How to talk about the manosphere



A discussion guide for parents & trusted adults.
From The Man Cave and Teach Us Consent.

the man cave

TEACH US * CONSENT

You don’t need to be an expert on the manosphere to talk about it with the young man in your life.



Your role is simply to stay close, stay curious, and be clear about what’s not okay.

Hearing him use some of these words in the glossary doesn’t necessarily mean he believes them or repeatedly engages with this content. A lot of the time, boys are repeating what they’ve seen or heard, often as a joke. But words matter. When harmful language becomes normal, the ideas behind it start to feel normal too. Over time, that can make risk-taking behaviours, disrespect, and even violence towards women and others easier to excuse or partake in.

A bit of prep goes a long way. Then it’s about how you show up. You won’t get it perfect, and you don’t need to. What’s important is that you keep trying.

This is a starting point for conversations, not a complete guide to the manosphere or to preventing harm.

Q: What is the manosphere?

(A) The manosphere is a loose network of online creators, communities and content aimed at boys and men.

Many young men go online looking for belonging and advice on things like fitness, money, confidence or relationships. Alongside that advice, they are often served content that blames women and feminism for the problems men face, and promotes rigid, outdated ideas about gender roles, like that women shouldn't work or earn their own money.

It's also a business. Many creators make money from young men's loneliness and insecurities through views, courses, coaching and paid memberships. And because social media platforms are designed to keep people watching, this content can end up in his feed whether he goes looking for it or not.

Before you start

How you show up matters as much as what you say, so it's worth doing a little groundwork first.

Expect it to bring you closer.

Go in expecting the conversation to strengthen your relationship, not damage it. If you walk in braced for a fight, he'll likely feel it. If you walk in wanting to understand him better, he'll feel that too.

Do your homework.

As best you can, get a sense of the digital world he's growing up in. Try watching some of the content that's likely coming his way, like the creators or trends you've heard about. It doesn't need to be perfect. You're not trying to become an expert, just to get a feel for what he's seeing. Use the glossary to look up words you've heard, from him or elsewhere. It's there to help you understand, not to use on him.

Get calm before you get curious.

Whether it's something he's said, something you've heard, or content you've come across, if it lands close to home or rattles you, work through your reaction first, ideally with another adult. That way he's not left managing your feelings on top of his own. It can help to remember your own teenage years, the in-jokes and things said for a laugh. That's not an excuse, but it might help you understand and relate.

Know where you stand.

Be clear on your own values, where your line is, and why it matters to you. That way you're ready to hold it calmly and share a bit of yourself when the moment comes. Think about how you'd say it in your own words. You know him better than any guide does.

Look at what you role model.

We all teach by example, and boys can't be what they can't see. How the adults around him treat and talk about other people, handle their own feelings, and use technology teaches him more than any one conversation.

Pick your moment.

There's no perfect time, but side by side often works better than face to face: in the car, cooking dinner, walking the dog. Other adults he trusts can help too.

In the conversation

You know him best, and you know how to start a conversation with him. But if you'd like a few words to get the ball rolling, keep it simple. It's just about asking to enter the conversation:

"Hey, have you got a sec?"
"I've been thinking about some things. Can I share them with you?"

Once he says yes, follow your gut. These four mindsets will help you stay in the conversation, even when it gets hard.

(1) Get curious

Ask before you assume, and listen more than you talk. Underneath what he says, there's usually a question he's trying to answer or a feeling he's trying to make sense of. Your job is to find out what it is. Ask open questions that invite more than a simple 'yes' or 'no'. When you first start having these conversations, you might just listen and take it in. You can always come back to it once you've had time to think about what you want to say.

Try: *"I'm struggling to understand this. Can you explain it to me?"*

Or: *"What makes you feel like that?"*

Or: *"Can you show me? Who are you watching, and what do you like about them?"*

(2) Keep your centre

He might push your buttons, sometimes on purpose. The goal is to stay in the conversation, and too much heat is the quickest way to end it. Keep it low, slow and considered. You're also showing him how to handle a hard conversation.

Try: Slow right down, lower your voice, and take a breath before you answer.

It's okay to say, *"I need a minute with that one,"* and come back to it.

(3) Hold the line

Being curious isn't the same as agreeing. Manosphere content often puts people down: most commonly women and girls, people from racially marginalised communities and LGBTIQA+ people, but also boys themselves, telling them they're not "man enough" unless they're jacked, rich or never ask for help. When something he says crosses one of your lines, name it in the moment if you can. Letting it slide tells him it's okay. Then share why it matters to you: something you've seen, lived or believe. That's what turns "don't say that" into something he might think about. Be firm about the comment, and leave the shame out. Everyday put-downs, even as jokes, make it easier to see people as less than, and might be unknowingly hurting someone who overhears them. They can also lead to more serious harm.

Try: *"I'm struggling to find the humour in that. Here's why..."*

Or: *"I'm not okay with that. I want the women in my life to feel safe and respected, and here's why that matters to me..."*

(4) See the good in him

Hold the line on what he said, but never on who he is. He needs to know you're on his team. The moment he feels you're not, because he's being ganged up on or judged as a bad person, the conversation often stops. You can be on his team and still hold him to account. Remember, too, that a lot of this content tells boys they're not good enough as they are (not big enough, rich enough or tough enough) and pushes them to change their body or habits in ways that can harm their health. So take every chance to let him know you value him for who he is, not how he looks, what he earns or what he achieves.

Try: *"I'm always in your corner, but I don't agree with you on this."*

Or: *"I've seen you be kinder than that. What's going on here?"*

Or: *If he's started changing his diet, training or habits: "You seem really into this lately. I don't know much about it. Are you open to telling me more?"*

Or: *Honour him. Name something specific about him you appreciate, and the impact it's had on you.*



After the conversation

This is one of many conversations, not one big one. Ten small chats will do more than one big talk. What you do next matters as much as what you said.

Follow through	If you said you'd do something, do it. If he sends you videos, watch them. Following through shows him you meant it.
Keep it going	Swap perspectives: "Send me three videos that show what you mean, and I'll send you three of mine. Then let's talk about them." Or book in the next chat, somewhere side by side like dinner, a walk or the drive to training: "Can we pick this up again next week?"
Check in	Next time, come back to it. You might ask: • "How was that conversation for you?" • "What have you been thinking about since?" • "Was there anything you didn't agree with?"
Own it and repair	If it didn't go the way you hoped, say so. "I didn't handle that well the other night. Can we have another go?"

If you need more support:

Most of the time, staying close and keeping the conversation going is enough. If you're worried about his safety or wellbeing, or about how he's treating others, you don't have to handle it alone. Talk to his school or your GP, or reach out to the following services:

Start here:

- Emergency: 000
- Kids Helpline (for him, 24/7): 1800 55 1800
- Parentline (for you): varies by state
- Lifeline (crisis support, 24/7): 13 11 14

More support:

headspace (12 to 25 year olds) · MensLine Australia 1300 78 99 78 · 1800RESPECT 1800 737 732 (family, domestic and sexual violence) · Men's Referral Service 1300 766 491 (controlling or violent behaviour) · Butterfly Foundation 1800 33 4673 (body image) · QLife 1800 184 527 (LGBTIQA+) · 13YARN 13 92 76 (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander)