TACKLING MISOGYNY IN SCHOOLS

- Southwark's Youth Justice Service will share practical tools, activities and approaches schools can use to explore male identities, social media, the manosphere and healthy relationships with young people, based on their new gender specific group-work programme for boys, entitled 'Real-Talk'.

How It Manifests in School Environments

- **Emotional Expression: Aggression or withdrawal as the only acceptable outlets for sadness, vulnerability, fear, or insecurity.**
- How does it manifest in your school environment? What are your day –to- day experiences?
- How does the school address misogyny?

Influences & Online Culture

- **The Digital Environment:** How online influencers, algorithms, and manosphere content target teenage boys during vulnerable identity-forming years.
- **Why the Appeal?** Address the underlying needs these influences exploit—belonging, purpose, validation, and clear answers to social anxiety or feeling lost.
- **Media Literacy:** The importance of teaching boys to critically evaluate the online content they consume.

The Impact on Boys and the Wider School Community

- **Impact on Boys:** Elevated mental health risks, isolation, substance use, lower academic achievement, and difficulty forming healthy relationships.
- **Impact on Girls & Female Staff:** Misogynistic attitudes, harassment, feeling unsafe, and taking on emotional labor.
- **Impact on School Climate:** Disrupted learning, increased disciplinary interventions, and lower overall wellbeing.

Shift from Reactive Discipline to Proactive Education

- Punishing sexist language or behaviour is necessary for establishing boundaries, but it rarely changes underlying attitudes. Without education, students often view discipline as merely "getting caught" rather than an opportunity for reflection.
- Move Beyond "Zero Tolerance" alone: While clear red lines must exist, pair sanctions with restorative conversations or educational reflections. Ask questions like: "Where do you think that phrase comes from?" or "What do you think that actually communicates to the people around you?"
- Deconstruct Online Influencer Rhetoric: Many young people absorb misogynistic talking points from social media algorithms. Rather than dismissing these views, address them head-on in citizenship, PSHE, or tutor time. Analyze how online content uses grievance, fear, and toxic definitions of "strength" to manipulate impressionable audiences.
- Teach Media Literacy: Equip students with the tools to critically evaluate online media, spot algorithmic radicalization pipelines, and recognize logical fallacies or manipulative narratives.

Key Concepts & Psychological Drivers to Understand

- To challenge misogyny effectively, educators must understand why it resonates with some young men today. It is rarely just about hating women; it is often tied to identity, belonging, and digital design.
- Algorithmic Radicalization: Social media platforms use recommendation algorithms designed to maximize engagement. A student searching for basic fitness, motivation, or gaming content can quickly be funneled toward "manosphere" creators, incel forums, and anti-feminist rhetoric within a few clicks.
- The Appeal of the "Manosphere" & "Red Pill" Ideology: Online subcultures often target young men's genuine anxieties—fear of rejection, financial insecurity, body image issues, loneliness, or a lack of purpose. Creators sell a narrative that blames women and progressive society for their struggles while offering a rigid, black-and-white roadmap to "success" (money, status, power, dominance).
- The Difference Between "Banter" and Abuse: Microaggressions in secondary schools are frequently disguised as "just banter." It is vital to teach students the line where humor becomes target-based harassment, and how "ironic" sexism often serves as a shield for actual misogyny.
- Bystander Apathy vs. Active Intervention: Adolescents often stay silent when witnessing misogyny due to fear of social exclusion or physical escalation. Understanding the psychological barriers to speaking up helps in training students on safe, practical ways to intervene.

The "Active Bystander" Framework

Teach both boys and girls actionable ways to interrupt misogynistic behavior safely using the 5 Ds framework:

- Direct: Firmly address the behavior in the moment ("That's not cool," or "We don't talk to people like that here").
- Distract: Interrupt the situation by changing the topic, interrupting the interaction, or calling the target/speaker away.
- Delegate: Report the behavior to a staff member, head of year, or safeguarding lead.
- Delay: Check in with the target after the event to offer support and let them know the behavior was unacceptable.
- Document: Keep a note or record of repeated online or offline harassment to share with school leaders or pastoral staff.

Behind the mask

"Presenting a certain face to the world is something that most people do every day. The different masks that people wear can act as a social disguise and help us get through a variety of situations. Some people may put on a certain mask at work, at school or college. A different mask with their friends and another when walking down the street alone. The reasons behind the masks we wear, can be different for everyone, change depending on who we are with and where we are and can change over time. They can be both positive and negative."

The facilitators are encouraged to give some examples of the masks they may wear to illustrate this concept.

Ask the participants, what are the reasons people may wear a mask

Some reasons include/suggest:

To be liked
To hide excitement
To intimidate others.
To impress others
To hide the truth
To be attractive
To hide anger
To show knowledge
To avoid speaking to others
To hide pain
To avoid embarrassment
To manipulate

<u>Instructions</u>

The facilitator should now read out the following statement and instructions. *"We all wear masks at some time in our lives—it's part of human nature. The problem comes when masks become normal and we lose ourselves in the process. It is important to have self-awareness about the different masks we wear and the reasons behind it-- recognizing the masks we wear is one way to make sure that they do not gain control of our true "self."*

The facilitator should now hand out a mask and a range of different coloured pens to each participant.

The facilitator explains that on the outside of the mask, put the faces you show your friends, family, teachers, for example; using words, pictures, poetry, phrases, etc.

On the inside of the mask, show who you really are and how you really feel; using words, pictures, poetry, phrases, etc.

The facilitators are encouraged to take part and complete their own masks.

After all masks have been completed, go around the room, asking all participants to discuss their masks.

This can be an exposing activity with an element of vulnerability and personal disclosure. Facilitators should use positive affirmation throughout and not pressure anyone to share if they are uncomfortable. Should a participant disclose any information of concern, which may indicate unmet mental health needs, etc. follow-up conversation/support should be offered after the session is complete and their caseworker notified.

Male Archetypes

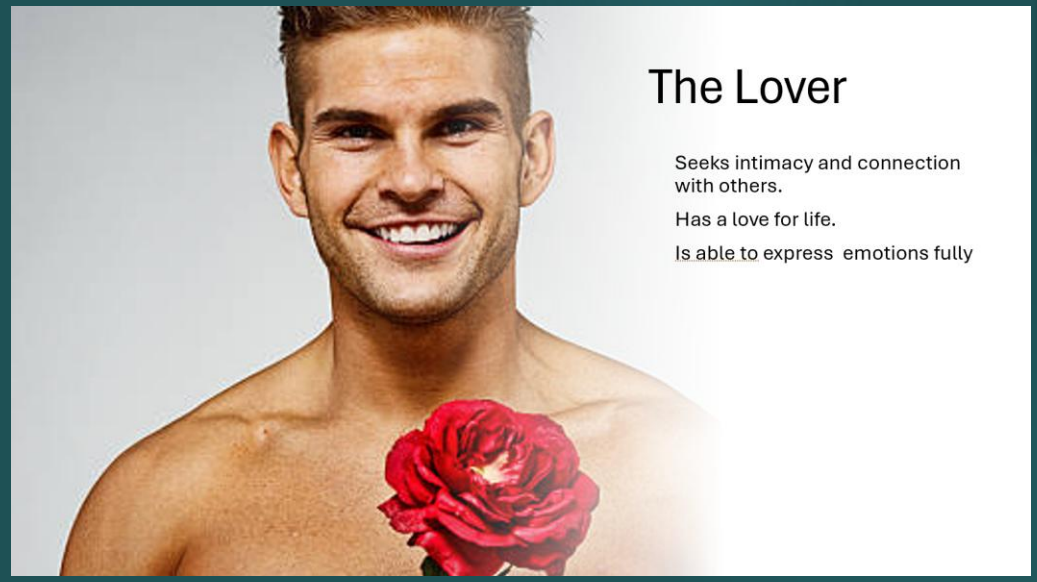
- There are different types of masculine presentations.
- More than one version of healthy masculinity.

- During this activity, the group will be introduced the 12 male archetypes and everyone will be asked to identify three of the architypes that reflect their personality the most.
- The facilitator will place the 12 male architype cards in a circle around the room, before introducing each of the architypes, explaining their characteristics to the group and encourage discussion over the positives and negatives of each architype.
- The facilitator will explain these archetypes are not scientific or 'fixed', participants may relate to many or none of these archetypes and they may be change depending on where you are, who you're with and over time.
- The facilitator may want to expand on this and explain the archetypes are a psychological concept, created by Carl Jung, over 100 years, based on his observation of European men. Therefore, may not be all relevant to all of us. Can the group think of any other architypes?
- Facilitators should explore if these architypes are different if they are with their family, at school/college or in the community with their friends.
- The aim of this exercise is to generate a discussion about there being no singular way to 'be a man', and that each archetype is as valid as the other; each one has strengths/weaknesses, and different men may drift through different archetypes throughout their lives as their priorities and experiences change.



The Magician

Aims to make dreams come true.
He is a master of deep thinking, problem-solving.
Can be mysterious.



The Lover

Seeks intimacy and connection with others.

Has a love for life.

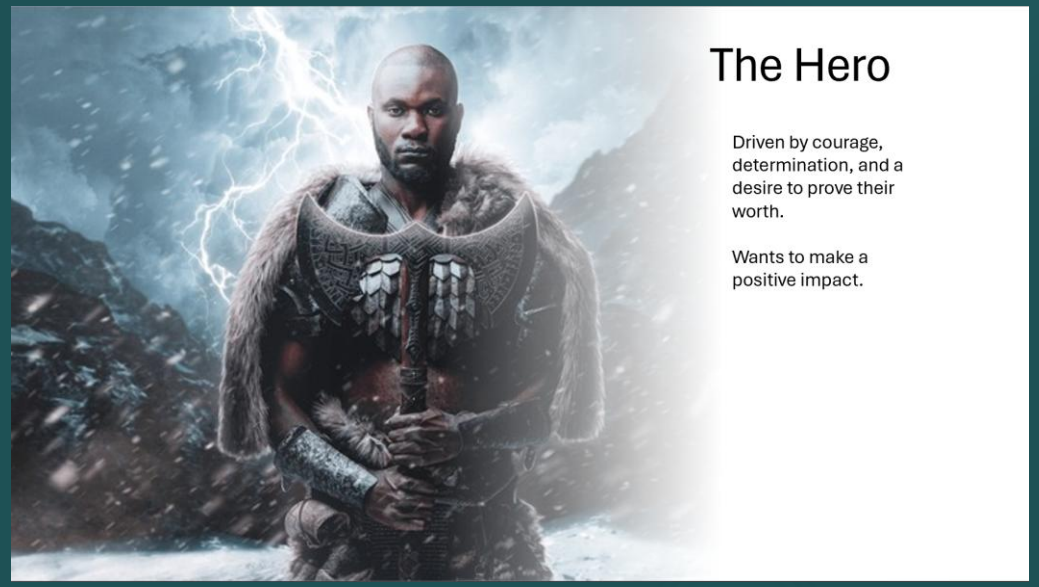
Is able to express emotions fully



The Ruler

Seeks control, responsibility, and the desire to lead and organize.

Is a good decision maker.



The Hero

Driven by courage, determination, and a desire to prove their worth.

Wants to make a positive impact.

Breaking the stereotype

- The facilitator will place a piece of A4 paper at either end of the room, one with **Agree** the other with **Disagree** written on it. The facilitator will read out the following statements and ask the participants to stand by the sign they agree with. Each boy should be asked to explain why they agree or disagree with the statement.
- It is okay for men to show weakness.
- To be respected, you need to be feared.
- It's okay for men to cry.
- Men do not need other male friends.
- It is not important for men to be physically strong
- Men should earn more than their partner.

Practical Classroom & Pastoral Strategies

- **Challenging "Banter":** Moving beyond "boys will be boys." How to call out harmful language directly without shaming, turning micro-aggressions into teachable moments.
- **Modelling Healthy Masculinity:** Male educators modelling emotional openness, accountability, and vulnerability; all staff modeling respectful cross-gender interactions.
- **Creating Safe Spaces for Emotional Literacy:** Giving young men the language and permission to express fear, sadness, and stress without losing status among peers.- Breaking the stereotype activity/blend with aspects of victim activity.
- **Restorative Approaches:** Using restorative conversations rather than purely punitive measures to unpack the root causes of aggressive behavior.
- **Partner Closely with Parents and Guardians:** interventions are significantly amplified when reinforced at home. Maintain Constructive Communication: When addressing an incident involving a child, approach parents as partners in guidance rather than solely delivering a complaint. Frame the conversation around shared goals: helping the young person develop into a respectful, successful adult.
- **Model Healthy Professional Boundaries**: Demonstrate mutual respect, active listening, and collaborative problem-solving in all staff-student and staff-staff interactions.

Create Safe Spaces for Dialogue and Peer Mentoring

- Adolescents need structured environments where they can ask difficult questions without fear of immediate public shaming, balanced with accountability.
- Facilitate Guided Discussions: Use tutor time or dedicated workshops to explore topics like healthy relationships, consent, peer pressure, and modern masculinity. Ground these discussions in respect, autonomy, and shared humanity.
- Establish Peer-Led Initiatives: Empower student-led groups, equality councils, or ambassador programs where older students champion respectful behavior and model positive leadership for younger years.
- Engage Positive Male Role Models: Involve male teachers, pastoral staff, and external mentors to actively model confident, emotionally intelligent, and respectful masculinity. It is vital for boys to see men who reject misogyny while remaining secure in their identity.

Crown the King

- The purpose of this final exercise is to recognise the individual contribution each member of the group has provided by offering positive affirmation and identifying individual strengths and contributions.
- In turn, each boy will have the crown/headpiece placed on their head. Whilst the crown is on their head, others from the group will identify positive aspects of their character/ positive contributions/ identify what they have taught us.

Key points

- Toxic masculinity and misogyny can influence school culture.
- Online influences can shape attitudes and behaviours.
- Harmful sexualised behaviour must be addressed early.
- Misogyny can affect both female students and staff.
- Schools play a critical role in promoting healthy, respectful relationships.
- Consistent responses and positive role modelling make a significant difference.
- **Separate the Boy from the Behavior:** Frame interventions around the pressure to conform, rather than labelling a young person as inherently problematic.
- **Provide Alternatives, Not Just Prohibition:** Don't just tell young men what not to be; offer a compelling, positive model of what healthy manhood looks like.
- **Consistency Across Staff:** Ensure zero tolerance for misogynistic or homophobic language is applied uniformly by all departments and leadership.
- "If we want boys to challenge misogyny, we must also create environments where they can explore identity, vulnerability, relationships and emotions safely."