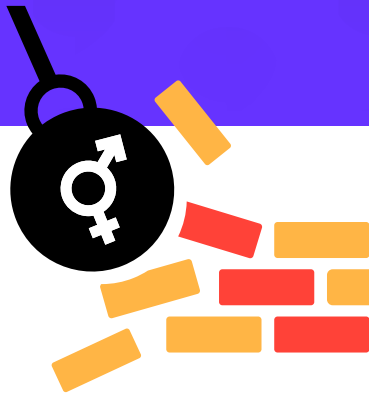


# Breaking down gender stereotypes

## Parent companion guide

Talking to your child about gender stereotypes they might see or hear online and in the media can help them recognise and stand up to it and make positive choices.



### Contents

- What you need to know
- [5 topics to discuss](#)
  - [How gender stereotypes appear online](#)
  - [The impacts of stereotyping others](#)
  - [How stereotypes can lead to hate](#)
  - [How to counter gender stereotypes](#)
  - [Supporting yourself and others](#)
- [Glossary of terms](#)

### What you need to know

- Many gender stereotypes are unconscious and a product of societal norms. For example, associating boys with blue and girls with pink is often done from infancy. As children grow, though, boys might be teased if they like pink because of this stereotype, which can impact their wellbeing and sense of self.
- Sex generally refers to biological characteristics based on reproductive organs while gender refers to an internal sense of who we are. These two characteristics might align or differ.
- Sexism can refer to stereotypes and negative treatment of people based on both sex and gender.
- Gender stereotypes can lead to sexism and hate (e.g. misogyny) both online and offline.
- Sexism and hate related to gender stereotypes can spread quickly online through algorithms that recommend content and create echo chambers.

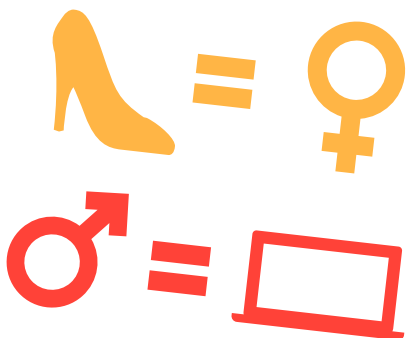
# 5 topics to discuss

## 1. How gender stereotypes appear online

**Gender stereotypes come in a range of formats online from off-handed comments to videos which promote stereotypes as truths.**

What your child sees or experiences online will depend on many factors, including their age, which platforms they use and what the algorithm suggests to them. This may look like:

- Memes being shared in chats between friends which make jokes out of stereotypes
- Comments that your child or other users make that repeat stereotypes they might have heard elsewhere (usually as a joke)
- Short videos which are snippets of longer videos where someone talks about gender roles or inequality
- Online games which treat male and female characters differently, such as men having realistic armour while women have revealing armour.



Together with your child, review their favourite platforms and the content which is suggested to them. Does the algorithm recommend harmful content? Do the influencers they follow share positive messages and attitudes? Are they seeing a balanced view of the world?

This is a great way to talk about the content they enjoy and discuss the importance of thinking critically about it. Encourage them to seek out content which shows a balanced view of the world and to remain mindful of the content they interact with.

## 2. The impacts of stereotyping others

**Gender stereotypes can affect children's mental health and wellbeing.**

For example, boys who are told not to show emotions play into the stereotype that men must be tough and only women can show feelings. This can mean boys keep feelings inside and look for support elsewhere – often online.

This can sometimes lead to misogyny or other forms of hate, as online communities can offer belonging but might also blame others for personal feelings. Talking to a parent, carer or trusted adult can help children engage with more positive communities instead.

When discussing gender stereotypes, check in with your child about their mental health. Ask how the content they watch makes them feel and if anything is bothering them.

Sometimes it's easier for children to open up if you're the one starting the conversation. Just remember to stay calm, no matter the topic, and let your child lead the conversation.



## 3. How stereotypes can lead to hate

Hate like misogyny or misandry usually starts with stereotypes. Stereotypes divide groups into 'me and people like me' and 'them and people like them'. This can make the 'other' seem less worthy of respect, care or understanding which makes it easier for hate to grow.

Talk to your child about how harmful stereotypes and hurtful words are shared online. Why might it feel easier to say something online than offline?

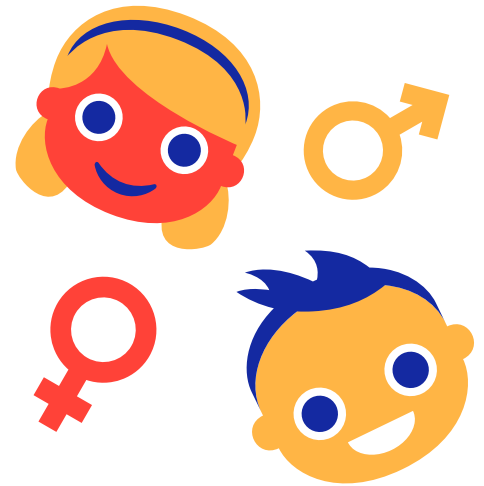
Discuss ways to prevent this. Highlight tools like block and report, curating content feeds, and talking to someone they trust about their feelings.

## 4. How to counter gender stereotypes

**The best way to counter gender stereotypes is to notice them in daily life. Examples include:**

- Assigning colours to boys or girls
- Using phrases like 'man up'
- Saying children can't do something because of their gender

Encourage your child and your family to be mindful of language. Allow children to explore activities traditionally associated with other genders to help them grow into well-rounded individuals. You can also join them in these activities to lead by example.



## 5. Supporting yourself and others

Talking to your child about standing up for themselves and others is important. This could include:

- Calling out stereotypes among friends
- Reporting harmful content online
- Reaching out to users being targeted with kind words
- Blocking or marking content as "not interested"
- Sharing factual information with sources (for children 14+) to counter misinformation

Creating space for your child to support themselves and others, and to share their experiences with you, can help them feel empowered to tackle stereotypes they see head-on.



# Glossary of terms

When you are introducing the concept of gender stereotypes to children, there might be complex words they don't understand, so it is important to take time to help them learn what they mean. Here is a short glossary of terms that can help explain some of these meanings.

## Algorithm

Rules a computer or programme follows to solve a problem. For example, on social media, [algorithms](#) study users' actions such as liking or commenting on content and then suggest related content users might like.

## Disinhibition

When someone acts without thinking about how others might be impacted. For example, on social media, many people say hateful things that they would never say to someone face-to-face. The lack of immediate feedback helps create disinhibition.

## Echo chamber

A result of [algorithms online](#) where users only see content that supports their views. For example, if someone 'likes' and comments on misogynist content, they will start to only see misogynist content, which will lead to them thinking that everyone shares those misogynist ideals.

## Equity

Some people might receive special accommodations so that they are equal to another person. This is equity. In other words, equality is giving everyone the same thing while equity is giving everyone what they need to access something in the same way as others. For example, a child who struggles to write with a pen or pencil at school might get a scribe or device to use instead so they can do the same work as other students.

## Gender

According to the [NHS](#), gender refers to an internal sense of who we are, how we see ourselves and how we describe ourselves. Gender can align with sex but can also be more fluid and may not align with sex at all.

## Gender equality

Regardless of our gender, everyone has the right to equality. This means that if there is gender equality, everyone, no matter their gender, has access to the same rights, treatment and opportunities as any other gender.

## Misandry

Generally, the hate or prejudice against boys and men. It means that men are treated poorly or miss out on opportunities because they are men. Misandry is sometimes misattributed to feminism, though the two are not related.

## Misogyny

The hate or prejudice against girls and women. Some online communities join together because of their misogynistic views. [For example](#), incels (involuntary celibates) blame women for their trouble getting girlfriends while MGTOW (men going their own way) believe that women are so toxic that men should avoid them altogether and won't even have friendships with women.

## Non-binary

A gender identity that doesn't align to either male or female sex.

## Sex

According to the [NHS](#), sex is a biological characteristic based on reproductive organs. Generally, it refers to 'male' and 'female' sexes and is something assigned at birth.

## Sexism

The prejudice or discrimination based on someone's sex. It might sometimes apply to gender as well. It generally results in poor treatment of others based on stereotypes.

## Stereotype

A widely held but oversimplified image or idea of a person or group of people. It can negatively impact people's images of themselves. 'Boys need to be tough' or 'girls are too sensitive' are examples of stereotypes which are not true.

