

TALKING TO OUR TEEN SONS ABOUT INFLUENCERS ONLINE

Tools to start the conversation

There are very valid concerns amongst parents today around how their teens, especially young men, are engaging with influencers on social media. It can feel hard to know where to start to support your son in navigating this online world. Instead of trying to protect them from every new “bad influence”, as parents we need to build his sense of belonging and resilience, as well as his critical and emotional literacy skills. The most powerful tool we have to do this is by having more real, open and meaningful conversations with our adolescent sons, which will allow them to feel seen, heard and valued.

This toolkit, co-developed by Movember and partner Beyond Equality, gives tips to parents about how to start and continue conversations on these more challenging topics. This is not a mental health escalation tool, if you are worried about your teen’s mental health, please reach out to your local crisis support service or contact your doctor for expert advice.

Conversations don’t have to look one way, but it can also be hard to know where to start. You can use the **ALEC** approach; four steps to helping you approach important conversations, as a guide to get you going.

WHAT ELSE CAN PARENTS AND CARERS DO BEYOND STARTING THESE OPEN CONVERSATIONS?

- Keep the lines of communication open
- Challenge stereotypes with men and boys
- Model and celebrate positive behaviours
- Learn and upskill on understanding the internet
- Normalise having struggles
- Work with schools, community groups (or start one!)
- Make sure you are taking care of yourself as a parent – checking in with yourself
- Interrogate your own relationship with gender and masculinity

MORE INFORMATION:

To find out more about how online influencers are impacting young men, visit movember.com/youngmenonline

To find out more about Beyond Equality, visit beyondequality.org

A

ASK: Ask him how he is and what's been happening lately

- Be curious, empathetic, explore it with him.
- Don't get hung up on it being perfect.
- Start by asking how he is feeling – in a time and private place that will encourage ease and openness.
- Use open ended questions to stimulate meaningful conversations.

Examples:

“What's going on in your world?” / “What's new with you?”

- Model honest conversations – demonstrate your own ability to be honest, open and vulnerable.

Examples

“I've been super tired this week because of this thing going on at work!”

“I saw something on TV the other day that shook me up a little.”

L

LISTEN: Listen and give him your full attention

- Listen without judgement – let him speak freely without fear of criticism.
 - Listen to understand, not respond.
 - Try to make sure your own emotions don't get in the way here. If he says something that scares you, responding with curiosity rather than alarm, anger, judgement or shaming is essential to keeping him engaged.
 - Keep an open mind - understand things from his point of view. Without making any of your own judgements. And without forcing your views, values, or beliefs onto his experience.
 - Validate his feelings – show them his emotions matter, even if you don't get it. When it comes to young men's engagement with tech, it's a new world, there's no way you will have gone through the same experiences he has, so don't seek out endless opportunities to teach or jumping to problem solve.
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E

ENCOURAGE ACTION: Encourage him to take action towards feeling better

- Focus on action: the best way is to support him to come up with solutions himself. Rather than simply telling him what to do. Or expecting him to have all the answers.
- A good way to do this is by making curious suggestions.

Examples:

“I wonder what it would be like to talk to your friends about some of this stuff”

“What would it be like to take a small break from social media?
Is there something you'd like to do instead?”

C

CHECK IN: Check in on how he is feeling after your chat

- Open conversations can be difficult as a young person, but modelling this is a good opportunity for him to practice emotional literacy and build emotional intelligence.
- Celebrate every conversation! Reinforce the idea that conversations are good even when they're difficult and re-affirm that you love chatting with him no matter what it's about.
- Let him know he can come to you.
- Let him fail – it's ok to let him stumble. He will learn how to get back up.
- Regularly checking in shows that you mean what you say - you're here to support them.