

Imagine a Man

Positive Masculinity

Background

Positive masculinity benefits everyone

Talking about positive masculinity promotes healthier gender norms and create a more equitable and inclusive society. Positive masculinity benefits everyone.

In 2021 No Knives, Better Lives explored what it was like to be a boy or young man in Scotland today. The purpose of the research was to develop and deepen our understanding of how young people felt about masculinity and growing up, and whether there was early evidence of the impact of cultural and social norms around masculinity on risk taking and violent behaviour. As a result of this work we started to use the term positive masculinity.



Context

Why it matters – a crisis of masculinity?

Men are failing to flourish. If we examine the evidence around men’s mental health, attainment levels and suicide rates we can see that men are doing badly. For a long time, we have known that harmful masculinity has been a driver of violence. Men are far more likely

to be both the victims and perpetrators of violent acts, including knife crimes. Men have poorer physical and mental health than women and poorer overall outcomes. Where masculinity intersects with poverty these outcomes are even worse.



Suicide is the biggest killer of men under 45 in the UK



Three quarters of all suicides are male



43% of men admit to feeling worried or low



10% of men admit to having suicidal thoughts



Men in deprived areas are 10x more at risk of suicide than those in affluent areas



89% of convictions for handling offensive weapons are men



75% of the victims of violence are men



Boys have had worse exam results than girls for 30 years



Men make up 95% of the prison population

What is Needed

Reframe the narrative

Politicians and policy makers need to stop using the term 'toxic' masculinity to describe the behaviour of boys and young men

Labelling boys and young men (predominantly working class boys and young men) as 'toxic' is not supported by either an evidence or a rights-based approach. Using the term simply alienates and demonises young people who are already disadvantaged without seeking to address the causes of harmful masculinity. If you must, then use the word 'harmful' instead.

Talk up positive masculinity

Give boys and young men a version of 'feminism' they can get behind – fill the void that harmful influencers fill

When boys and young men don't have a vision to believe in, or a language to express themselves or their aspirations, then 'toxic' influencers fill the void. Share positive news stories that support the aspirations of boys and young men. Make positive masculinity a 'thing'.

Teach positive masculinity

Include positive masculinity in the curriculum – make it a 'right' that boys and young men are taught about positive masculinity

Make it a 'right' for all boys and young men to have brave spaces to discuss their masculinity, challenge harmful stereotypes and work out their ideals and aspirations about manhood. Allow boys and young men the place, the time and space to learn about empathy, caring, humour and strength in a supportive environment.

Model and support positive masculinity to those at most risk

Maintain and invest in a dedicated fund for youth workers to work specifically with boys and young men in disadvantaged communities

Youth workers can offer strong protective factors to mitigate the risk of boys and young men acting out with harmful traits. Youth work has been starved of funding – support, fund and develop more youth workers (of all genders) to support boys and young men and to act as positive role models in communities more at risk from harmful masculinity.

Follow the evidence

Fund more research on the impact of positive masculinity on male behaviour

Gather intelligence that supports the adoption of a narrative and curriculum on positive masculinity and how that impacts on everyone, not just boys and young men. If boys and young men understand and can articulate what positive masculinity is, then they are going to have the knowledge and confidence to withstand and reject harmful behaviours. It will benefit mental, physical health and allow boys and young men to flourish.

