# The Online Together Project

Ages 14+

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.
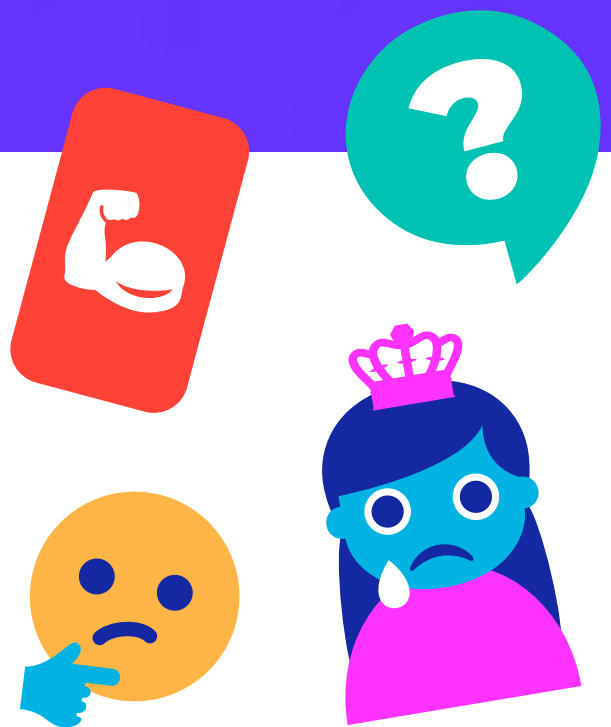
1. If someone online prefers not to state what sex they are, this means…

What you need to know

If you have met someone for the first time online and that person decides to keep certain aspects of their personal information private, particularly their gender, you should respect that. They might still be discovering who they are and not willing to share this with others or they may only want to share who they are with the people they trust most.

While meeting new people through online platforms has become the norm, it is important to note that people may have different reasons why they choose to share or not to share certain things about themselves.

No matter who someone is, it should not be used to put a limit on what they can do on and offline.

It is important to champion equality for everyone and allow people to have safe spaces to be who they want to be online.

For parents & carers:

As children get older and are more active online, it is likely that they will be interacting with people who they have not met in real life. If this is the case for your child, take some time to talk about the importance of protecting their personal information and considering other people's privacy.

Encourage young people to embrace gender equality in their online spaces. Being kind and considerate is key no matter how old they are.

You can also use the Media Smarts tip sheet on taking to children about gender stereotypes or Common Sense Media article on recognising harmful gender stereotypes.

Discuss these questions

The way that someone sees themselves as male, female, both or neither is the personal business of that person. Why is it important to respect someone's privacy and identity online?

2. When I play an online video game, I choose...

What you need to know

When choosing your avatar how much thought do you put into it? Do you choose an avatar that looks like you or a version of yourself or a stereotype of what other people think is beautiful? While it may seem trivial, what you see online can have an impact on how you see yourself and what you consider beautiful. If you are constantly looking at images real or animated that promote a certain type of beauty it can have an impact on how you see yourself and others.

It is important to remember that people are more than how they present themselves online and their value is not solely based on who they are or what their outward appearance looks like but a range of factors.

For parents & carers:

Online games can offer children a world of adventure to immerse themselves in, but it is important for children to not be exposed to gender stereotyping. If your child is a keen gamer, together try and find games that will expose them to a range of perspectives. See our amazing games guide to get started.

Discuss these questions

Do you tend to interact better online with people that look like you? If you are a gamer, do you prefer playing with people who are of a particular gender? Why do you think that is? Do you think there are certain groups of people that are better at certain things than others? If so, why?

3. On social media, it is better to post images so that...

What you need to know

When you look at your social feed, do you see trends that suggest that if you want to get a lot of likes you have to post specific types of images that reflect gender stereotypes, for example men with muscles? Do you think there is a lot of pressure to post these types of images? Does the need to be validated with likes and comments by friends or the wider public impact on how people post?

Social media gives you the opportunity to express who you want to be but can also influence you to conform to 'rules' which tell you what is acceptable and what is not.

It is important to remember to celebrate what makes you you and encourage others to do the same to create a safe space for self-expression.

For parents & carers:

Teens may not realize that they are learning (and conforming) sexist gender stereotypes that they see on social media. If your teen is active on social media, take some time to discuss how they feel about the ideals they see online when it comes to body image for different genders. Talk about how this can or is impacting the way they view people of different genders and discuss ways to ensure they stay true to who they are and celebrate others' differences in a positive way.

Discuss these questions

Do you think that social media has a powerful influence on children and young people? Why or why not? Is that influence positive or negative or both?

4. Which statement is NOT an example of gender stereotypes in video games?

What you need to know

The roles of males and females have been traditionally defined by society and today as the world has changed, these have also changed and expanded to recognise all groups of people.

No matter who you are, through our interactions online and offline it is important to remove the limitation that stereotypes affect people.

Anyone can do anything, be anything, regardless of their gender.

For parents & carers

While the digital world currently reflects some of these outdated stereotypes, talking to teens about how to recognise them and what they can do to promote gender equality through their interactions online can empower them to create a safer space for self-expression online.

Discuss these questions

Why do you think that movies, video games and stories show certain genders as weak and powerless, and others as strong and capable? If you grow up believing these stereotypes, what could happen when you are an adult?

5. Which of these statements do you often hear in popular music?

What you need to know

Popular music has become more expressive and musicians are sharing their views on many different subjects, however when lyrics are insulting or promote stereotypes, that's the time to reflect on what is being shared.

Simply taking the time to recognise how this type of media can influence your understanding of the world when it comes to who people are can help you think critically about how much this impacts how you interact with others on and offline.

For parents & carers:

Find some examples of popular songs that contain some stereotypes of genders and discuss with your teen how these statements can influence the way we perceive different genders.

Discuss these questions

Is listening to popular music important to you? What can you do if you hear certain types of people being insulted in a song? How do you think they feel when they hear those words?

6. When I see sexist, bullying or gender-harmful behaviour online, I...

What you need to know

Whether you stumble upon comments with harmful behaviour online or you are part of a messaging group and see harmful comments, it is important not to ignore them.

Where it is safe to do so, call it out (this could be if you know the person and are able to have a conversation about it). You can also report it and block those who are responsible for the comments (visit https://reportharmfulcontent.com/child/ to get support on reporting issues online). Be sure to reach out to a trusted adult or if you need to there are organisations like Childline that can support you on this.

If it is happening to someone else, you can support the person who is being targeted. Check out the Stop, Speak, Support online guidance created by and for young people to provide advice on how to support others online.

With so many people posting content online, it can be easy to just leave it or expect someone else to deal with it but, it is always best to take some action to remove it to discourage others from sharing harmful content and create a safer digital space for everyone.

For parents & carers:

As negative comments have become more prevalent online, it is important to support teens with the right information and skills to help them address these online. Encourage young people to block and report harmful comments and call them out when it is safe to do so. Make sure to regularly check-in with them about their interactions online to know when they need help to resolve a situation. See our range of social media how-to guides to help children take advantage of the available tools on the most popular platforms to stay safe.

To equip young people on how to challenge negative perceptions of gender online, you can use scenarios to get them thinking 'what they would do if' it happened in a particular context. This can help them build up their understanding and develop approaches they can use to tackle these issues online.

Discuss these questions

Have you ever seen or heard someone say something sexist or gender-harmful? What did you do? What can you do better the next time?

7. What is online disinhibition?

What you need to know

It may feel good to share things online that you might not share otherwise, but you need to think carefully about your online reputation and the potential impact on others when you share, post, comment or forward things online.

Make it a habit to post or comment on the same positive things that you would say in real life.

For parents & carers:

You can help children and young people understand the long-lasting effects of what they share. Empowering them to take control of how their online reputation is created is key. Visit our Online Reputation hub for more support.

Discuss these questions

Why do you think people act differently when they are online compared to how they act offline? Do you feel safer when you post or comment online?
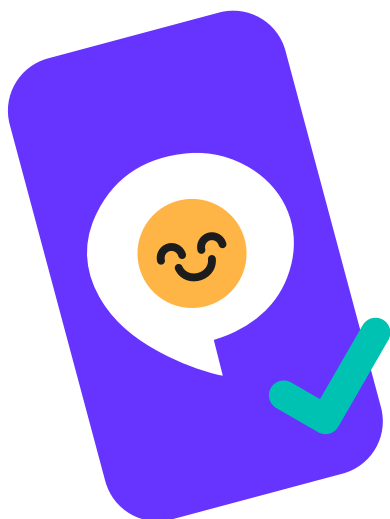
8. Spot the most appropriate response: My friend has sent me some juicy gossip about someone else's love life, before I share it I...

What you need to know

Chasing likes to gain popularity or feel accepted by a friendship group is tempting but can lead you to post and do things that you would not do offline and in some cases regret later on.

What you share online is a reflection of you. You should always think before you post content about yourself, as well as think before posting content about others.

For parents & carers:

Talk to your child about how and what they decide to share online. This will give you a starting point to encourage them to be more intentional about what they share online. Take a look at our expert article 'How can I encourage my child to share safely online?' for more guidance.

Discuss these questions

Why is it important to think twice about what you post and share online about yourself? About others?

9. When someone posts something I do not agree with I...

What you need to know

The internet can be a great place to exchange viewpoints and ideas, however it is important to only challenge an idea, never the person.

Although there is a lot of information online, platforms have been created to show us what we are most interested in. So, there can be times when some people may be exposed to the same type of content again and again because that is what the platform thinks they like. This means that they may only be hearing or seeing one side of a story which can impact on what they believe is true or fake.

Everyone is entitled to have their opinion and it is crucial to use critical thinking and analysis to question any potential fake news and misinformation online.

For parents & carers:

Talk to your child about why it is important to consider more than one viewpoint. Discuss the effect echo chambers online can have when we do not expose ourselves to other sources of information and just look at things that we agree with all the time. Exposing young people to a range of ideas can give them a clearer sense of empathy and a good insight to have informed discussions if they want to challenge ideas that may differ from their own.

If you are worried about your child's exposure to fake news and the impact this might have on their online safety, visit our Fake news and misinformation hub.

Also see our expert article 'What is the real world impact of online hate speech on young people'

Discuss these questions

How do you feel when someone posts something that you do not agree with? How do you feel when someone challenges you online?

Is it easy for you to challenge or question others respectfully? Do you know how to recognise healthy debate versus hate speech? Do you know how to deal with hate speech if you come across it online? Would you feel confident to mute, report or block someone if they said hurtful things to you?

10. When I choose to watch an online influencer, I choose...

What you need to know

Have you taken a moment to think about why you follow, like or replicate what your favourite influencers do? It is important to consider this as influencers can play a big impact on you both in positive and negative ways, based on what they believe and what they want their followers to do.

Next time you are scrolling through your favourite influencers' feed or watching their video or livestream, try to consider how their advice or beliefs are impacting what you do in your life on and offline. Is it positive or do you think it might be putting your wellbeing at risk?

For parents & carers:

No matter the platform that your child uses, there a number of things you can do to ensure that children develop critical thinking when choosing what videos to watch and what influencers to follow.

Get advice from our experts on the increasing impact of social media influencers on young people's lives and what you can do to ensure the influence of these individuals on your child stays positive.

Discuss these questions

What is the significance of online influencers in your life? Do their opinions, ideas and viewpoints influence your own?