



***IT'S NOT JUST***

**AGENTS OF CHANGE:  
A WORKBOOK  
FOR YOUNG MEN**

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Government  
of Canada

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du Canada

Canada



A photograph of three young people outdoors. On the left, a young man with dark curly hair is seen in profile, looking towards the center. In the middle, a young woman with reddish hair and freckles is also in profile, looking towards the right. On the right, a young man with curly reddish hair is looking directly at the camera. They are all wearing casual clothing. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a building.

**This gender-based violence awareness module has been created in partnership with Women and Gender Equality Canada and White Ribbon Canada, and support from YWCA Canada and Next Gen Men.**



# INTRODUCTION

**This workbook is about you. Your experiences, your ideas, and the world you're growing up in. You'll explore topics like masculinity, respect, consent, and gender-based violence (GBV) in ways that connect to your real life.**


Many boys and young men grow up hearing that being a "real man" means always being tough, hiding your emotions, or using force to solve problems. These ideas can hurt everyone and are linked to higher rates of loneliness and mental health struggles, including suicide, among boys and young men.

**You didn't create these rules, but you have the power to challenge them by showing strength through honesty, care, and respect for others.**

**This workbook isn't about fixing anything about you. It's an opportunity to explore the strengths, influence, and positive impact you already bring to your friendships and your community.**

Throughout the activities, you'll have space to reflect, ask questions, and build on approaches to healthy masculinity, respect, and responsibility in everyday life. Think of it as a chance to deepen skills you already have and discover new ways to support the people around you.





➔ **This workbook is designed specifically for boys, young men, and those who are masculine-identifying. When we say boys or men, we mean anyone who connects with masculinity including people who may be seen or treated as masculine regardless of sex assigned at birth. Masculinity looks different across cultures, experiences, and personal identity and we use this language to be as inclusive as possible.**

Take the content at your own pace. Some ideas may feel familiar. Others may challenge you. That's okay. What matters is being open to thinking, learning, and choosing how you want to act.



# TRIGGER WARNING

This workbook talks about gender-based violence, a topic that can be difficult to discuss. Before you begin, know that it's important to protect yourself and be mindful of your personal triggers. A trigger is anything that brings up memories of a past traumatic experience. This could be graphic images or descriptions of violence or something subtle like songs, smells, or even colours.

If anything triggers you, it's okay to pause. Take care of yourself and step away if you need to. Use the resources listed at the end of the workbook, or try self-care strategies like exercise, meditation, or spending time with loved ones to help you feel more grounded and in control.

If you or a friend need help dealing with GBV, you can find [a list of cross-Canada resources](#), including hotlines, counselling services, and support groups for youth. You can also find additional resources on the [youth-based resources database](#).



## **SECTION 1:**

# **HEALTHY MASCULINITY, IDENTITY & EMOTIONAL LIFE**







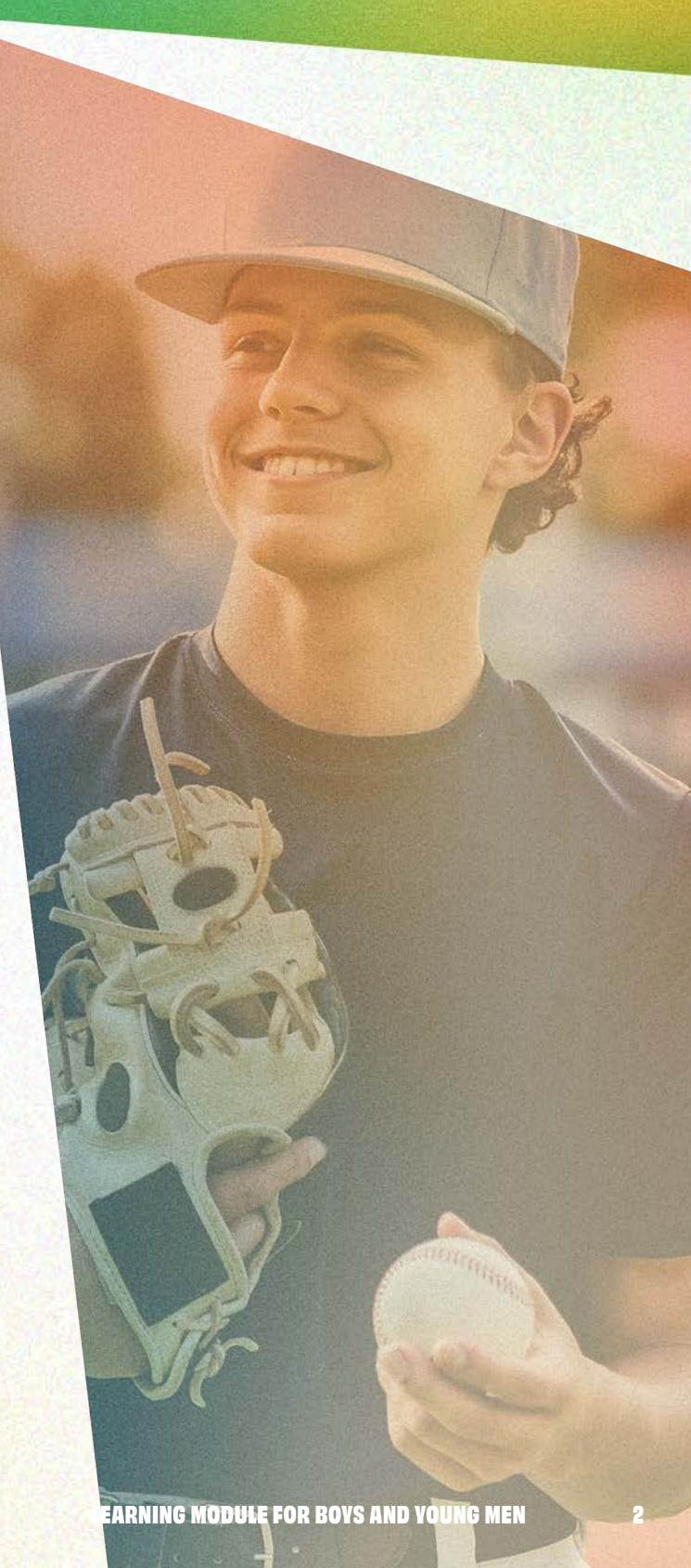
Messages about masculinity start early. You might have heard ideas about how you're "supposed" to act – like what emotions are okay to show, and how you should deal with problems. These messages can come from many places, including family, culture, peers, schools, sports, media, and online spaces.

Masculinity is not any one single thing. How you and other young men are raised can look very different. In some families or communities, boys may be expected to be strong, independent, or protective from a young age. In others, hiding emotions may be tied to ideas of respect, honour, or survival. Experiences of racism, exclusion, or being misunderstood can also shape what masculinity feels like and what is expected.



**Healthy masculinity** means understanding that there isn't only one way to "be a man." It's understanding and expressing yourself in a way that supports your well-being and the well-being of others.

This means allowing space for all your emotions, identities, and interests. It's being respectful, responsible, and caring rather than proving toughness or dominance. Healthy masculinity is feeling free to express yourself however you want while supporting others that express themselves differently – whether it's through art, fashion, hobbies, music, sports, or some other way.





## ACTIVITY

# THE MAN BOX



### STEP 1: DRAW THE BOX

Draw a large square in the middle of a blank page. Label it: “The Man Box”.

Inside the box, write words or phrases you’ve heard about how boys and men are “supposed to” act.

For example:

- **Don’t cry**
- **Be tough**
- **Be strong**
- **Don’t show weakness**
- **Always be in control**

Now, add your own examples from friends, family, social media, sports, music, or other places.

### STEP 2: OUTSIDE THE BOX

Outside the square, write ways you think that you, other young men, and men that you look up to actually are – or want to be – especially the things that don’t always fit inside the box.

For example:

- **Caring**
- **Creative**
- **Emotional**
- **Quiet**
- **Gentle**
- **Asks for help**





### STEP 3: PERSONAL REFLECTION (SHORT ANSWERS)



# MASCULINITY, EMOTIONS, AND THE BODY

➔ Many boys grow up learning to deal with their emotions by hiding them, joking about them, or pushing through them. While anger is often seen as acceptable, other emotions like sadness, fear, embarrassment, or vulnerability are ignored or discouraged.

Sometimes, anger sits on top of other feelings and when those feelings get pushed down, they can come out as rage, frustration, or shutting down. Over time, this can make it harder to understand what you're really feeling, or how to express yourself in healthy ways.

**We often see this play out when people say things like “man up,” “be strong,” “walk it off,” “tough it out” and “real men don’t cry.”**

The issue is that these emotions don't just impact your thoughts, they also affect your body. For example, feeling stressed or scared might make your heart beat faster or your stomach feel tight.

Feeling calm or happy can help your body relax, which is why it's important to allow yourself to feel and to know how to identify your emotions.

Take a moment to think about whether you've experienced any of the following:

- **tightness in your jaw or shoulders**
- **a knot or tight feeling in your stomach**
- **a racing heart or shallow breathing**
- **a heavy feeling in your chest**
- **a lump or tightness in your throat**
- **sweating more than what is normal for you**

If you've felt any of these before, consider:

- **What was happening at the time?**
- **What emotion do you think might have been underneath?**
- **How did you respond in that moment?**

There's no right or wrong way to feel. This is about noticing patterns and understanding how your body and emotions are connected.

Paying attention to these signals is part of emotional awareness. Healthy masculinity makes space for these emotions, and for honesty, support, and connection.





# 6 WAYS TO PRACTICE HEALTHY MASCULINITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Healthy masculinity isn't about proving how tough you are or fitting into one box. It's about how you treat yourself and others every day, and it can look different for different people. Here are six ways you can practice healthy masculinity every day:



**1. BE HONEST ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS.**



**2. TRY TO RECOGNIZE HOW EMOTIONS FEEL IN YOUR BODY.**



**3. RESPECT OTHER PEOPLE'S BOUNDARIES.**



**4. OWN UP AND APOLOGIZE IF YOU HURT SOMEONE.**



**5. SUPPORT FRIENDS WITHOUT TRYING TO FIX EVERYTHING.**



**6. QUESTION MESSAGES THAT PUSH CONTROL OR DOMINANCE.**

➡ These are skills that develop over time. They may take practice, but doing so means contributing to a future where everyone feels safer.





## SECTION 2:

# POWER & RELATIONSHIPS



# WHY POWER MATTERS FOR RESPECT AND CONSENT

**Everyone sees and experiences the world differently. Your experiences are shaped by many things, like where you grew up, your family, your culture, your gender, your race, your abilities, your income, your sexuality, and how others see you. Together, these factors influence how much power or influence you may have in different situations and how others treat you.**

While these factors don't define who you are, they can help explain why people can experience the same situation very differently.

Having power doesn't mean your life has been easy or that you haven't faced challenges. Power means that in some situations, certain systems or social rules may work in your favour more than they do for others. Power and hardship can exist at the same time and recognizing that doesn't take away from what you've had to overcome.



**Respect and consent aren't separate from power. Power differences can make it easier for some people to speak up and harder for others to say no.**

When you understand power, you notice what's being said, what isn't said out loud, and what might be harder to say for some people. This awareness sets the tone for healthier relationships, and for the conversations about consent, boundaries, and GBV that come later in this workbook.



# POWER, EXPECTATIONS, AND GENDER



Unfair gender expectations create the idea that there are only certain “acceptable” ways to act, based on being seen as a “strong, masculine man” or a “soft, feminine woman.” These expectations are learned and people can start receiving them usually from a very young age.

These messages can shape what’s expected of us in ways that feel limiting or uneven. They may give some people more room to express themselves while restricting others, even if no one means for that to happen. This can affect everyone, because it suggests there are only a few ways to feel, behave, or show who you are.

## Examples of unfair gender expectations:

- **Girls and young women are often encouraged to be caring, avoid conflict, and keep the peace. They might learn that saying “no” clearly could make them seem rude or difficult.**
- **Boys and young men might be encouraged to take charge, hide their feelings, and push through discomfort. They might learn that backing off or showing hurt feelings looks weak.**

**Not everyone relates to these expectations in the same way. Gender is diverse, and everyone should have the space to define themselves in the way that feels right for them.**

This doesn’t mean boys are taught to cause harm, or that girls are taught to accept it. Recognizing these patterns can help explain why pressure, misunderstandings, or crossed boundaries can happen, especially in dating or relationships, because people may feel pushed into roles that don’t reflect who they really are.

It’s important to remember that respect and consent aren’t just about what someone means to do – they’re also shaped by expectations, power, and impact.



## ACTIVITY

# USING YOUR INFLUENCE FOR GOOD

### Step 1: Read the scenario

Jordan and Alex are at a small party with friends. Jordan is well-liked and people usually follow their lead. Alex looks uncomfortable when someone keeps teasing him about who he likes. A few people laugh. No one says anything. Jordan notices Alex seems quiet and embarrassed.

### Step 2: Spot the power

Circle or write down:

→ **Who has more social power in this situation?**

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→ **What gives them that power?**

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→ **Who has less power right now? Why?**

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## Step 3: Your turn

Imagine you are Jordan.

→ **What power do you have in this moment?**

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→ **How could you use that power in a positive way?**

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→ **What could you say or do?**

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→ **What might happen if you stay silent?**

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→ **What might change if you speak up?**

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## Step 4: Influence for good

Complete this sentence:

**“Using my influence for good could look like...”**





## **SECTION 3:**

# **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**







## **A QUICK CHECK-IN**

**Some of the topics in this section can be difficult or uncomfortable. As you read, notice how you're feeling and how your body is responding.**

**If you need to pause, slow down, or take a break, that's okay. Checking in with yourself is part of learning. Taking care of yourself first is the priority.**



# GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

**Gender-based violence (GBV) is any form of harm against a person based on their gender, gender expression, or perceived gender. It's not just physical or sexual violence: it can also include emotional violence, economic abuse, coercion, threats, or neglect.**

It is important to know that GBV affects people of all genders. While men and boys can be victims and survivors of violence, women, girls, and people from marginalized communities are most affected by GBV. Most GBV is caused by men or boys, regardless of the victim or survivor's gender.

This doesn't mean that all men and boys cause harm, but it does mean that you, and other young men, have an important role to play in preventing violence and building safer relationships and communities.

## WHY GBV HAPPENS: GENDER, POWER, AND CONTEXT

In the last section, we talked about power: how it works in society and in relationships, and its connection to gender. You learned that society sometimes expects you to act in a certain way because of your gender and that these expectations can shape how people interact in situations involving attraction, rejection, or pressure.

Because society often pushes these unhealthy attitudes, these behaviours aren't just normalized. They're rewarded by other people who have power.

Understanding power helps explain why some harmful behaviours, including GBV, are excused or misunderstood, even when they hurt people. What matters most is the impact of actions, not just the intentions behind those actions.

### Impact vs. Intent

**Impact** ➔ **is what you meant to do.**

**Intent** ➔ **is how it affects someone else.**

Even if you didn't mean to cause harm, the impact of your actions on others matters most.



# TYPES OF GBV



GBV can show up in many different ways, including:



## Physical harm

including hitting, using weapons/objects, throwing things, standing too close to someone to intimidate them, or restraining someone.



## Economic harm

like , taking or using money without asking, pressuring someone to buy things like gifts or food, making someone skip shifts at work.



## Emotional or psychological harm

like insults, telling someone who they can and can't hang out with, humiliation, manipulation (like the silent treatment), or threats.



## Online harm

including harassment, forcing someone to share their location, repeated pressure through messages, sharing images without consent, or sextortion.



## Sexual harm

including unwanted comments, pressure, or sexual contact.

**Sometimes, these behaviours are dismissed as jokes, misunderstandings, or “normal relationship drama,” but the impacts can be serious and long-lasting.**



# HOW GBV AFFECTS PEOPLE

➔ The impacts of GBV are different for everyone, but the effects of the harm often last longer than the incident itself. Recognizing the impact can help people grasp why GBV is a serious issue, even when harm isn't intended or is downplayed by others.

## 6 WAYS GBV HARMS PEOPLE OVER TIME

### 1. SELF-CONFIDENCE

People may doubt themselves or feel less capable.

### 2. MENTAL HEALTH

It can increase stress, anxiety, or depression.

### 3. TRUST IN OTHER

It can be harder to feel safe or trust friends, family, or partners.

### 4. RELATIONSHIPS

Friendships or romantic relationships may feel more complicated or strained.

### 5. SENSE OF SAFETY

People may feel unsafe in places they once felt comfortable, online, or offline.

### 6. DIFFICULTY SPEAKING UP

Ideas about masculinity or fear of judgment can make it hard to ask for help or share experiences.



# BECOME AN AGENT OF CHANGE

## Ending GBV starts with awareness. This means:

- Noticing your own feelings, such as frustration, anger, or feeling left out
- Seeing how power affects how people treat each other
- Spotting when someone might feel pressured or unsafe



**These are skills that help you understand yourself and others, and act in ways that show respect and healthy masculinity. Most GBV is carried out by men or boys. This doesn't mean that all men or boys are violent or are to blame for harm they didn't cause. It does mean that they're in an influential position to help end GBV.**





# 7 EVERYDAY ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE TO HELP END GBV

## 1. Respect boundaries

- Check in before hugging, touching, or goofing around with someone. Skip jokes about someone's body or appearance because they can hurt even if you don't mean them to.
- Pay attention if someone says "no," "stop," or seems uncomfortable based on body language and stop what you are doing.

## 2. Speak up in the moment

- If someone makes a sexist joke or harmful comment, say something like: "That's not cool" or "I don't think that's funny."
- Support peers who might be getting teased, pressured, or harassed.

## 3. Check in with friends

- Ask: "Are you okay?" if you notice someone seems upset, pressured, or excluded.
- Listen without judgment and take their feelings seriously.

## 4. Be mindful online

- Don't share private images, gossip, or harmful memes.
- If you see someone being bullied or harassed online, act safely: report it on the platform, support the person privately, or get help from a trusted adult.

## 5. Reflect on your own behaviour

- Notice when you might have pressured someone or crossed a line, even unintentionally.
- Apologize and think about what you can do differently next time.

## 6. Use your influence positively

- Model respectful behaviour in your friend groups, sports teams, or online communities.
- Encourage friends to think critically about content that promotes controlling or harmful ideas.

## 7. Support change in your environment

- Suggest alternatives to harmful games, jokes, or competitions that rely on putting people down.
- Step in when group norms make someone feel unsafe, even in small ways, like redirecting the conversation.



## ACTIVITY:

# MY ACTION PLAN TO HELP STOP GBV

## Step 1: Pick your focus

Read the seven everyday actions on the last page. Choose **2–3 actions** you want to focus on.

## Step 2: Set your goal

For each action you picked, fill in the chart below:

Action	My goal	Where/ when	Possible challenge	How will I handle the challenge?	Who can help?

**Tip:** Small actions add up! Even one respectful choice can make a big difference.





## **SECTION 4:**

# **BOUNDARIES, CONSENT & RESPECT**



# BOUNDARIES, CONSENT & RESPECT

Boundaries, consent, and respect shape how people treat each other including in friendships, dating, sexual situations, and online. These things are all connected. They work together and are shaped by power, expectations, and situations.



## BOUNDARIES: NOTICING LIMITS IN YOURSELF AND OTHERS

Boundaries are personal limits you set for yourself around physical space, touch, time, emotional sharing, and attention. Everyone has boundaries, and they can change depending on the situation.

Boundaries are communicated in different ways. Sometimes they're stated clearly. Other times, they show up as hesitation, pulling away, changing the subject, shorter responses, or silence.

**Paying attention to boundaries means noticing when someone is uncomfortable and respecting it, instead of ignoring it, pushing it, or trying to get around it.**



# CONSENT IN REAL LIFE

Just as you have the right to have boundaries, it's important to respect other people's boundaries. That's what consent is all about. Consent also means having the capacity and the freedom to make a decision.

Capacity means having a clear mind (without the impact of drugs, alcohol, or pressure). Freedom means being able to make a decision without fear of what will happen next. And being free to change your mind.

One easy way to remember what **healthy and clear consent** looks like is with these five elements:



## F → FREELY GIVEN

Consent should be given without pressure, manipulation, or guilt. It's a choice, not something forced.



## R → REVERSIBLE

Anyone can change their mind at any time. Just because someone said yes before doesn't mean yes forever.



## I → INFORMED

Consent means knowing what you're agreeing to. Everyone should have all the facts to make a choice.



## E → ENTHUSIASTIC

Consent should look like excitement and willingness. If someone seems unsure or hesitant, it's not consent.



## S → SPECIFIC

Saying yes to one thing doesn't mean yes to everything. Consent should be clear for each activity.

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**Here's the thing: consent is shaped by the situation.**

Someone might say yes even when they don't actually want to because of pressure, fear of conflict, power in the relationship, concern about consequences, or expectations about how they're supposed to respond.



# WHEN CONSENT ISN'T CLEAR



Not every situation has clear signs of consent, especially when people feel pressure to be easygoing or confident.

When you're not sure, stop and check in. Give space, ask how the other person feels, and pause or stop at any time if needed. Consent isn't about convincing someone to do what you want. It's about making sure both people truly want.

## POWER AND CONSENT

Power affects how easy it is for someone to speak honestly. It can come from many places including:

- Gender expectations
- Age differences
- Money
- Popularity / Social influence
- Physical presence
- Position of authority

Power affects how easy it is for someone to speak honestly. It can come from many places including:

Sometimes, a person may feel it's safer or easier to go along with something than to say no or change their mind. Understanding consent means recognizing when a "yes" might be shaped by pressure, expectations, or the belief that one person should take the lead.

Consent isn't just about what someone says. It's about making sure everyone involved is free to decide and it's important to remember **silence is not consent**.



## WAYS YOU CAN ASK FOR CONSENT

Consent before or during sex or sexual activity doesn't have to feel awkward or like it's ruining the mood. Many people find it attractive that you're thinking about their boundaries during intimate moments. Some examples of things you can say are:

- "Are you good with this?"
- "Do you want to keep going, or take a break?"
- "We don't have to do anything if you're not sure."
- "Can I keep doing this?"
- "Do you want to try something new?"

These questions aren't about being robotic. They're about understanding someone else's needs and making sure you know where they're at.



## ACTIVITY:

# NOTICING SIGNALS



Read each situation below. For each one, choose all the signals that might show someone is uncomfortable or has a boundary that you need to respect. Then think about how you could respond in a way that helps them feel safe.

### Situation 1

You start kissing someone, and notice they:

- A. Pull back slightly and hesitate
- B. Smile and lean in
- C. Stop responding
- D. Seem tense

**Which of the above shows us that they might be uncomfortable?**

**Why?**

**Respectful response ideas: Pause, check in, ask if they're okay, don't push.**

### Situation 2

You suggest moving to a more intimate activity, and they:

- A. Nod enthusiastically
- B. Laugh nervously
- C. Avoid eye contact and shrug
- D. Remain quiet

**Which of the above shows us that they might be uncomfortable?**

**Why?**

**Respectful response ideas: Slow down, ask if they're comfortable, give them space to say no.**

### Situation 3

During sexual activity, they:

- A. Go quiet
- B. Pause
- C. Change the pace unexpectedly
- D. Lean in closer and smile

**Which of the above shows us that they might be uncomfortable?**

**Why?**

**Respectful response ideas: Check in verbally, slow down, ask if they want to continue.**

**See answers on next page**





## Situation 4

You suggest doing something physical or sexual, and their response is:

- A. "Maybe"
- B. "I guess"
- C. "Yes, definitely"
- D. A joke instead of a clear yes

**Which of the above shows us that they might be uncomfortable?**

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**Why?**

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**Respectful response ideas: Don't assume consent, clarify verbally, respect a no or hesitation.**

### Answers

- Situation 1: A, C, D
- Situation 2: B, C, D
- Situation 3: A, B, C
- Situation 4: A, B, D





# Optional Reflection Questions

Which signals were easiest to notice? Which were harder?

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Why is it important to respond even to small cues of discomfort?

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How can you check in without making the situation awkward or pressured?

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# CONSENT ONLINE

It can be tricky to know what's okay online. Messages move fast, tone is easy to misread, and people can feel pressured without anyone saying it out loud.

Online consent means:

- **Respecting it if someone doesn't respond or takes a pause**
- **Not pressuring someone with repeated messages**
- **Not saving, forwarding, or screenshotting private content**



## IMPORTANT:

**Non-consensual sharing of private images is sexual violence. It is illegal. You can face serious consequences under the law. Even if you think it's "just a joke" or "everyone's doing it," it hurts the person in the image and can cause long-lasting trauma. Respecting digital consent and boundaries means never forwarding, saving, showing someone else, or posting images someone sends you, or sending your nudes to someone without asking first.**



**Remember: Consent matters online just like it does offline.**

Group chats, gaming spaces, and social media can make people feel pressured to go along with jokes, comments, or sharing that they're not comfortable with. Paying attention to this and respecting others' boundaries is a big part of consent online.





## **SECTION 5:**

# **ONLINE COMMUNITIES**



**Online spaces, like social media, gaming platforms, group chats, streaming sites, and following influencers, play a big role in how boys and young men learn about relationships, gender, and what's valued or rewarded.**

These spaces can be positive. They can help you connect with others, learn new things, seek guidance, and feel less alone. At the same time, they can also increase pressure, competition, and provide harmful and narrow ideas about masculinity, especially when the same messages are shared over and over.

It's important to notice how online spaces shape what feels "normal" or expected. When certain ideas show up everywhere, they can start to feel true, even if they aren't healthy or realistic.





# TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED VIOLENCE

**Technology-facilitated violence** is harm that happens through digital tools like phones, apps, social media, or gaming platforms. This can include:

- Cyberbullying or harassment
- Repeated unwanted messages
- Non-consensual sharing of private images
- Sextortion
- Using screenshots, group chats, or online posts to pressure, embarrass, or shame someone

**Sextortion (or sexual extortion) is a type of online blackmail where someone threatens to send a sexual image or video of a person to other people if the person doesn't pay them or provide more sexual content.**



Sextortion: It's a scam.  
It's trending. You can make it stop!  
(Royal Canadian Mounted Police)

Boys can be targets of serious online harm, too and are at higher risk than girls in some cases. These situations can be scary and confusing. Social pressures around masculinity and sexuality can make it harder for boys to speak up or ask for help.

**In Canada, boys make up the majority of victims in sextortion cases reported to cybersafety hotlines, with 91% of incidents affecting boys.**



## Why it matters:

Harm online can happen fast and spread widely. Even if someone doesn't mean to cause harm, messages, images, or rumours can still have serious effects. Being careful and respectful online is just as important as offline because your choices affect you and others.



# WHERE BOYS LEARN ABOUT GENDER ONLINE

You may have learned ideas about masculinity online maybe even before talking about them in real life. These messages can come from influencers, memes, podcasts, gaming culture, comments, friends, or pornography.

Negative online messages about being a man are often simplified or exaggerated. You may have seen some of these stereotypes show up like this:

- **Confidence can be shown as being controlling**
- **Success can be shown as dominating others**
- **Rejection can be seen as something to “beat” instead of something to accept**
- **Pornography can make sexual relationships look like a performance or something you’re “entitled” to, instead of a relationship built on respect, consent, and communication**

Because online platforms reward attention, the most extreme, funny, or shocking content often gets the most views. That can make harmful or unrealistic ideas about being a man feel normal, even if they don’t reflect what’s happening in your real life.

## THE “MANOSPHERE”

The “manosphere” is a group of online spaces that focus on boys and men. You might see it when looking for advice about fitness, dating, finances, confidence, mental health, or belonging. Some content might seem helpful at first because it feels relatable to real pressures or frustrations you’re experiencing.

But a lot of this content can be **dangerous and harmful**. It can:

- **Teach boys to blame others including women and members of 2SLGBTQI+ communities for men’s problems**
- **Encourage ignoring boundaries or disrespecting consent**
- **Treat rejection, conflict, or relationships as something to “win” or control**
- **Normalize harmful ideas about sex, dating, or masculinity**

This type of content hurts everyone it touches. It can influence how you think and act offline damaging friendships, relationships, and communities. The goal isn’t to avoid all online spaces, but to think critically about what you’re seeing. Notice when ideas and messages are controlling, disrespectful, or unsafe and choose to reject them. Acting with respect and care is how you protect yourself and others.



# WHAT YOU CAN DO IF YOU NOTICE A FRIEND GETTING INTO HARMFUL CONTENT ONLINE

## 1. Start a real conversation, not a fight

Instead of making fun of them or arguing in the group chat, try asking:

- “What do you like about that guy’s videos?”
- “What about that do you actually think would work in a real relationship?”
- “What part of that makes sense to you?”

Asking questions helps them think instead of getting defensive.

## 2. Offer another perspective.

You could say:

- “I don’t know, that feels kind of unfair.”
- “I’ve seen relationships work better when both people have equal say.”
- “I get what you’re saying, but something about that feels off to me.”

You can also share other content creators or posts that promote respect, consent, and healthy masculinity. You’re not trying to embarrass them, just to show there’s more than one way to think.

## 3. Set the tone in your friend group

If they start repeating harmful takes or sexist jokes, you can say:

- “That’s not it.”
- “Let’s chill with that stuff.”
- “Okay, anyway – let’s talk about something else.”

Even small comments can shift what feels “normal” in your group. You don’t have to “fix” your friend. But as a peer, your voice can matter more than you think.





## REFLECTION ACTIVITY:

# RESPONDING TO HARMFUL CONTENT ONLINE

Have you ever seen these ideas online or heard them from your friends? How did they make you feel? How do you engage with them?

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Write down what you could say to a friend who is engaging in harmful content. Then use it as your guide to having these conversations with friends.

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## **SECTION 6:**

# **WHAT YOU CAN DO AND HOW YOU CAN HELP**





# ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPAIR IN EVERYDAY LIFE

**There are many ways you can help end gender-based violence. This includes your own actions, how you respond when something feels wrong, and how you support others in your everyday life and online.**

## Allyship

is choosing to support and stand up for others when they're treated unfairly or harmed. It's about noticing what's happening and acting with respect and care.

## Accountability

is how allyship actually happens. It's taking responsibility for your actions, learning from mistakes, and making changes so you don't hurt others again.



Being an ally and taking accountability doesn't mean being perfect or never messing up. It means:

- **Paying attention to how your actions affect others**
- **Speaking up or stepping in when boundaries are crossed**
- **Being open to learning, listening, and changing**

Allyship and accountability go hand in hand. Sometimes, it can be hard to admit you hurt someone, especially if you see yourself as one of the "good guys." Realizing you may have pressured someone, crossed a boundary, or acted in a controlling way can feel uncomfortable or confusing. You might think:

*"I'm not a bad person... so that couldn't have really been harmful."*

But being a "good guy" isn't about never messing up. It's about being willing to reflect, take responsibility, and do better.



# NOTICING PATTERNS

One harmful action can be a mistake. But when something keeps happening, it becomes a pattern. Patterns matter because they affect whether people or places feel safe or unsafe.

## To notice a pattern:

- Look back at your actions
  - Think about times you made jokes, crossed boundaries, or ignored someone's discomfort.
  - **Ask yourself:** Has this happened more than once?
- Listen to feedback
  - Listen when someone tells you they were hurt or uncomfortable.
  - **Ask yourself:** Am I hearing the same concern from different people or at different times?
- Notice your feelings and reactions
  - Do you feel defensive or want to ignore harm?
  - **Ask yourself:** Do I try to understand my feelings in the moment, or after something emotional has happened?

- Connect the dots
  - If similar situations keep happening, or if the same type of harm occurs repeatedly, that's a pattern.
  - **Ask yourself:** What keeps showing up again and again, and what might that be telling me about how I act or react?

## Next steps if you notice a pattern

- **Be accountable** by apologizing, listening, and adjusting your behaviour. Patterns often continue when we don't stop to think about the impact.
- **Repair trust** by giving space, clarifying intentions, or changing how you act.
- **Get help** from a trusted adult, mentor, or support service if it's hard to break the pattern on your own. See the Resources section at the end of the workbook for more information.





# HOW TO APOLOGIZE



**Apologizing is one way to take accountability and repair harm if the victim or survivor agrees to an interaction. A thoughtful apology doesn't have to be perfect. It's about recognizing impact, learning, and being ready to do better.**

A meaningful apology often includes:

## 1. Acknowledging what happened

Be specific about what you did or said.

## 2. Taking responsibility

Focus on your actions and their impact, without making excuses.

## 3. Showing commitment to change

Share what you'll do differently or ask what would help repair trust.

## 4. Respecting their response

An apology doesn't guarantee forgiveness. It is important to give the other person or people space and time.

### Everyday examples of apologies:

- Crossing a boundary: *"I realize I kept pushing you to hang out when you said you weren't up for it. I'm sorry for not respecting your space. I'll check in instead of assuming next time."*
- A joke that hurt someone: *"I said something in the group chat that I thought was funny, but I know it upset you. I'm sorry. I'll be more careful and listen if something doesn't land."*
- Pressure in a dating situation: *"I see now that I pressured you to do something you weren't comfortable with. I'm really sorry for crossing that boundary. I want to respect your limits going forward."*



# BYSTANDER INTERVENTION

A bystander is someone who isn't directly involved in a situation but is near enough to know what is happening. Bystander intervention means noticing when something doesn't feel right and deciding how to respond safely. It's not about being a hero or always getting it "right." Sometimes it's safer to pause because jumping in could make things worse.

## The 5 Ds of Bystander Intervention shows different ways you can step in:

- **Direct:** saying something in the moment
  - "That's not funny."
  - "That's not cool."
- **Distract:** changing the subject
  - Starting a side conversation
  - Interrupting to shift attention
- **Delegate:** bringing in help to prioritize safety and effectiveness (not passing the responsibility off)
  - Asking a friend, teammate, or peer to step in with you
  - Looping in someone with more authority or responsibility (a coach, supervisor, teacher)
  - Reporting concerning behaviour through a platform's safety tools
- **Delay:** checking in afterward
  - "Hey, I noticed what happened earlier, are you okay?"
- **Document:** taking note of the event
  - If you see an incident write down the date, time, location, and any other information you can. If you take a video of an incident, only share it with the victim or survivor. Never post it online.





## ACTIVITY:

# ONE SMALL CHANGE



**Goal: Turn your learning into action. Complete one of the below safe challenges this week.**

### 1. Ask before you assume

Practice checking in instead of guessing what someone wants or needs.

Examples of what you could say:

- “Do you want to join us, or do your own thing?”
- “Are you up for this?”

### 2. Shut down gossip

Step in if people start trashing someone who isn't there.

Examples of what you could say:

- “Let's not talk about them.”
- Or just don't join in.

### 3. Make space in a conversation

If someone keeps getting talked over, help create space for them to speak.

Examples of what you could say:

- “Hold up — I think they were saying something.”
- “Go ahead, what were you saying?”

### 4. Own a mistake quickly

Correct yourself if you say something that lands wrong.

Examples of what you could say:

- “My bad.”
- “That wasn't cool. Sorry.”

### 5. Compliment respectfully

Give one genuine compliment this week that's not about someone's body.

Examples of what you could say:

- “You handled that well.”
- “You're really consistent.”

**Once you complete a challenge, come back and reflect:**

- What did you do?
- How did it feel?
- What difference do you think it made?



# CONCLUSION

**This workbook has been about you, your choices, and the world around you. We looked at how ideas about masculinity, power, and relationships can shape how young men act and how they are treated. Strict rules about being “tough” or “in control” can hurt everyone, including you, but you have the power to redefine what it means to be a man in your own life and with your friends.**

We've explored consent, boundaries, respect, and online safety, showing how even small actions like listening, checking in, speaking up, or stopping harmful behaviour can make a big difference. You've seen how patterns of harm can develop, how to be accountable, and how allyship and bystander actions help create safer spaces both online and offline.

Ultimately, this is about making choices that show care, respect, and responsibility. You don't need to be perfect, just aware, willing to learn, and ready to act in ways that reduce harm and support others. Every small step adds up, and your influence can help build relationships, communities, and online spaces where everyone can feel safe and respected.





# RESOURCES

## 24/7 SUPPORT SERVICES

**[Kids Help Phone](#)**: Confidential chat, text and phone mental health support services for kids, teens, and young adults.

**1-800-668-6868**

**[Hope for Wellness Help Line](#)**: Counselling and crisis intervention offering immediate help to Indigenous people across Canada.

**1-855-242-3310**

**[Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline](#)**: Chat and text support to connect human trafficking victims and survivors with support services.

**1-833-900-1010**

**[Trans Lifeline](#)**: Confidential peer support and resources for trans and gender-diverse people, not connected to the police.

**1-877-330-6366**

**[RiseUp \(by Kids Help Phone\)](#)**: Confidential support and resources specifically geared toward African, Caribbean, and Black youth and their well-being.

**Texting RISE to 686868**

**[Suicide Crisis Helpline \(988.ca\)](#)**: A 24/7 safe space to talk to a trained responder that will listen without judgement, provide support and understanding, and share helpful resources.

**Call or text: 988 (toll-free, 24/7, multilingual)**

## Men/boy specific resources:

**[Men&](#)**: Confidential phone and chat line and resources specifically geared toward men

**1-833-327-6367**

**[HeadsUpGuys](#)**: A mental health resource specifically geared toward men

## Workbooks

Each **[workbook](#)** covers a different topic and was designed so you can explore all information on GBV or choose the content that is most relevant to you.



# YOUR GBV GLOSSARY



**Not sure about a word or phrase found in this module? Gain a better understanding of gender-based violence by learning the terms below.**

## ALLYSHIP



When someone with power or privileges works to help those who are treated unfairly.

## GENDER



The social and cultural expectations and roles associated with being a man, a woman, or another gender, including behaviour, clothing choices, and interests.

## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)



Violence and harmful behaviour that happens in response to someone's gender, including physical, emotional, economic, or sexual violence.

## GENDER EXPRESSION



The way someone shows their gender identity to others, such as through chosen name, pronouns, clothing choices, hairstyles, or mannerisms.

## GENDER IDENTITY



A person's internal sense of their own gender, which may not always align with their assigned gender at birth or their gender expression.

## MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES



Those who face intersecting barriers based on their ethnicity, disabilities, sexual orientation, gender, and age in Canadian society.

## PERCEIVED GENDER



The gender that people assume someone is based on factors such as appearance, behaviour, or clothing.

## POWER



The ability to influence or control others and the resources that shape their lives and experiences.



# YOUR GBV GLOSSARY

## PRIVILEGE



Unearned advantages, rights, and benefits that individuals or groups have based on their race, gender, class, ability, etc., often resulting in unequal opportunities and unequal access to resources and power.

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## SEXTORTION



Sextortion (or sexual extortion) is a type of online blackmail where someone threatens to send a sexual image or video of a person to other people if the person doesn't pay them or provide more sexual content.

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## TECHNOLOGY FACILITATED VIOLENCE



Refers to any harm, abuse, or violence enabled or committed using technology, such as cyberbullying, online harassment, or non-consensual sharing of intimate images.

Disability-specific types of technology-facilitated violence include the removal of assistive technology such as devices for communication or misusing assistive technology to control communication of the person who needs it.

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## TRAUMA



Refers to a deeply distressing or disturbing experience that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, resulting in long-lasting psychological, emotional, and physical effects. Trauma can be caused by just one event, including violence, abuse, natural disasters, or accidents.

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## WELLNESS



A state of overall well-being, including the physical, mental, emotional, and social aspects of one's life, which involves holistically caring for oneself and promoting a healthy and balanced lifestyle.