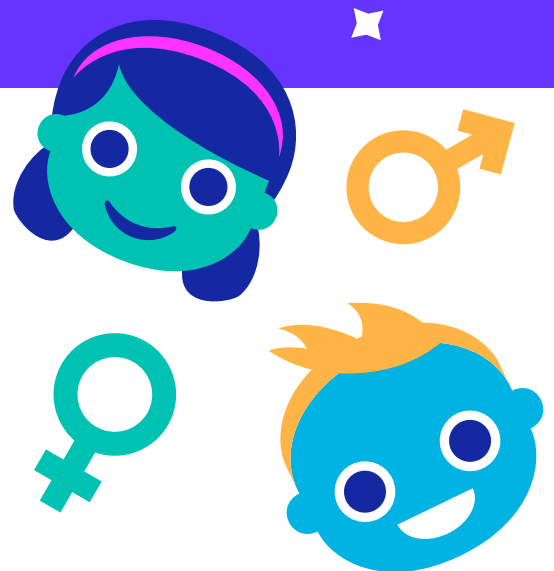**Ages 11–13**

Gender stereotypes online: what you need to know

If you've completed The Online Together Project skills tool or just want to learn more about the topic, this summary advice on gender stereotypes online can be a great help.

Use it as a learning tool together with friends or family to get more familiar with the topic and have meaningful conversations.

1. What is gender equality?

What you need to know

Gender equality is a human right that means that all genders have the same rights and opportunities and that all genders should be treated with respect. This could be to choose what games they want to play or what avatar they want to choose.

Did you know that gender equality is such an important goal, that even the United Nations is working to achieve gender equality and empower girls around the world?

When it comes to the online world, gender equality is important because it allows all groups of people to take advantage of the opportunities that the digital world can offer. For example, expressing their views and learning new skills to raising awareness of things they are passionate about.

It allows everyone to express their rights online on an equal basis and get the best out of their experience.

For parents & carers:

To help your child think about this in more practical terms, you may like to talk about the kind of jobs that people do and ask them whether they associate these to a particular group of people and why this is.

Discuss these questions

How important do you think it is to make sure everyone has the same rights and opportunities? Do you think that all groups of people online have the same opportunities? This could expressing themselves through a post or video online. If you do not agree, how do you think we could help everyone feel like they can be themselves online?

2. Which of these statements do you agree with?

What you need to know

Gender stereotypes are popular beliefs that a particular group of people should like, wear and do certain things, and in some cases are not allowed to like, wear and do other things because they do not fit the idea. For example, the belief that boys are better at online gaming, or that girls are better at taking selfies. It's important to remember that anyone can be good at anything regardless of who they are.

The online world should give everyone the same opportunity to explore their creativity, gain skills in what they like and be recognised for their achievement no matter who they are. Supporting others who do things that go against these stereotypes can be a great way to make it easier for everyone else to do the same.

For parents & carers:

To help your child think about gender stereotypes, consider calling out stereotypes when you see them in the media. Describe how gender stereotypes can make people feel limited or not 'normal' if they do not fit the images that other people think they should be.

Discuss these questions

Have you ever thought or believed a gender stereotype, like boys are better at gaming and girls are better posting selfies? Why? Why not?

3. Which of these statements is NOT a gender stereotype?

What you need to know

It can be tempting to oversimplify what groups of people do online by what you see, however, these ideas are considered as gender stereotypes rather than reflecting the real picture.

When you say 'all' it means that this is something you expect a group of people to do as a standard. This can create a barrier to your understanding of what this group of people can or should do.

Whatever you see people doing online no matter who they are, it is important to remember that people are unique and free to make choices about what they do without conforming to stereotypes.

For parents & carers:

To help your child think about these stereotypes in their digital world, ask them to look at how different groups of people are portrayed and talk about whether these are realistic or stereotypes. This could be characters in games, ads they have seen online or influencers they follow online.

Discuss these questions

What stereotypes do you see online? Do you think these stereotypes are old-fashioned? Why do you think they still exist today?

4. Which of these statements is NOT a stereotype in social media images?

What you need to know

If you are using social media made for kids or have reached the age when you can use the most popular platforms to connect with friends, it is important to think critically about the images, posts and people you follow.

Social media can be a great way of connecting and can also have many positive images and influences. But unfortunately, negative gender stereotypes can have an unhealthy influence on the expectations (or rules) that we put on different groups of people when we are online.

For parents & carers

If your child is active on social media, take some time to talk to them about what they post and how they feel about the images they see in their social feed. Discuss the pressure to post 'selfies' and encourage them to think critically about how realistic the 'expected' norm is for young people posting images of themselves no matter how they identify.

Visit the Social Media Hub for facts and advice on guiding your children and young people on social media.

You can also visit this resource for further reading: The Children's Society: How do gender roles and stereotypes affect young people?

Discuss these questions

Have you seen jokes or comments about someone's body or looks online? How did that make YOU feel? How do you think the person would feel knowing that they are being talked about?

5. Which of these statements is NOT a stereotype in advertisements?

What you need to know

Sometimes there are stereotypes in online and offline advertisements so it is important to use your critical thinking skills to see that an advertisement may be biased (to lean in a certain direction, either in favour of or against a particular thing).

For parents & carers:

One way to support them is use real life examples that you may have seen recently around you to start a conversation and get them thinking more deeply about how these can influence the way we see different groups of people online.

To help think critically about the things they see online, download our Online Critical Thinking Guide.

Discuss these questions

Do you think that advertising reflects our society? Why? Why not? If advertisements use lots of gender stereotypes, what does this say about our society?

6. What can I do if I spot someone online being hurt by gender-stereotypical language?

What you need to know

When you see someone being hurt online, it is not always easy to be an upstander - to stand up for the person being hurt.

Being an upstander is one of the best ways of offering support to someone being hurt as well as making a person stop posting hurtful content. Watch the Stop, Speak, Support video to learn more tips on how you can help others.

For parents & carers:

Empower children to take action if they see something that may be harmful to them or others online in a safe way. Ensure they know how to block and when to report things online. Additionally, have an open door policy to offer support to empower them to take positive action in supporting others online. See our Stop, Speak Support parent support page for more advice.

Discuss these questions

Have you ever seen someone being targeted by gender stereotypes and language online? What did you do? What do you think you can do better? If the situation were reversed, how would you want someone to support you?

7. You are playing an online game and a player makes a statement about another player saying 'You play like a girl'' what do you do?

What you need to know

It is tempting to just laugh it off, retaliate or do nothing when someone says this but it is important to know that it is not acceptable.

The more you hear these comments, the more it can influence you to think they are okay and persuade others that it is normal to believe these stereotypes. They can also make people in that group think they cannot or should not do something and become unhappy about it.

While they may seem harmless, they can have a hurtful impact.

For parents & carers:

It is important to talk to your child about the impact of their words online. While some things may be considered banter by one person, the same comment can cause others to have a negative view of themselves and their abilities. Use our Top internet Matters guide to help children think critically about how they interact with others online.

Discuss these questions

You have spotted one of your friends make an inappropriate joke about gender stereotypes online. How can you explain to them that their jokes are not funny?

8. Which of the following statements is NOT an example of gender roles?
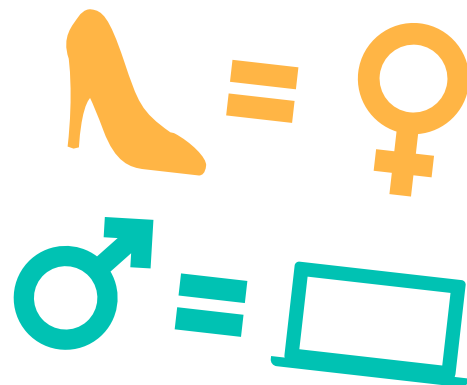
What you need to know

Gender roles describe the behaviour and attitudes that are designed as either masculine or feminine in a given culture.

For example, in some online games, characters will be designed to have certain skins or accessories that are linked to our culture's understanding of what is masculine and what is feminine.

Sometimes we think that people should act or dress a certain way, because of their gender. But stereotypes like that can cause unequal and unfair treatment. For example if someone receives a lot of negative comments online simply because they have posted something that is considered 'only for girls' like posting images wearing makeup or wearing a particular outfit.

For parents & carers:

Take time to discuss how your child understands culture norms of what is masculine and feminine and how they have come to that understanding (i.e. through online games they play, TV shows they watch, influencers they follow). Encourage them to look beyond someone's appearance whether online or offline before making assumptions about them.

Discuss these questions

What do you think about gender roles and gender stereotyping? How can you fight against gender stereotyping?

9. Which of the following is true?

What you need to know

Playing and being creative are important for your development. The online world allows you to express yourself in so many different ways. Just because you choose a profile picture that represents a popular toy, a celebrity or an animated character, does not mean this is a reflection of you

But play, creativity and imagination can allow you to think differently and that's what makes play so much fun. Also, it helps us to be more accepting of others' differences and celebrate them.

For parents & carers:

The online world allows children to express themselves in ways that can help them discover who they are and create an online identity. To give them the tools to do this safely and smartly take a look at our online identity series for top tips.
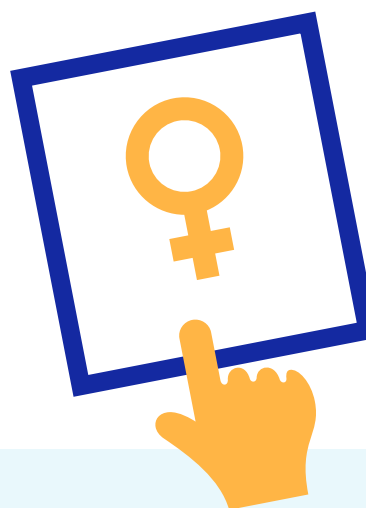
Discuss these questions

Imagine that you are leading a team to create a new app or game. What sort of skills do you think your team would need? Why is it important for the team to respect each other and their different strengths and weaknesses?
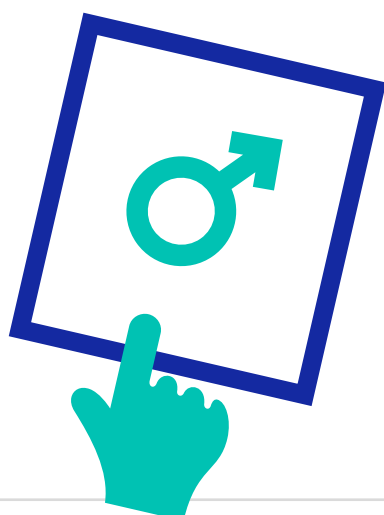
10. Consider the type of people you follow when online. Why do you follow them?

What you need to know

Online influencers have built a reputation and following based on their knowledge, expertise and skills in a specific area. Online influencers are people just like you and me, and they can have opinions and views that are positive and negative.

If you do not like or agree with their point of view, do not be afraid to share it in a safe place where your opinion will not be shut down.

It can be hard to be different and do your own thing if there is pressure from your friendship group to do something else but it is important to let your voice be heard.

For parents & carers:

If your child is engaging with influencer content online, it is important to ask questions and keep track of what impact this is having on them.

Influencer content may be harmless but staying engaged in what they consume will allow you to challenge any ideas that may not align with true facts.

You can also see our expert article to help children think critically about the social media influencers they follow.

Discuss these questions

Online influencers have a lot of power and responsibility towards their followers? Why? Why not?

Can you think of an example when an online influencer was a negative role model? A positive role model? Which do you prefer?