It’s okay to take a break and take care of yourself.”

Key Terms	Definition
Stereotype	A fixed, oversimplified idea about a group of people, like saying all women are emotional or all men like football.
Masculinity	The set of qualities, behaviours, and roles traditionally associated with being male, such as strength, leadership, or independence.
Toxic (Harmful) Masculinity	A narrow and harmful version of masculinity that discourages emotional expression and promotes violence/aggression.
Vulnerability	Willingness to be open about your feelings, fears, or struggles. It's often seen as weakness in toxic masculinity, but actually shows strength and courage.
Gender Norms	Social rules or expectations about how people should behave based on their gender.
Identity	How someone sees themselves - including their gender, personality, values, and beliefs.
Gender Equality	The belief that all genders should have equal rights, opportunities, and respect. Healthy masculinity supports gender equality.
Positive Role Models	People (of any gender) who show that it's okay to be kind, respectful, and emotionally open—helping to redefine what it means to be strong.
Assertiveness	Standing up for yourself and your needs respectfully—not through aggression or control.
Empathy	The ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. It's a key part of healthy relationships.
Healthy Masculinity	A balanced and respectful way of being male that includes emotional openness, empathy, and respectful relationships with others.

Things to think about



Why is it important?

- **Socialisation & Norms:** From childhood, boys are taught to fit into certain roles. Phrases like “man up,” “don’t be a girl,” or “boys don’t cry” are heard early and often.
- **Cultural Reinforcement:** Media, TV/Film demonstrates that heroes are often shown winning through violence or control, not vulnerability or communication.
- **Isolation & Online Influence:** Teen boys may find that male ‘influencers’ are encouraging them with harmful behaviours.



Did You Know?

- **Men who express vulnerability tend to have stronger relationships meaning that** emotional openness is linked to deeper connection and resilience in both friendships and romantic relationships.
- **Empathy and kindness are masculine traits too.** Culture throughout history has recognised protectiveness, compassion, and nurturing as part of healthy masculinity.
- Challenging this language helps create respect and equality — starting with how we speak every day.

What can you do?

Speak up when you hear sexist or disrespectful language — calmly explain why it's harmful.

Model vulnerability – Talk openly, show feelings.

Use supportive, inclusive language – Replace phrases like “man up” with “it’s okay to feel that way” or “what’s wrong?”.

Use inclusive and respectful language in your own conversations and online posts.

Teach empathy and active listening to help boys understand others’ emotions and show compassion in friendships and relationships.

Be a positive role model by treating everyone with respect, regardless of who they are.

Help friends and family understand the impact of their words without attacking or shaming them.



Here are some videos and links that you may find useful:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjZTZm1phwo>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbk3iJqmjNU&list=PLXTALXk4qAXi-sq_txWq0EwNCeKqbE3pf&index=4



Where to go for help

Parents/guardians/carers

Wider trusted family

Teachers/ Youth Workers

Childline 0800 1111

Yellow Door 02380 636312

No Limits

Police 999



Online support

www.childline.org.uk

www.nspcc.org.uk

www.themix.org.uk

www.kooth.com

www.youngminds.org.uk

www.barnardos.org.uk

☀️ Final Thought



Tackling misogynistic language starts with noticing it and having the courage to speak up. By choosing respect and supporting others, we help create a world where everyone is valued equally. Small actions add up, and together we can build a culture that rejects hate and promotes fairness for all.