

~~No knives~~
Better lives

Imagine a Man

TOOLKIT

Building positive
masculinity with
young people



#IaM

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Using this Resource

This resource is split into 4 sections:

Thinking it Through

This section is all about thinking it through:

In this section we set the scene and say why this work is important. You can read a shortened version of the original research as well as find out how we co-produced this resource with young people. We make the case for delivering both universal and targeted work on positive masculinity.

Getting Started

This section is all about getting started:

In this section we ask the question 'what is positive masculinity'? This can be the ultimate starting point of a programme with young people. We explore the importance of creating Brave Spaces for young people to explore positive masculinity.

Making it Work

This section is all about making it work:

In this section we analyse the role of the facilitator and look at building a secure foundation to explore positive masculinity. We talk about the scaffolding and the importance of the following; mattering, strength, humour connecting, caring, respect and flourishing.

Passing it On

This section is all about going beyond the scope of your initial programme:

In this section we look at what the next steps might be. We look at telling positive stories and influencing others beyond the scope of the project. We encourage practitioners to support young people to spread the word about positive masculinity. We want to support and encourage a ripple effect that leads to positive masculinity being accepted as the social and cultural norm.

You can
ADAPT
or **INVENT**
activities

You can deliver
activities
IN ANY ORDER

Young people
choose to
take part and
it's **BEST IF**
THEY LEAD

RESPECTFUL
CONVERSATIONS
and **TIME FOR**
REFLECTION
are key

Encourage a
RIPPLE EFFECT

Useful Terminology

What is gender?

Gender is often referred to as a construct because it is a social and cultural concept that is created and reinforced (much like a structure or a building) through societal norms, expectations, and beliefs about what it means to be male or female.

How is this different from biological sex?

Gender is different from biological sex, which refers to the different biological and physiological characteristics of females, males and intersex persons, such as chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs.

What is masculinity?

Masculinity is defined as qualities and attributes regarded as characteristic of men. When we talk about masculinity, we're talking about a person's gender.

What are cultural and social norms?

Social and cultural norms are rules or expectations of behaviour and thoughts based on shared beliefs within a specific cultural or social group. While often unspoken, norms offer social standards for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour that govern what is (and is not) acceptable in interactions among people.

What is hegemonic masculinity?

Hegemonic masculinity refers to more traditional forms of masculinity that emphasise traits such as being tough, not showing emotions, being the provider and being strong and aggressive.

What is intersectionality?

Intersectionality is the concept that individuals face overlapping systems of oppression and discrimination based on their intersecting identities, such as gender, race, class, and sexuality. When it comes to masculinity, intersectionality can have both positive and negative impacts.



Thinking it Through



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Introduction

“ Feminism has done a huge amount of good in the world. We now need its corollary – a positive vision of masculinity that is compatible with gender equality ”

- RICHARD V. REEVES 2022

Doing more for boys and young men does not require us to abandon our ideal of gender equality, rather it extends it.

When we started our project on boys and young men, we had just come to the end of one that examined the role of inspirational women. But what of the inspirational men? Where were the positive role models that exemplified a positive version of masculinity? Why was it that the advocates of harmful versions of masculinity were so prevalent on social media? Why was violence so overwhelmingly a male activity? Why were suicide rates so high, mental health rates so poor, and grades so low? In essence, were the boys okay?

To find out, we asked young people what it was like to be a boy or a young man in Scotland in the here and now. And it turns out that actually the boys were 'mostly'

doing fine. But importantly, some were not doing so well, particularly those where masculinity intersected with poverty. Young people had heard of and understood what 'toxic' masculinity was but had never heard of 'positive' masculinity and they struggled to identify positive role models.

Young people really needed and wanted to talk about masculinity. They desperately wanted to explore what is to be male in today's society. They required space to have difficult and challenging conversations with each other and with trusted practitioners. They wanted to talk about damaging and harmful stereotypes and how those impacted on relationships.

As a result of participating in the project Imagine a Man young people developed a better understanding of themselves and others through respectful and transformative dialogue. The results are interpreted, compiled and shared here.

This resource is our contribution towards developing a continuing understanding of what constitutes positive masculinity. It is important because it attempts to define the role of men in society in a way that we believe to be aspirational. Above all we want boys and young men to be optimistic for the future and to flourish.

- VICKI RIDLEY and AMY CALDER



VICKI RIDLEY
NKBL Senior Development Officer



DR AMY CALDER
Senior Policy & Research Officer

About No Knives Better Lives

No Knives, Better Lives, run by [YouthLink Scotland](#), works in partnership with young people and practitioners to understand and address the drivers of youth violence within a sustainable public health model, focused on primary and secondary prevention.

Through the programme, adults working with young people in Scotland receive professional training on youth violence prevention and access to a range of high-quality resources with the ambition of reducing youth violence and supporting young people to fulfil their potential.

For more information visit [No Knives Better Lives](#).

Steering Group

The Steering Group for Year Two of the project Imagine a Man consisted of:

- **VICKI RIDLEY** - No Knives, Better Lives, YouthLink Scotland
- **DR AMY CALDER** - YouthLink Scotland
- **PROFESSOR ROSS DEUCHAR** - University West of Scotland
- **SUE BROOKES** - Scottish Prison Service
- **COLIN MACFARLANE** - YMCA Scotland
- **DR EMMA DAVIDSON** - University of Edinburgh
- **GAVIN CROSBY** - Young Scot
- **DOUGLAS GUEST** - Circle

The Pilot Groups

The Pilot Groups for Year Two of the project Imagine a Man consisted of:

Shetland: The Open Project

Dundee: Education Support Officer for Dundee Council, a Health Promotion Officer for NHS Tayside and police officer for Police Scotland

Glasgow: Royston Youth Action

Why this work is relevant

✓ It is Rights-based

The policy context surrounding masculinities work requires us to be both intentional and pro-active in our work aimed at reducing negative outcomes for boys and young men. All children and young people under 18 have a right to live free from violence, to survive and develop, and importantly, to be heard on the issues that affect them. Fundamentally that means we as adults have a duty to ensure, to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of boys and young men so they can realise their full potential.



The Convention on the Rights of The Child (UNCRC):

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child establishes protections to which children under the age of 18 are entitled. The Convention established state obligations to ensure that all children's rights are realised. The protection of children and young people from violence is a fundamental right enshrined in the Convention.

- **Article 2**
Is applied to everyone without discriminating on the basis of other characteristics
- **Article 12**
Has views listened to in matters that affect them and have them taken seriously
- ★ **Article 19**
Is protected from violence and requires government signatories to do all that they can to ensure that young people are protected from all forms of violence.
- **Article 29**
Has access to transformative education
- **Article 39**
Receives support to recover from trauma
- **Article 40**
Is treated with dignity and respect if involved in the justice system

✓ It is Evidence-based

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. In 2017 following an in-depth analysis of Police Scotland's statistics from all areas it was discovered that men are more likely to both carry knives and be the victims of knife carrying.

It was these statistics that made us want to further understand the pressures facing boys and young men to behave in certain ways that could potentially lead both to violence and repeat victimisation. We understand however, that the issue is complex and intersects with other drivers such as poverty and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

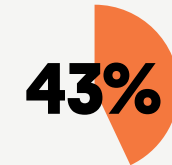
In addition we were aware of additional evidence that boys and young men were failing to flourish. Male suicide rates remain much higher for men than for women.



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



Three quarters of all suicides are male



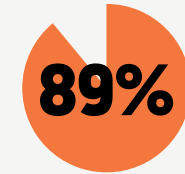
43% of men admit to feeling worried or low



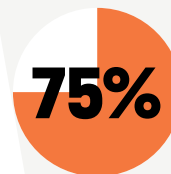
10% of men admit to having suicidal thoughts



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



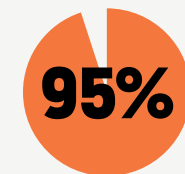
89% of convictions for handling offensive weapons are men



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

✓ **It advocates a Youth Work approach**

No Knives Better Lives, as part of YouthLink Scotland advocates using a youth work approach. This doesn't mean that you have to be a formally trained youth worker, but we do expect that you would be guided in your prevention work with young people by the principles of youth work.

✓ **It is Trauma-informed**

Trauma-informed is the term used to describe an approach to care and services that takes into account the potential impact of traumatic experiences on individuals in terms of physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

A trauma-informed approach involves creating a safe and supportive environment that allows individuals to feel empowered and in control of their experiences. It also involves promoting resilience and recovery and minimising the risk of re-traumatisation.

✓ **It is Assets/Strengths based**

The terms 'strengths' and 'assets' are often used interchangeably to apply to either individuals or communities. We recommend thinking about 'strengths and asset-based approaches' in relation to both individuals and communities. Starting with strengths and assets can make things less daunting and help us realise what already exists in communities.

Youth work in Scotland is characterised by 3 essential and distinctive features:

1. Young people choose to participate. This means that young people take part voluntarily. They can decide whether or not they walk away. This is why it's important to get buy-in from your participants and also to make sure your activities are interesting and fun.
2. The work must build from where young people are at. This means acknowledging their own experiences and building out an agenda from there. This will ensure your discussions take into account young people's lived experiences.
3. Young people and youth workers are partners in the learning process. The young person is an active partner who can determine the direction of discussion and influence the agenda. Youth workers can also learn from the lived experience of young people.

Personal strengths and assets:

- Relationships (friends, parents, community)
- Lived Experience (good and bad)
- Skills
- Aspirations
- Hope for the future

Community strengths and assets:

- Place
- Space
- People
- Tools

The Context

Baseline data and intelligence gathering to understand the experiences of boys and young men in Scotland

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 [Imagine a Man Full Report](#) 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. This is also the story of how we started to use the term **positive masculinity**.

We were a little surprised at the high level of interest shown amongst young people of all genders in taking part in this research. This showed us that they viewed this as an important subject and that boys and young men really wanted to talk about it.

1230 young people across Scotland completed a survey, 25 young people took part in focus groups and 5 adult practitioners were interviewed.

The themes explored included stereotypes and expectations, risky behaviour, community and relationships, ideal futures and support needed to explore what masculinity meant.

Because violence is predominantly a male experience (as they are much more likely than women to be both perpetrators and victims of violent acts) we wanted to find out when, where and who could make a positive intervention. We also wanted to get a sense from boys and young men themselves, exactly how they reflected on the pressures to conform to gender stereotypes and how this impacted on them as individuals. Therefore, the resulting report addressed primarily the male experience of violence and analysed their understanding of risk and protective factors.

We embarked on this research assuming that boys and young men would tell us that their experiences were a story of conforming to negative stereotypes, feeling inhibited about asking for support which might show them up as being 'weak' and of anger



▲ [Imagine a Man: What is it like to be a boy or young man in Scotland in 2021?](#)



management and risk-taking behaviours escalating due to peer pressure. We were mostly wrong about this assumption.

The story we heard from all genders was a much more positive one. It is true that boys and young men do feel cultural and societal pressures to conform to stereotypes, but they are very aware of this. In our survey boys and young men from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds were able to reflect on their experience and demonstrate a deep awareness of what constituted undue 'negative' pressure.

Boys and young men demonstrated that they placed great value on what in the past have been considered as 'feminine' traits such as being caring. However, they were aware of pressures to behave negatively and what constituted these pressures.

The survey showed that boys were more likely than girls to engage in risk taking behaviours that could be seen as pre-cursors to an escalation to violence. However, the vast majority did not. Culture change and social norms are inextricably linked and the signs there are very encouraging.

Boys and young men demonstrated a willingness to talk about their feelings but were often thwarted in this by lack of space or relevant people willing to create and facilitate this space. Practitioners shared with us their lack of knowledge and confidence in talking about masculinity, but that it was necessary and important to their work. This seems to indicate that there is a gap to create practitioner resources to help practitioners feel more confident in discussing masculinity.

The research created an undeniable shift in our thinking and the way we frame the discussion about masculinity and its relationship with violence. We hear a lot about a version of harmful masculinity sometimes referred to as toxic masculinity. This is not the way we want to start the discussion about behaviour and gender stereotypes and rather falls into the negative trope of seeing men as a problem to be fixed.

This was the moment when we started to talk about **positive masculinity** and what would that look like for young people.

From our discussions with all young people from all genders, the problem is not with individuals but with a lack of **space, place and person** to talk through these things. Growing up without these things, with antisocial behaviour as the cultural norm is where things get trickier for boys and young men. It's there we need practitioners to hold these discussions about what constitutes a **positive masculinity** and create those safe spaces to talk openly to young people.



In summary, here's what we concluded:

What it's like to be a boy or young man in Scotland is more positive than expected, because:

- Though some gender expectations existed, boys and young men on the whole were not defined by them and were reflective about their impact
- The majority of boys and young men were not taking part in risky behaviour and did not feel pressured by their friends to do so
- The majority would share their worries with an adult in their life.

In a positive future for boys and young men:

- They were seeking stability and security for their futures through owning their own homes, earning a lot of money and having a partner or being married
- They would like everyone to be equal and not to have stereotypes about what it is to be a boy or young man in Scotland.

Creating a culture for masculinity to flourish would include:

- **Safe spaces** for young people to explore and understand masculinity
- A move away from binary notions of **gender** to viewing gender on a spectrum
- Sharing more **positive stories** of masculinity
- More **funding for youth work** as a safe space to have these discussions
- **Adult role models** for boys and young men to learn about positive masculinity including from women in their lives.

Our Approach

Co-producing a 'positive masculinity' approach by, with and for boys and young men

The results of the research from the first year of **Imagine a Man** provided us with a broad breadth of understanding of what it was like to be a boy or a young man living in Scotland. This was a useful snapshot but didn't give us the full picture. The second year aimed at providing more depth to our understanding, with a particular emphasis on what exactly does '**positive masculinity**' mean to young people.

Three youth groups based in **Dundee, Glasgow and Shetland** were supported to conduct research on what positive masculinity means in their schools and communities.

The youth workers and practitioners from each group were trained in youth-led research to support young researchers. The training included how to write research questions, data collection methods, analysis, dissemination and ethical considerations. As this was a youth-led research approach the young people had complete flexibility about how to conduct their research and share their findings.

They were provided with some guidance

research questions which they could adapt to their interests. These included:

- What is positive masculinity?
- What are the opportunities and barriers for young people to develop positive masculinity?
- What conditions are needed for young people to develop positive masculinity (place/space/people)?

These research questions were formed as a response to the year 1 research and where the gaps were identified. Interestingly, all of the three groups focused only on the first question around defining positive masculinity. This was because the young researchers themselves had little understanding about what positive masculinity is and what it means to them, so they chose to focus their research on exploring this.



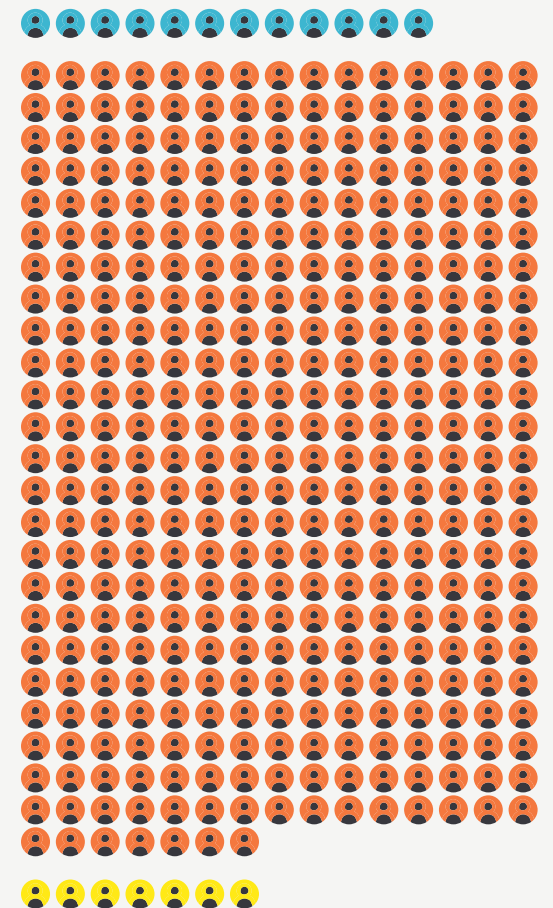
12 youth researchers engaged



367 young people surveyed



7 adult workers supported the process



Dundee

This project was supported by a partnership between an Education Support Officer for the Council, a Health Promotion Officer for the NHS and a Police Officer. They supported 5 young men aged 16-17 who were an established friendship group, based in a school in Dundee. Though the young men knew each other well they did not know the practitioners, who felt that they were being invited into their space. The young men were chosen as they were identified by a teacher as being articulate, mature and role models to their peers. After building trust and establishing a relationship with the group the practitioners supported the young researchers to explore positive masculinity. This was a new concept

to the group and something they were keen to explore. They decided to distribute an online survey to young people across Dundee (completed by 137 young people) and conduct focus groups (attended by 5 young men).

Dundee is an area of high deprivation, health inequalities, high drug deaths and the highest rate of youth incarceration in Scotland. As such, a holistic approach was taken, which meant that by focusing on positive masculinity could have a positive impact on some of these wider social, health and justice issues being experienced.

Glasgow

Two youth workers from Royston Youth Action supported 5 young men aged 15-17 years. The youth workers had worked with these young men before and so had an established relationship with them. The young men were approached to take part due to their diversity – some came from families on benefits, other more affluent families, some had come to Glasgow as asylum seekers, and some were from the LGBT community. The young men knew each other before the project but were not close friends. They had been part of other projects and groups including on issues such as gender-based violence. Given the diversity of the group it was seen as

a good opportunity for the young men to work together and hear others' views. To help build these relationships and with funding from the Glasgow Children's Holiday Scheme they started the project with a residential.

Royston is an area of high deprivation and has a strong multi-cultural community, where over 60 different languages are spoken. The young men attended a Catholic school and chose to conduct their research in the school. A survey was distributed to S4-S6 pupils and teachers were interviewed.

Shetland

An experienced youth worker and a volunteer led the research from the OPEN Project in Shetland. They chose to take the lead in running focus groups with young people, to learn their views and to introduce them to the concept of positive masculinity.

21 young people took part in focus groups with the youth worker and volunteer. The young people were aged 14-18 and mainly lived in central Shetland. The majority were young women, one of the focus groups did take place with young men, and trans men and gender fluid young people. Some care experienced young people took part. The youth worker wanted to showcase positive masculinity in the community. He felt that young men need to be given a chance to be positive and be thought

of as positive. These views existed before this project but being part of Imagine a Man provided an opportunity to focus on this.

Lerwick where the research took place is seen as the 'toon' – there is an 'us and them' mentality between people from the 'toon' and those living outside. Though tech has better connected people across Shetland there is still a divide. This can be seen in different dress and even different accents. Many will have chosen to take part in the focus groups because they wanted to be part of positive change and take part in a discussion they don't usually have an opportunity to have. Some will have joined because of some of the incentives – pizza and tokens.



Flipping the Script

Reframing the narrative from 'Toxic' Masculinity to 'Positive' Masculinity

"Flipping the script" Shetland worker

A lot of people, especially young men do not like the proximity of the word 'toxic' next to the word masculinity with its negative connotations. Yet it has come to be a term of reference that is used to describe a plethora of 'bad' behaviour from men. It is also a very recognisable term. However, it's not a good definition – we don't want to promote non-toxic masculinity and such limited and limiting terms of reference, we want to talk about **positive masculinity** and what it means to flourish.

A very societal harmful response to tackling youth violence is to demonise young people and it could be argued that labelling masculinity as 'toxic' is merely part of this equation.

In year two of our research across all the pilot areas, we found that most young people had heard of the term 'toxic' masculinity but had not even heard of the term 'positive masculinity'.



CASE STUDY



Positive masculinity at Royston Youth Action

For the young men at Royston Youth Action where positive masculinity was a new concept, they used their research to reflect on what positive masculinity meant to them.

“Positive masculinity I believe is having confidence in yourself and always having good feelings about yourself”

- YOUNG RESEARCHER, ROYSTON YOUTH ACTION

“I think positive masculinity is having healthy friendships with other males and being strong and being able to support one another, to be able to show emotion and being a good role model for other young men growing up to support them with their mental health and how to grow up a respectful, happy man and not to let society criticise them and don't let anything stop them from achieving greatness”

- YOUNG RESEARCHER, ROYSTON YOUTH ACTION

“I believe that there is not one answer to what is positive masculinity but there is multiple answers depending on who you are and if we were all to spread a little bit of kindness and respect for one another then positive masculinity would be spread to one another as a side effect of that”

- YOUNG RESEARCHER, ROYSTON YOUTH ACTION

The young men from Royston Youth Action produced a podcast where they discussed positive masculinity. We were struck with how they respected and listened to each other, modeling their own version of positive masculinity in the process.



▼ Imagine a Man
Podcast and Script
soundcloud.com/youthlink-scotland/imagine-a-man-podcast-royston-youth-action

CASE STUDY



Forming new partnerships to explore positive masculinity in Shetland

When advertising the opportunity for young people in Shetland to take part in focus groups on social media, Shetland Women's Aid shared the post and highlighted it as an important piece of work. Shetland Radio saw this exchange and invited the youth workers and Women's Aid to be interviewed at the station, [which can be heard here at 13.50 minutes](#). This has helped establish a positive relationship between youth work and Shetland Women's Aid and they invited the youth worker to take part in White Ribbon Day.

"We've had lots in the media recently particularly over the last year about toxic masculinity, so we want to try and flip the script and try and speak about what is positive masculinity...what could be promoting positive masculinity in the community, what hinders it and what barriers there are"

- YOUTH WORKER, SHETLAND

"The issue is so so important, that's why I was so excited to see everyone at the OPEN Project taking this conversation on. In our society there are so many pressures to subscribe to certain gender roles, stereotypes and characteristics and it's really important to see a positive spin put on masculinity"

- SHETLAND WOMEN'S AID

"It's a conversation what needs to continue...we don't need these prescribed gender roles and characteristics and being able to promote positive masculinity and traits like kindness and empathy...that's for everybody and this is just the start of that conversation"

- SHETLAND WOMEN'S AID



Using a Universal Approach (All genders)

Delivering work on 'positive masculinity' with all genders

Universal and primary prevention targets everyone – in the case of masculinity work or discussions about gender, this means working alongside both boys and young men and girls and young women.

Universal prevention can be less stigmatising than targeted prevention because it does not single out specific individuals or groups for intervention. Instead, universal prevention strategies are designed to promote positive behaviours and attitudes across an entire population or community (such as a school). By taking a universal approach, the focus is on changing the environment and creating a culture where violence is not acceptable, rather than targeting certain individuals or groups as being "at risk."

The almost exclusive focus on universal discussions about gender in the past has been the prevention of gender-

based violence (GBV). This has resulted in an avoidance of discussing the interconnectedness of the drivers of violence and has largely ignored young men's violence against other young men. This does not however need to be the case, and with a better understanding of how to prompt discussion about the many facets of what constitutes a 'positive masculinity' practitioners can facilitate a better mutual understanding across all genders.

By bringing an awareness to 'positive masculinity' and by involving girls and young women alongside boys and young men, discussions can be less about the 'toxicity' of negative stereotypes and more about aspirations and hopes for the future and how best to achieve these. However, talk would also need to include discussions about femininity and the cultural impacts of expectations and stereotypes for girls and young women as well.





The advantages of a Universal approach

- **Developing awareness:** Talking about gender can help both girls and boys become more aware of the ways in which gender expectations and negative stereotypes can impact on developing a positive sense of self. This awareness can help them identify and challenge sexist attitudes and behaviours in themselves and others.
- **Increasing empathy:** By discussing their shared and different experiences and perspectives, girls and boys can develop empathy for each other and better understand how gender expectations and stereotypes affects individuals differently
- **Promoting respect:** Engaging in respectful conversations about gender can promote a culture of mutual respect and understanding between girls and boys. This can help create a more inclusive and equitable environment for everyone.
- **Building allyship:** Boys who talk about the relationship that gender stereotypes have with everyday sexism and misogyny with girls can become allies and support girls in their efforts to challenge sexism in all its forms. Girls, in turn, can learn to support boys who may also be affected by gender stereotypes and expectations.
- **Creating opportunities for learning:** Engaging in conversations can help both girls and boys better understand and appreciate the diversity of gender experiences and identities that exist in society.



CASE STUDY

Using a Universal Approach in Shetland

Exploring positive masculinity was a new concept for the youth workers in Shetland. So, they decided to find out where young people were at in their understanding of it through focus groups. They decided to not just focus the conversation with young men, but to instead chat to young people across the gender spectrum including trans men, gender fluid young people and young women. The intention with this approach was to create a ripple effect for discussions in the wider community about positive masculinity.

Using a Targeted Approach (Boys and young men)

Delivering work on 'positive masculinity' with boys and young men

Targeted and secondary prevention work means working with a particular group or community - in the case of masculinity work or discussions about gender, this means working only with both boys and young men.

Targeted prevention work with only boys and young men can be highly beneficial in developing a space where supportive relationships can develop and grow and where there is time and space to discuss significant issues around masculinity without girls and young women being present.

The advantages of a Targeted approach

- **Encourages openness and vulnerability:** Boys and young men may feel more comfortable discussing their thoughts and feelings about masculinity in a single-gender setting, as they may be less concerned about being judged or misunderstood by girls and young women. This can allow for more open and vulnerable conversations about the topic.
- **Provides a safer space for self-exploration:** Boys and young men can focus on their own experiences and perspectives without feeling like they need to cater to the expectations or opinions of the opposite gender. This can create a safer space for self-exploration and reflection.

- **Allows for more pointed discussions:** When boys and young men are the primary focus of the discussion, the conversation can be tailored to their specific experiences and challenges i.e., expectations of getting involved in fights. This can allow for more targeted and effective discussions about the specifics of masculinity.

In year one, the focus groups with boys and young men flagged a very significant insight - boys and young men wanted a single gender space to talk about masculinity. This was something that they currently didn't have and the feedback was about how much they appreciated this dedicated time and space to explore what being a boy or young man meant to them. When it came to year 2, the three youth groups were given the option of whether to only work with young men, two of the groups chose to take this approach.

CASE STUDY

 **Working with young men in Dundee**

The young men in Dundee through their research created their own identity MENDING Mindsets, with the tag line 'wave the stereotypes away'. These young men initially had an interest in exploring mental health and through exploring masculinities deepened their understanding of the impact of expectations and stereotypes on mental health. The young men took the lead in the focus groups and the discussions with other young men reinforced the need for more safe spaces for young men to explore masculinity. The young people in the focus group also expressed an interest in being part of the work moving forward. The young men see this research as a step in the right direction to make things better for other young people. The hope is that the young men will further develop the MENDING Mindsets identity.

CASE STUDY

 **Working with young men in Glasgow**

Working only with young men in Glasgow led to this idea of creating brave spaces for young men to explore masculinity. As the young men were not an established group of friends, led the youth workers to organise a residential at the beginning of the project. At the residential the young men were supported to have challenging conversations about what masculinity meant to them, the impact of influencers, use of language and mental health. One young man shared that having this space to discuss mental health at the residential has led him to check in on his friends more, be more open about his own mental health and wellbeing and at the residential was the first time he had told his friends that he loved them.

Intersectionality

Masculinity is impacted and impacts other cultural and socio-economic identities

Gender is hierarchical and produces inequalities that intersect with other social and economic inequalities. Gender-based discrimination intersects with other factors of discrimination, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, age, geographic location, gender identity and sexual orientation, among others. This is referred to as intersectionality. (World Health Organisation)

Intersectionality is the concept that individuals face overlapping systems of oppression and discrimination based on their intersecting identities, such as gender, race, class, and sexuality. When it comes to masculinity, intersectionality can have both positive and negative impacts.

Intersectionality can provide a more nuanced understanding of how different aspects of masculinity intersect with other identities and experiences. For example, a black man's experiences of masculinity may



be influenced by both racism and sexism, leading to a unique set of challenges that are not present for white men. Similarly, a boy or young man from a housing scheme's experiences of masculinity may be very different from those of a boys or young man from an affluent area.

Intersectionality can also help us understand how certain aspects of masculinity contribute to oppression and discrimination towards other marginalised groups. For example, harmful masculinity, which is characterised by rigid and harmful

stereotypes of masculinity, can perpetuate sexism, homophobia, and transphobia, among other forms of discrimination. Men who are members of multiple marginalised groups may face additional barriers to challenging and changing these harmful aspects of masculinity.

Ultimately, intersectionality can help us better understand the complex ways in which masculinity is impacted by multiple systems of oppression and privilege. By taking an intersectional approach to masculinity, we can work towards creating more inclusive and equitable definitions of masculinity that acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of all experiences and identities.

The young people involved in the research all brought their different identities. The research by the young men from Royston Youth Action found that 75% of young people felt that race, education, religion and ethnicity were all factors that affected positive masculinity.

One of the young men from Royston Youth Action shared his reflections on the research process. This can be viewed on YouTube.

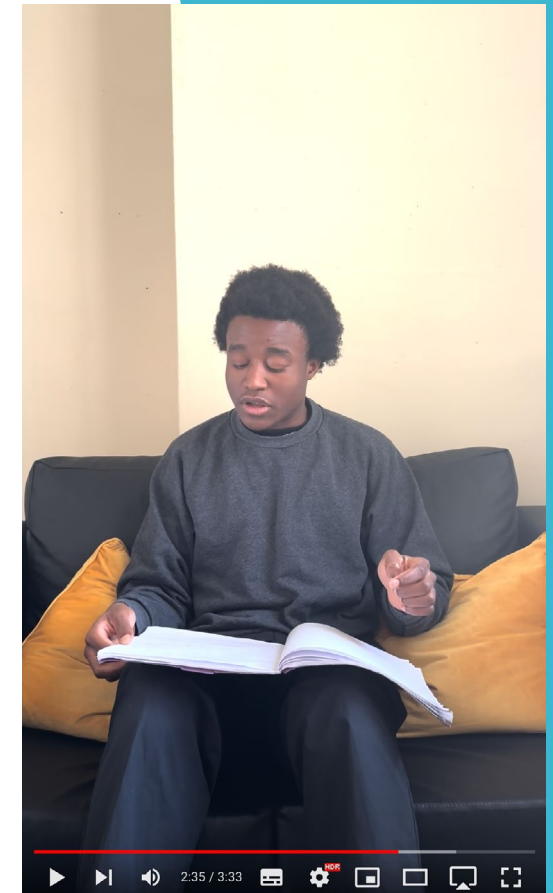
In their podcast the young researchers discuss the impact of different identities on the perception of masculinity, here are a couple of quotes from the young researchers' discussion based on their own experiences.

"I don't get why people judge on people's sexuality...and saying that affects you being masculine...because if they are born male and they choose to be a gay man...I don't get how people can judge on that and then your skin colour people judge on how your masculinity is as well"

- YOUNG RESEARCHER, ROYSTON YOUTH ACTION

"I would say religion does take a huge impact on masculinity, religion, ethnic background and how you grow up because in some religions masculinity is seen as the man providing, the man going out getting food, working, coming home, going back to work"

- YOUNG RESEARCHER, ROYSTON YOUTH ACTION



▲ Royston Youth Action
Young Researcher
Reflection
youtu.be/BdwQAzexyTg

Delivery Model

An asset-based model for creating the core conditions to discuss positive masculinity

Instead of approaching a community with a deficit-based mindset that identifies problems and deficiencies, an assets-based approach seeks to uncover and build on the strengths, skills, and capacities that exist within the community. This approach recognises what already exists in the community.

Using the formula:

- Can you identify people and places that can help you create the conditions to discuss positive masculinity?
- Are there relevant role models you can approach?
- Are there young men whose 'lived experiences' would provide valuable insights?







Getting Started

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#IaM

Why talk about positive masculinity?

Talking about positive masculinity is an important way to promote healthier gender norms and create a more equitable and inclusive society.

✓ For boys and young men ✓ For an inclusive society

Talking about positive masculinity is important for several reasons. Firstly, it can help to counteract the negative stereotypes and behaviours associated with harmful masculinity. By highlighting positive examples of masculinity, we can promote healthier and more constructive gender norms that help boys and young men reach their full potential.

Talking about positive masculinity can help consolidate more inclusive and diverse communities. By celebrating and highlighting positive examples of masculinity from different cultures and communities such as the LGBTQ+ community, we can create a more inclusive and accepting society.

✓ For girls and young women

Talking about positive masculinity can help to promote gender equality and reduce harmful power dynamics between men and women. When men are encouraged to embrace positive aspects of masculinity, such as emotional intelligence, empathy, and respect for others, they are more likely to become allies in the fight for gender equality and to promote healthy and positive relationships with women.

Critical questions to ask of both practitioners and young people:

- Is there a lack of positive role models to show what 'positive masculinity' can look like?
- Try and think of 5 positive role models that define your version of positive masculinity?
- Define: Harmful masculinity

Harmful Masculinity is defined as a holding damaging beliefs about what it means to be a 'real man' that are rigid, hetero-normative, violent and controlling. We can still talk

about harmful masculinity without referring to it as 'toxic' - it is important to be able to call out misogyny and bad behaviour. The language of Restorative Approaches uses the word harm and refers to those who are harmed (rather than victims), which we think is appropriate, hence using the term 'harmful masculinity' which fits with our ethos, approach and values.

When harmful ideals about masculinity are upheld, these can lead to the perpetuation of a negative form of masculinity where physical power and abuse are accepted and tolerated as the social norm. Harmful masculine ideals such as hiding emotions and expectations of aggression can heighten the potential for engaging in violent acts such as bullying, verbal aggression, physical and sexual assault. Role models and social norms can be upheld in families, peer groups and communities. Our role is to challenge these damaging beliefs and harmful social and cultural norms.

What is positive masculinity?

The million-dollar question

The question of what constitutes positive masculinity turned out to be complex, nuanced and deeply personal.

Though each of the pilot groups used different approaches and had different starting points to their relationship with the young people, they all gently introduced the concept of positive masculinity. They all started where the young people were at and explored the experience of being a young man in their local areas. The focus for the 3 pilot groups was conducting research in their communities to explore the issue. However, due to their lack of awareness of positive masculinity the focus instead became on providing space for the young men to discuss what it meant to them.

In answer to the question 'what is positive masculinity?'

"Someone who can act as a role model to the people around them. Being able to support friends and family unconditionally. Can act as a positive presence and is able to improve people's moods.

Someone who shouldn't be pressured by the words that are said about them but should be comfortable in opening up and expressing emotion without feeling ashamed or embarrassed.

Being able to enjoy what they like regardless if those interests are considered 'girly'

- YOUNG PERSON, DUNDEE

In Dundee, they developed and ran an activity to support the young men to explore what masculinity meant to them, here is their explanation and reflection on the activity. The group called this The Masculinity Spectrum.



? The Masculinity Spectrum

Purpose: To discuss the concept of masculinity.
Can masculinity be understood/explained as a spectrum?

What did we do?

We laid down a roll of paper with harmful written at one end and positive at the other. Masculinity was written in the middle. Various materials were provided such as playdough, magazines, and pens. The group were asked to write words, cut out words/ images and make models to represent what harmful/positive masculinity means to them and how it can be shown to others. The group were then asked to place the materials on the spectrum to show how the behaviours/expectations/images would fit together as part of a sliding scale – we called this the masculinity spectrum.

How did it go?

The group were really engaged – and the playdough was a big hit! The activity allowed individuals to show their thoughts and feelings in a way which was meaningful to them.

Our evaluation:

This was a good activity to help get everyone involved in a practical activity, particularly with the playdough. It was very clear after the activity that the group found it much easier to give examples and show understanding of the harmful aspects of masculinity. This led to further discussion and the group beginning to question what masculinity means and the impact of this on them and others. Very thoughtful reflections from the group. Broad research areas were identified at this point but not specific questions although a good foundation was created for further work



For a summary of MENDING Mindsets - https://youtu.be/vaF5plur_hl

In our 3 pilot areas, '**what is positive masculinity?**' turned out to be the million-dollar question.

There ended up being no definitive answer to what constitutes positive masculinity, and it was often dependent on the life experiences of the boys and young men answering this question. Definitions of positive masculinity reflected their own cultural and socio-economic circumstances and took into account their lived experience of intersectionality. A working-class heterosexual cis gendered boy from a deprived area would be expected to give a different slant on what positive masculinity meant to them compared to a privately educated gay person. Likewise, anyone from two different cultures, or two different gender identities – say a girl or a boy – would have their own nuanced ideal on what was meant by positive masculinity.

However, there were some common themes that did emerge from our 3 areas

Lack of awareness of positive masculinity:

This was a new concept to the young researchers and the community members they reached out to during the research.

“Most people (64) have not heard the term positive masculinity (answered by 105 people)”

- DUNDEE YOUNG PEOPLE'S RESEARCH FINDING

“For the question about positive masculinity people were saying they don't know and they said...they've only heard of toxic masculinity”

- ROYSTON YOUTH ACTION RESEARCH FINDING

“I think that us taking part in this project has really helped me understand it [positive masculinity] more, personally before we started this I never really heard the term positive masculinity, it was always just negative masculinity and toxicity”

- YOUNG RESEARCHER FROM ROYSTON YOUTH ACTION

Stereotypes about masculinity still exist:

Specifically the pressure to be muscular, strong, to provide for your family and be a protector.

“Real men don't cry” “beliefs that showing emotion is gay” “Being shamed for showing femininity”

- QUOTES ABOUT SOCIETAL STEREOTYPES FROM SHETLAND'S RESEARCH

Mental health and wellbeing – there was a lot of discussion about the need for men to open up, show their emotions and have good feelings about themselves.

“Men should feel free to share their emotion and not hide it away and make it look like nothing is wrong”

- YOUNG PERSON, DUNDEE

Importance of relationships, specifically friendships – the need for healthy relationships, to check in on your friends, to be supportive and accept support.

“Men should have a place to talk and feel comfortable when opening up, surround yourself with people who care and matter”

- YOUNG PERSON, DUNDEE

The impact of influencers and role models

There was an acknowledgement that influencers can have a big impact on expectations of masculinity. There was a suggestion that there is a need for more role models who support positive masculinity.

“You see it's not talked about a lot, but a lot of influencers kind of promote it. My view for example Paddy the Paddy from UFC [Ultimate Fighting Championship], especially the stuff about his pal killing himself and him telling the whole UFC on the show, saying how he was feeling and that...that's influenced a lot of young men to get help and probably saved a lot of people's lives”

- YOUNG RESEARCHER FROM ROYSTON YOUTH ACTION

Promoting positive masculinity:

There was a recognition that with the lack of awareness there is a need to further promote what positive masculinity is and a move away from toxic masculinity.

“I think promoting positive masculinity is a big thing because it is a thing, like even when you have mental health groups and all that, they focus on toxic masculinity and how to not be toxic, they don't speak about how to be positive”

- YOUNG RESEARCHER FROM ROYSTON YOUTH ACTION

Masculinity or Masculinities?

Gender as a **construct**

Gender is often referred to as a **construct** because it is a social and cultural concept that is created and reinforced (much like a structure or a building) through societal norms, expectations, and beliefs about what it means to be male or female.

What is considered masculine or feminine in one culture may be different in another culture. For example, while wearing makeup may be considered feminine in some cultures, it is considered masculine in others. There's often been very different attitudes between generations – sometimes 'old fashioned' notions of what constitutes masculine and feminine behaviours and ways of looking or dressing can come into play.

Gender is constructed through various social and cultural factors, including media, religion, education, friends and family. These factors contribute to the development of gender roles, which are the behaviours and expectations associated with being male or female in a particular society. But these can be challenged.

In year one, we explored what it was like to be a boy or young man in Scotland.

Young people told us about the expectations that existed, including:

- Having sex
- Being brave
- Being a gentleman
- Being the man of the house
- Being a 'ned'
- Standing up for yourself
- Being powerful
- Not being a 'snitch'

An important part of Scottish masculine culture identified was football. There was a perceived pressure to like football to prove you're a "proper lad".

"I was'nae like into football, I was'nae a proper lad in my younger days, I was fat and hairy, I was into a different kind of interests and I was...they would look at me as if I was the weirdo, the odd one out which I still feel to this day"

- YOUNG PERSON, IMAGINE A MAN, YEAR 1

Young people believed these expectations came from society, family, school peers, media and experiences growing up. Where young people grow up also had impact as one young person explained:

"It depends...it just depends on your background and that done it, if you're fae a nice area...but if it's a bad area as they call it, they've got a premeditated opinion of you. So that could play a part in what the expectations are, he's fae there don't fuckin' expect much from him. Then again somebody else will come in, he'll be good he's fae there so it differentiates the expectations on people"

- YOUNG PERSON, IMAGINE A MAN, YEAR 1

If gender is a construct, then we can **deconstruct** it

Challenging stereotypes

Deconstructing masculinity involves critically examining and challenging traditional notions of what it means to be a man. It involves recognising that masculinity is a social construct that can be harmful to both men and women when it reinforces rigid gender roles and hyper-masculine stereotypes.

One way to deconstruct masculinity is to challenge the belief that men must be tough, aggressive, and dominant. This belief can lead to harmful behaviours such as emotional repression, and a lack of empathy, and violence.

"Toxic masculinity which I think is a term that I'm not comfortable with anyway. It's almost stigmatising what are guys for these days? What are they? And I've had those questions with youngsters who say well...with some expletives in the sentence what am I for? So I think we need to look at...we really need to work on positive stories, we need to work on positives"

YOUTH WORKER FROM IMAGINE A MAN, YEAR 1 REPORT

If gender can be deconstructed, then it can be **reconstructed**

Positive role models

Reconstructing masculinity involves looking at positive role models – think about people who embody the non-harmful aspects of masculinity such as emotional expression and vulnerability. Share stories and anecdotes that show positive qualities and how they have impacted others.

A significant way of reconstructing masculinity is to ask young people to imagine a man.

Imagine a Man

This man is living his best life. He is a role model for others. What do you see? What are his values, qualities, strengths, weaknesses? What do others think of him? What do you think of him?



A Brave Space

A 'brave' space not a 'safe' space – promoting challenge and growth

"A lot of the conversations were uncomfortable and that and a lot of the conversations were beneficial and that, I think we took a lot from it and learned a lot from it as well"

- YOUNG RESEARCHER, ROYSTON YOUTH ACTION

What is a brave space?

A brave space is an environment where individuals feel safe and empowered to express their opinions, feelings, and perspectives without fear of judgment or reprisal. Unlike a "safe space," which is often associated with creating a place free from emotional triggers and discomfort, a brave space encourages individuals to engage in challenging conversations and respectfully explore diverse viewpoints.

In a brave space, individuals are encouraged to share their experiences and perspectives openly and honestly, even if they conflict with the opinions of others. This can help to promote empathy, understanding, and collaboration. Brave spaces are particularly important for individuals who find it difficult to speak up and be heard or express a viewpoint that differs from the cultural and social norm. Men have found these brave spaces really important to feel able to express themselves.

Some examples of brave spaces might be Men's Sheds, group work rooms, boys groups etc.

Creating a brave space requires a commitment to listening actively, challenging assumptions, and promoting respect and inclusivity. Ground rules and guidelines can help establish expectations for behaviour and encourage constructive dialogue. By fostering a brave space, individuals can build meaningful connections and engage in much deeper conversation prompting deeper understanding and learning and growth.



Ground Rules

Creating a brave space involves establishing a safe and respectful environment where individuals feel comfortable expressing themselves and engaging in constructive dialogue. Here are some potential ground rules that can help create a brave space':

- **Respect each other's experiences and perspectives:**
Everyone has a unique background and set of life experiences that shape their perspective. Listen actively to each other and avoid making assumptions.
 - **Use "I" statements instead of "you" statements:**
Focus on expressing your own thoughts and feelings rather than making assumptions or blaming others. This can help to promote constructive dialogue and avoid defensiveness.
 - **Avoid interrupting or talking over others:**
Allow everyone to express themselves fully without interruption. Use hand signals or other cues to indicate when you have something to add.
 - **Challenge ideas, not people:**
Engage in respectful and constructive debate, but avoid personal attacks or insults. Focus on the ideas being discussed rather than the person expressing them. If someone makes a comment you disagree with call it out.
 - **Acknowledge and address privilege and power dynamics:**
Recognise that some individuals may have more privilege or power than others based on their identity or position. Be aware of this and work to create a level playing field for all participants.
 - **Confidentiality and privacy:**
Respect the privacy of others and ensure that personal information shared in the group remains confidential, unless the individual has given their permission to share it.
 - **Allow for mistakes and learning:**
Creating a brave space means acknowledging that everyone makes mistakes and that learning and growth are possible. Be open to feedback and willing to learn from each other.
- By following these ground rules, you can help create a brave space where individuals feel empowered to express themselves and engage in constructive dialogue.**



Reflection

The importance of reflection

Reflection is important because it allows us to gain deeper understanding of ourselves and others and make sense of our experiences. One of the key aspects of the work with Imagine a Man was allowing space and time for reflection about masculinity. This involved setting aside time for reflection, as well as encouraging reflection through prompts such as questions and reflective exercises and sharing lived experiences.

Don't assume young men aren't reflective

In year one of Imagine a Man, focus groups were conducted with young people from different backgrounds, including young men who are justice experienced, younger boys (aged 7-11), trans men and gender fluid young people, young men with disabilities, black and minority ethnic young men and young women. In all of the focus groups one of the strongest impressions was that young people understood the stereotypes and expectations that young men faced. They recognised the problems this was causing at home, in schools and in relationships. They valued the space in the focus group to discuss this in more detail and to hear from their peers. They were very reflective about the challenges being faced but were also optimistic for the future.

In Shetland, the youth worker and volunteer ran the focus groups as workshops to provide a reflective, engaging atmosphere for the young people to share their views. This included activities such as drawing a picture of a man and using that as a prompt for discussion. Young people were also asked to create a poster that showed masculinity and to then discuss with the whole group. These activities provided a creative way to open up discussion and reflect on the expectations and stereotypes that young people were familiar with.



Getting Started Activities

Imagine a Man

Masculinity and Stereotypes



Time required	45 Minutes
Objectives	Group warm up and icebreaker that introduces the concept of masculinity
Description	An icebreaker/circle exercise
Resources required	Group work – no physical resources needed, but some groups have found it easier to draw their man first and then share the information.

What to do

1. Ask everyone in the group/circle to think of a man (not themselves and not anyone else in the room). This man does not exist. He is to be completely invented by you! You are to 'Imagine a Man'.

We need to know the following about your imagined man:

- What is his name?
 - What does he look like? (hair, eyes, clothes, height, weight)
 - What is he like as a person? (personality, mood, sense of humour)
 - What does he do for a living? (job, studies, career path)
 - How does he spend his leisure time? (hobbies, sport, art, recreation, pets)
2. Ask people to share their creations in turn. If you have drawings then ask them to share these and explain their pictures.

Facilitator's Notes

- How easy was it to 'Imagine a Man'?
- Did any of you think about anyone specific when you were imagining your man?
- If so, then who and why did you think of them?
- Are there similarities or differences between the imagined men?
- If you had to choose the most different imagined men, which two would the group choose? (Hopefully there will be two very distinctive men, but they may all be quite similar i.e. all stereotypes of masculinity)
- Is there a gender spectrum that you would arrange your imagined men on? – you could do this as an add-on activity. You should have evidence to talk about masculinity and how that sometimes involves stereotypes. We are all influenced by these stereotypes. Ask the group to define a stereotype.



BOOM!

The Importance of Respect and Disrespect

Time required	45 Minutes
Objectives	Group warm up and icebreaker that introduces the concept of 'triggers' especially those linked to masculinity and respect. Also engenders empathy and facilitates a group getting to know each other
Description	An icebreaker/circle exercise
Resources required	Group work – balloons, flipchart paper or whiteboard and markers

What to do

1. Give everyone a balloon
2. Ask everyone in the group/circle to think of a situation where they have felt disrespected and triggered (a trigger is something that gives us strong emotions) i.e. my teacher told me I was stupid. Go round the room/circle.
3. Write these on a flipchart
4. If the situation shared would also trigger you, then blow into you balloon (sometimes one goes BOOM!)

5. Go round the room again, but this time ask everyone to give an example of feeling respected i.e. I was asked to try for the local football team or felt listened to.
6. If the situation described would also soothe you, then let a little air out of your balloon.
7. At the end of the session some people may have very different sizes of balloons.

Facilitators Notes

- Young people have shared with us how important feeling respected is for them. Most fights take place because of feeling disrespected and triggered.
- It's good to share what triggers us and what strategies can help. This helps build empathy and respect for future discussions and also how the group can help to support one another.
- People have different triggers, so be aware of this, but also support each other through the process.
- If the balloon does burst, then you can talk about what this means for a person emotionally. How about what happens when we are overwhelmed? What happens when we go BOOM!?



The Clenched Fist

The Importance of Communication

Time required	5 Minutes
Objectives	Group warm up and energiser that introduces the concept of communication
Description	An icebreaker
Resources required	Pairs work – no resources needed

What to do

1. Ask everyone to find a partner. Have one person in each pair hold up their hand and make a clenched fist. Their partner's task is to find ways of opening the fist. Give them one minute to do this.
2. Ask for some examples of what the second person did to try and open the fist. (You will probably find that most people tried to open the fist using physical force, when they could have just asked their partner to open it.)

Facilitator's Notes

- How easy was it to open the other person's fist?
- What strategies did you use?
- What does this activity tell you about violence?
- Why do so many of us try physical way of solving the problem first?
- Do you think that violence is widely accepted in your area?
- You can build on this activity by asking the group to look at their local newspapers (physically or online) and identify how many of these are related to violence.



Dynamite and Shields

Personal Control and Self-Regulation

Time required	10 Minutes
Objectives	Group warm up and energiser that introduces the concept of personal control and self-regulation
Description	A group game and 'on the move' discussion that works best with a large group (10 plus).
Resources required	Space to move about in.

What to do

1. Ask group members to pick another group member without giving it away to anyone. That person will be their 'dynamite'.
2. Ask the group to keep as far away from their bomb as possible without leaving the group space. Do this for one minute.
3. Then ask the group members to pick another group member, different to their first and again without giving it away to anyone. This second person will be their 'shield'.
4. Explain to the group that they will start moving around again and the game involves making sure that the person they picked as their shield must be between them and their dynamite.
5. Explain that you are going to count down and when you get to zero, everyone must freeze. Let the group start moving again, give them adequate time and then start the countdown.
6. Shout STOP and ask the group to remain still. Once this has happened ask the participants using their left hand to point to their shield and with their right hand to point to their dynamite. Anyone whose shield is between themselves and their dynamite is still alive!

Facilitators Notes

- Facilitate a discussion around the activity. Questions should include the following:
- What did it feel like trying to avoid your dynamite?
- Who was in control of the situation?
- Who represents the dynamite in your life? i.e. could go off at any minute?
- Who are the shields in your life? i.e. those that give you 'sound' advice? Those that respect you?
- What was it like trying to stay behind your shield?
- Who was in control of the situation?



Agree/Disagree

Myth Busting

Time required	20 Minutes
Objectives	To hold a moving debate that explores attitudes in relation to masculinity that starts to identify harmful as well as positive behaviours
Description	A group game and 'on the move' discussion that works best with a large group (10 plus).
Resources required	Space to move about in.

What to do

1. At one end of the room have the statement agree and at the other have the statement disagree.
2. Get everyone to stand in the middle of the room. The middle of the room stands for 'don't know'.
3. Read out the statements and ask the group to 'move' to where they feel they want to stand in relation to whether they agree or disagree.
4. If they choose they can stand in the middle, or along a continuum.
5. People with strong views must try and persuade the undecided to

back their point of view.

6. Facilitate a debate amongst the group members. You can add factual information or correct any 'myths' the group use in their arguments with each other.
7. Once the debate has concluded you can ask if anyone wants to move – no one should be allowed to remain in the middle.
8. Read another statement and have another debate!

Agree/Disagree Statements

- Men are more likely than women to carry a knife
- A woman who is drunk is a disgusting sight
- All men are violent
- I might carry a weapon if I knew someone was 'after' me
- If I knew my friend was carrying a knife I wouldn't 'grass' on them
- It's okay to hit a man but not okay to hit a woman
- Men are more violent than women
- There are times when it's okay to hit people
- Violence is exciting – just look at what films people enjoy!
- Sometimes you have to fight
- Women are more caring than men
- Weak men get picked on

You can also get young people to write their own statements and pull these out of a box or a hat.



The Masculinity Spectrum

A group discussion from Dundee

Time required	45 Minutes
Objectives	Discuss the concept of harmful and positive masculinity and what this means to them as individuals and as a group. Can masculinity be understood/explained as a spectrum?
Description	A group activity/discussion
Resources required	Group work – playdough, magazines, pens

Facilitator's notes

- This is a good activity to help get everyone involved in a practical activity.
- Playdough goes down particularly well.
- Often the group will find it much easier to give examples and show understanding of the harmful aspects of masculinity. Why is this?
- This can helpfully lead to further discussion about masculinity and the impact of this on themselves and others.
- This activity can illicit very thoughtful reflections from the group.
- This activity can form the basis for further reflections.

What to do

1. Write on a roll of paper with harmful at one end and positive at the other.
2. Write masculinity in the middle.
3. Provide various materials – playdough, magazines, pens etc.
4. The group are asked to write words, cut out words/images and make models to represent what toxic/positive masculinity means to them and how it can be shown to others.
5. The group are asked to place the materials on the spectrum to show how the behaviours/expectations/images would fit together as part of the sliding scale



Minefield

Navigating Masculinity

Time required	45 Minutes
Objectives	To hold a moving debate that explores attitudes in relation to masculinity that examines how we navigate masculinity.
Description	A group game and 'on the move' discussion that works best with a larger group (10 plus).
Resources required	Space to move about in, masking tape, copies of the 'Minefield Map'

What to do

- Map out a grid that corresponds to the 'Minefield Map' using a roll of masking tape if you are indoors. If you are delivering this activity outside you could use chalk or chalk paint.
- Handout a 'Minefield Map' to each member of your group and ask them to do the following:
 - Mark two squares with the words BOOM!
 - Mark a further two squares with something that makes you angry or feel triggered
 - Please leave the START and FINISH squares clear.
 - Do NOT show anyone else your 'Minefield Map' – It is top secret!
 - Explain to the group:
 - Your objective is to navigate and cross the minefield safely.
 - You do this by choosing any route you can that takes you from the START to the FINISH.
 - A person volunteers to be the facilitator – they have their top secret 'Minefield Map' and know which squares are safe and will indicate appropriately by saying BOOM! Or by reading out a TRIGGER
 - Only one person is allowed on the minefield at any time
 - If you land on a BOOM! Square, you are dead and must join the back of the line
 - If you land on a TRIGGER square, the trigger will be read out and the group will decide if you have successfully described how you would deal with it positively rather than negatively
 - Every person must step on the START square and attempt to cross, if unsuccessful in their attempt to cross they must go to the back of the line and the next person must try to cross.
 - Once a participant is on the minefield, the rest of the team must be silent.
 - The only time the team can speak is when they agree or disagree that the TRIGGER question has been positively addressed.
 - Active participants can only move one square at a time. A move can be in any direction.
 - Once the minefield has been successfully navigated then that person is now the facilitator and uses their 'Minefield Map' as the blueprint for the next round.
 - Good luck!

Facilitators Notes

- Facilitate a discussion around the TRIGGERS. Questions should include the following:
- How would you address your trigger?
- What do the rest of the group think? Would this trigger any of you? Do you think you would handle it this way?
- Do we have agreement that this trigger has been successfully dealt with?
- Who was in control of the situation?

Personal Minefield Map

1. Mark two squares with the words BOOM!
2. Mark a further two squares with something that makes you angry or feel triggered.
3. Please leave the START and FINISH squares clear.

				FINISH
START				



Community Mapping Exercise

Assets-Based Exercise

Time required	45 Minutes
Objectives	<p>Generate insight and discussion on issues that affect the young people in the group in their own community in relation to masculinity.</p> <p>Find out about the area in general, especially things young people like and dislike about their community</p> <p>Gather useful knowledge about 'hotspots' for gangs and local rivalries. Places where young men get into trouble or places where they can get support.</p> <p>Develop knowledge about the assets in the community (schools, libraries, youth clubs, police etc.)</p>
Description	Group activity and needs assessment. This exercise is also very useful for the purpose of community planning
Resources required	Paper, pens, magazines, newspapers, sellotape, scissors, flip chart paper and coloured marker pens

What to do

1. Split the group into small groups on no more than 4 (if space and numbers allow). Explain that everyone is to contribute. It doesn't matter if they don't all agree – everyone's experience is unique and valuable. They can be as artistic as they want, using images from the magazines and papers.
2. The challenge is to draw a map of their community. This map **MUST** contain the following information;
3. Places that they feel safe in (this could be their home, their school, their local youth club, a sports club etc.)
4. Places that they don't feel safe in (this could also include some of the above, or include places like a dark underpass, the park at night, outside a dodgy pub, a bully's house etc.)
5. Facilitators Notes
6. Facilitate a discussion around the activity. Questions should include the following:
7. What would make your community safer (for boys and young men, for girls and young women)? (You could feed some of this back to the local council! Young people have the best ideas for improving their community.)
8. What strategies could you employ if you are in an unsafe place? (travel in pairs, avoid these places, let someone know where you are etc.)
9. A good debate might explore the paradoxes of communities for boys and young men. How communities can welcome and exclude boys and young men and how gangs can be both dangerous and attractive etc.



Positive Masculinity

Define Positive Masculinity

Time required	45 Minutes
Objectives	To discuss what constitutes positive masculinity The traits of positive masculinity – values, qualities, physical and mental traits Internal aspects and internal aspects of positive masculinity
Description	A group activity and discussion
Resources required	Pens and large paper (to draw round someone) either flipchart paper placed together or newspaper roll. You can do this on the floor or pin paper to a wall.

This activity can be done in small groups or in one big group

1. Draw round a person in the group to create a life size body outline on the paper (this may look a little like the chalk outline of a crime scene)
2. Ask the group members to imagine all the traits of positive masculinity:
3. What would this look like in our man?
4. Can you draw his expression? Give him features and a face.
5. List all the traits that our man might have that are positive qualities

Facilitators Notes

Ask the following potential questions;

- How would he speak to people?
- What would people make of him?
- What would be his role in the community?
- What physical and mental characteristics would he have?
- Does the person remind you of anyone?
- If so then who? This could lead onto a discussion about ROLE MODELS



**CLD
VOLUNTEER**

Making it Work

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#IaM

The Role of the Practitioner

The Builder/Facilitator

Deconstructing, reconstructing, and arranging the scaffolding

Some of the language used relating to gender identity, ironically sounds like something you might hear in a builder's yard. We also talk a lot about the role of the facilitator, with particular reference here to 'restorative approaches' as the person

responsible for arranging the scaffolding that supports the discussions, discourse and reflections that can engender a more thoughtful view of masculinity.

The conversations, dialogue and definition of what constitutes 'positive masculinity' belong to the young people themselves. The definitions themselves will be varied, nuanced and never quite the same as other definitions from other young people. They

will be subtly different depending on the intersection with other characteristics; class, community and culture.

The role of the builder/facilitator is not to tell young people what constitutes a positive masculinity but to create the conditions where young people can arrive at their own conclusions. Having ownership of their own definition of positive masculinity promotes a much deeper and lasting understanding.

The role of the Builder/Facilitator	What does this entail?	Why should we do this?
Deconstructing	Breaking something down into its component parts in order to fully understand its meaning	To challenge stereotypes and notions of harmful masculinity and how this impacts society To find out how we have personally been affected
Reconstructing	Building back up into something that makes sense to the learner/ participant to create a deeper understanding	To allow for personal reflection To allow for aspirations To create a better and more meaningful idea of what constitutes positive masculinity
Arrange the Scaffolding	Put in place supportive factors that promote growth, learning and self-reflection	To make young people feel they matter and are valued To see masculine traits such as strength as a positive To create the conditions for learning to be fun such as using humour To support connections to form with the group To reinforce the notion of caring as a masculine trait as well as a feminine trait To develop optimism for the future that allows young people to flourish

The Pro-social Adult

Making 'the' difference

Why is the role of the pro-social adult important?

Sometimes the pro-social adult (as opposed to anti-social) is called the trusted adult. In either case it is about being an adult that young people can access for support, advice and information.

Findings suggest that these relationships are hugely beneficial to young people as pro-social adults can encourage them and give them advice in a more relaxed manner than typical parents or family members. Such relationships are especially beneficial to young people as they are developing and transitioning into adulthood.

The pro-social adult is held up as an example of a positive role model during formative years. What we have learned for listening and analysing 'lived experiences' is that just one pro-social adult in a young person's life can make the difference.

This definition of a trusted adult is a youth-led definition from the organisation [Young Minds](#).

"A trusted adult is chosen by the young person as a safe figure that listens without judgment, agenda or expectation, but with the sole purpose of supporting and encouraging positivity within a young person's life."

The traits of the pro-social adult

It is important to acknowledge your own role in being the person that could potentially make the difference to a young person's life. In your violence prevention work you may be working with vulnerable young people whose experiences of adults are less than positive (antisocial as opposed to prosocial). Young people have fed back the traits they most value in a pro-social adult interaction.

These are:

- **Coming with no expectations**
Coming with no expectations of what young people will achieve or how they will behave
- **Being non-judgmental**
Being non-judgmental and refraining from trying to 'fix' a young person; instead, trusted adults help young people to work through issues in their own way
- **Having clear boundaries**
Ensuring relationships with young people have clear boundaries and limits. Trusted adults should understand when a situation extends beyond their skillset
- **Being a good listener**
Being a good listener, using silence to give young people space to open up and guide conversations
- **Prioritising honesty**
Prioritising honesty, asking hard questions when necessary and being vulnerable with young people
- **Being reliable**
Being reliable, through making themselves available to young people and engaging with them in a consistent way.

The practitioners from the three pilot groups had different professional backgrounds, but took similar approaches to building relationships with the young people. In Dundee an Education Support Officer for Dundee Council and a Health Promotion Officer for NHS Tayside partnered with a police officer to support the young people. They believed that the young men working with a police officer provided a really positive experience and broke down some barriers. In most of the sessions he didn't wear a police uniform, so not to create any barriers and he used a mutual interest in football to build a rapport with the young men.



'Wise Elders'

Creating a cultural and social norm of positive masculinity

One evening an old man told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, "my grandson the battle is between two wolves inside us all. One is Bad. It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other is Good. It is joy, peace, love, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith." The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "which wolf wins?" The old man simply replied, "the one you feed."

- ANONYMOUS STORY

49% of boys and young men would talk to their parents from our survey Imagine a Man.

A more spiritual take (and perhaps less formal take) on the role of the practitioner is to consider the concept of the wise elder. Generally, a wise elder is someone who is respected for their wisdom, knowledge, and life experience. A wise elder may be but doesn't have to be a family member.

Here are some possible roles that a wise elder might play:

- **Mentorship and guidance:** A wise elder may provide guidance and mentorship to younger generations. They can share their knowledge and experience to help younger individuals navigate life's challenges, make important decisions, and develop important skills.
- **Preservation of cultural traditions:** In many cultures, wise elders play an important role in preserving and passing down cultural traditions and practices to younger generations. They may act as keepers of cultural knowledge, ensuring that traditions and stories are passed down from one generation to the next.
- **Mediation and conflict resolution:** A wise elder may be called upon to help mediate conflicts or disputes within a community. They can draw upon their experience and wisdom to help individuals find common ground and resolve issues in a peaceful and constructive way.
- **Spiritual and emotional support:** Wise elders may also provide spiritual and emotional support to individuals within their community. They can offer guidance and support during difficult times and provide comfort and reassurance when needed.
- **Leadership and advocacy:** In some communities, wise elders can also play a leadership role, advocating for the needs and rights of their community and working to effect positive change.

Role Models

Does the gender of the practitioner matter?

The gender of the practitioner is not necessarily a determining factor in the success of a programme looking at positive masculinity.

Some of our research suggested that young men may be more receptive to working with male practitioners on issues related to masculinity because they perceive them to have a greater understanding of their experiences. However, this was not always the case, as female practitioners were also effective in working with young men and promoting positive masculinity.

During year one, young men in Polmont shared that it was the personal qualities and relationship with a practitioner that mattered, rather than their gender.

"It's not about what sex you are, it's just how they treat you and that, how they speak to you...speak to you with respect and have a laugh with you...if you're cheeky, or...confront you and that"

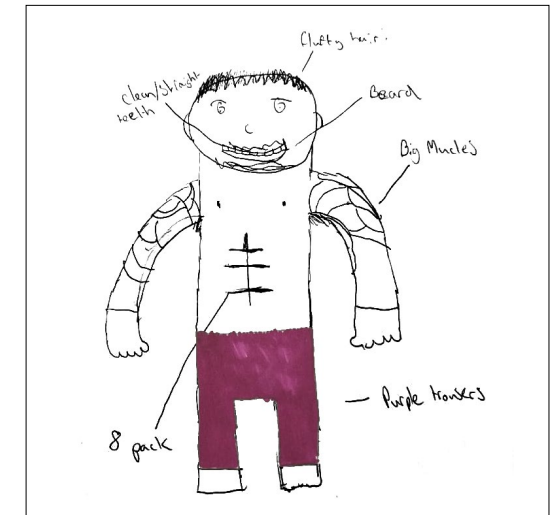
- YOUNG PERSON, POLMONT, YEAR 1 REPORT

A practitioner during year one, also believed that it is important for young men to have both female and male positive role models.

"It's important that they've got positive male role models but also positive female role models and somebody who can bring that female perspective as well and try and help the young men understand their behaviours around women and how they treat women and all that sort of thing"

- PRACTITIONER, YEAR 1 REPORT

Ultimately, the most important factor in the success of a positive masculinity programme is the quality of the programme itself and the skills and approach of the practitioner, regardless of their gender. It is essential that the practitioner demonstrates a genuine interest in the well-being of the boys and young men they are working with and that they approach the subject with a non-judgmental and empathetic attitude.



Male practitioners talking about masculinity

- **Authenticity:** Male workers may be able to relate to the experiences of young men more closely, as they have likely navigated similar issues in their own lives. This can help to build trust and rapport and make it easier for young men to open up about their thoughts and feelings.
- **Role models:** Male workers who embody positive masculine traits (such as empathy, respect, and emotional intelligence) can serve as positive role models for young men. Seeing positive masculinity in action can help young men to envision a healthier and more positive version of masculinity for themselves.
- **Lived Experience:** Young men may feel empowered by hearing from male workers who have overcome challenges related to masculinity. This can help them to feel more confident in their ability to navigate similar challenges.

Female practitioners talking about masculinity

- **Different perspective:** Female practitioners can bring a different perspective to discussions about masculinity, which can help to broaden young men's understanding of the topic. This can be especially valuable in challenging traditional stereotypes and promoting more diverse and inclusive views of masculinity.



Arranging 'The Scaffolding'

A secure and solid platform to build from

From our research in both year one and year two of Imagine a Man, we have learned that certain **core conditions** have made the process of talking about and defining what positive masculinity means a lot easier. We have used the term, scaffolding, to describe these conditions.

In **restorative approaches**, scaffolding refers to the support structures and processes that are put in place to ensure that the restorative process is carried out effectively and fairly.

These Are:

Mattering really matters

Strength as a positive

Humour helps!

Connecting connects and people feel grounded

Caring as a valued trait in boys and young men

Respect and disrespect

Flourishing future and an optimist outlook



Mattering really matters

We all want to matter and have our voice heard

“There are young men literally dying to be someone or something, anything but not no-one or nothing”

- LEE DEMA, FOUNDER OF ST MATTHEW'S YOUTH PROJECT, BRIXTON, LONDON

Mattering refers to the feeling that we are important, valued, and respected by others. It is a fundamental human need that has a significant impact on our emotional and psychological well-being. Not mattering can impact negatively on propensity to violence, as well as self-harm and suicide.

Recent research (Billingham et al 2023) indicates that **mattering** can hold significant influence particularly over the lives of boys and young men at risk from the social harm of inequality and poverty. Trauma and shame, feeling that you do not matter, have agency or casual power can be potent emotional drivers in the dynamics of violence.

Conducting research can provide a powerful opportunity for young people to share their views and have their voices heard.

In Shetland, the youth worker and volunteer led focus groups with young people from across communities including the LGBT community. Through conducting focus groups, they provided a voice to the young people who took part and an opportunity for them to be introduced to the concept of positive masculinity.

In Glasgow the young researchers produced a podcast to share their research findings and reflections. At the end of the process, they invited local community members, family and friends, academics, the wider research team and local influencers (including a professional boxer) to a listening party to hear their podcast. This provided the opportunity for the young researchers to share what they had learned and the impact it had on their lives. This was a significant moment of pride for these young men, as they were celebrated for their contributions to the research and for acting as positive male models to other young people.

'Mattering' values people and their opinions

Create the conditions that allow young people to share their views with each other, with a wider circle of friends and with the community at large. Demonstrate that they matter and that their opinions matter. Mattering and valuing opinion is one of the core conditions of developing a positive masculinity.



Strength as a positive

Stand up for what you believe in and help others

Strength can be a positive masculine trait because it represents physical and mental power, resilience, and the ability to overcome challenges. This trait is often associated with the traditional image of masculinity and is seen as a highly desirable quality by boys and young men themselves.

In our focus groups in year one, boys and young men discussed some of the pressures they felt in their physical appearance.

For the black and minority ethnic boys they felt a pressure to be "strong", "tall" and "buff". Intersectionality can provide a more nuanced understanding of how different aspects of masculinity intersect with other identities and experiences. For example, a black man's experiences of masculinity may be influenced by both racism and sexism, leading to a unique set of challenges that are not present for white men.

"They expect men to be bigger and stronger and braver"

- FG1

"If you're not 6 foot everyone just banter you"

- FG1

"They always expect us to be very tall, very strong, like very confident"

- FG1

"A massive buff guy"

- FG1

Physical strength can be important for certain professions or activities, such as sports, manual labour, or military service. Mental strength, on the other hand, is valuable in various aspects of life, including decision-making, problem-solving, and emotional regulation.

Strength as a positive

Strength should not be equated with aggression, violence, or the suppression of emotions. Positive masculinity involves using one's strength for constructive purposes, such as protecting others, standing up for what is right, being an active bystander, being a female ally, and helping those in need.



Humour helps!

It's easier to learn things if you can have a laugh

A lot of feedback we received from our young participants was about the ability to incorporate having fun into what were otherwise serious discussions. Having a laugh was important both in terms of facilitating comfortable relationships with peers and practitioners but also in determining mind-set, critical thinking, setting a non-judgemental tone for discussions etc. We include humour as a vital part of the scaffolding because it was deemed so important to those who took part in the project.

One of the key tenets of using a youth work approach is that activities are fun and engaging!

The Dundee pilot group discussed the importance of incorporating fun activities into their sessions, to help build relationships and trust with the young men. They ran icebreakers at the beginning of their sessions, including building a tower made from spaghetti and marshmallows. The young men are all football fans, so they adapted some activities to include a football theme. By building from the young people's interests and incorporating fun and practical activities helped to create a "relaxed atmosphere", "conversation starter" and in some sessions the young people were "buzzing with excitement". Pizza and snacks also helped.

Humour as a tool for learning

Humour can be a useful tool for learning serious things by making the learning process more engaging, reducing stress and anxiety, simplifying complex ideas, and encouraging creativity and critical thinking. Humour can be a vital tool in discussing positive masculinity but also a valued tool and personality trait for making people feel at ease.



Connecting connects and people feel grounded

Connecting – a shared experience and a nicer way to learn

Connecting, and feeling connected is an important piece of the support scaffolding. Connecting to others in the group, made the learning a shared experience and reinforced positive messages. Those who took part in group experiences, particularly in small groups or where it was using a targeted approach with boys and young men talked of both connecting to each other and improved mental health due to having new support structures and like-minded peers.

Connecting mattered greatly at Royston Youth Action, where the young men shared the impact of the project on their lives. Through exploring positive masculinity provided a brave space for them to open up about their mental health and wellbeing. Though the young men knew each other before the project they would not have described each other as friends. By the end of the project this diverse group of young men had become friends and would check up on each other. The development of these connections was definitely strengthened by taking the young men on a residential at the beginning of the project. This provided an opportunity for them to get to know each other, share experiences and build that brave space to explore masculinity.

Feeling connected

Nurture the group and strengthen the participants' feelings of connectedness. The group processes are important for reinforcing learning through challenge, but also arguably more importantly for being supported. Boys and young men are experiencing poor outcomes in mental health and higher rates of suicide than girls. These opportunities for forming connections to each other in supportive and supported environments can be hugely beneficial.



Caring as a valued trait in boys and young men

Caring as a cultural norm

Our survey of 1230 young people across Scotland wanted to explore some of the stereotypes and expectations that exist for boys and young men in Scotland today. The qualities that young people felt were most important for a boy or young man included:

- **51%** being confident
- **49% caring**
- **43%** working hard at school/college/university
- **40%** funny

We were surprised and heartened about the emphasis placed on young men being caring, which typically is considered to be a feminine trait rather than a masculine one.

Is being caring cool?

Absolutely! It is a sign of empathy, compassion, and emotional intelligence, all of which are important qualities in building strong relationships and being a good person.

Unfortunately, there is sometimes a societal stereotype that caring is more of a feminine trait, and that boys or men should be tough and unemotional. It is important to challenge these harmful stereotypes and promote the idea that being caring is a positive trait for boys and young men to have.

You can emphasise being a person who cares is a strength. Think of boys as active bystanders – they intervene in situations where someone might be harmed because they care and want to help.

Caring is cool

Caring as a valued trait of boys and young men is normal. It is not normal to not care. Acknowledge this, use it as a starting point in your discussions. Find out what young people care about, who they care about, and how caring manifests itself. Caring is a vital element of developing a positive masculinity.



Respect not Disrespect

Why do boys and young men fight?

"I have yet to see a serious act of violence that was not provoked by the experience of feeling shamed, humiliated, disrespected and ridiculed."

- JAMES GILLIGAN 1996

The notion of being respected and also of being disrespected are a significant motivator in young men's involvement in violent behaviour. Understanding this powerful driver of male violence that feeling disrespected can unleash is important. It means that we can create respectful conditions that honour individuals, take account of the codes of honour that boys and young men adhere to, and have meaningful conversations about the nature of respect.

We emphasised respect as being a core condition of a brave space, but it goes beyond that. Respect is crucial for maintaining peaceable relationships between boys and young men, but also between all genders.

Respect for one's self and others, the ability to see and hear other people's points of view all foster empathy which is important to maintain healthy relationships and to avoid and navigate conflict.

In Search of Respect

Understanding the importance of respect and disrespect is significant at a community level. Some communities have greater incidences of violence – gangs are more prevalent, nihilistic acts of vandalism happen more frequently and there are higher rates of addiction and suicide. The boys and young men living in communities with structural issues such as poverty, suffered 'humiliation' at a macro-level – feeling left behind, let down, marginalised, ignored and looked down on – were more likely to go in search of respect.

Understanding Respect

Creating the conditions for respectful relationships and respectful conversations are vital particularly in engaging with more marginalised boys and young men. The importance of this was emphasised in our Glasgow group, where the relationships to local youth workers and boys and young men built slowly over time. Respect was the number one ground rule (and often is cited first during a brainstorm) but respect cuts both ways and needs careful exploration if a complete understanding is to be realised.



Flourishing future and an optimist outlook

Banishing a 'lethal absence of hope'

Father Greg Boyle who started Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles in 1988 and is renowned for his pioneering work on rehabilitation, described gangs as being born from a "lethal absence of hope". Although at the extreme and furthest end of the violence prevention spectrum, the point made is thought provoking and a reminder to ensure that our programmes and work with boys and young men look at an optimistic future.

Flourishing - a lesson from positive psychology

"Flourish" is a book by Martin Seligman, a psychologist known for his work on positive psychology who argues that the goal of psychology should be to help people not just alleviate their negative emotions, but to help them thrive and flourish in life.

Seligman outlines a framework for achieving well-being and flourishing, which he calls the PERMA model. PERMA stands for Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment.

- **Positive emotions** are an essential component of well-being and happiness, and we can cultivate positive emotions through practices such as gratitude, kindness, and mindfulness.
- **Engagement** is the experience of being fully absorbed in an activity or task, which can lead to a state of flow and increased happiness.
- **Relationships** are crucial for well-being and emphasise the importance of building and maintaining strong connections.
- **Meaning** refers to the sense of purpose and fulfilment that comes from having a larger goal or mission in life. Issue your group a challenging task! Ask them to define '**positive masculinity**'.
- **Accomplishment** refers to the satisfaction and pride that comes from achieving our goals and making progress towards our aspirations.

A Flourishing Future

Developing hope and optimism for the future is an essential ingredient of working with young people. The whole programme is around positive aspirations and about creating the core conditions that allow boys and young men to flourish. It is inherent in the project's idealistic title – Imagine a Man and positive psychology is clearly an influence for us in our emphasising of positive masculinity.



Making it Work Activities

The Man Box

Hegemonic Masculinity and Societal Constraints: Harmful Masculinity

The central premise of The Man Box is that boys learn at an early age that they need to fit in – you are not a “real man” otherwise and this carries a high social price. Boys learn that they need to fit in the box.

Time required	45 Minutes
Objectives	Group discussion to break down the societal constraints of what it means to be a man in society.
Description	A group discussion on the need to fit in.
Resources required	Pens, boxes such as shoeboxes or flat pack boxes, paper

What to do

1. Ask group members or individuals to pick up a box or make up a box if flat packed.
2. Explain to them that this box represents how society expects them to behave as men – this is The Man Box.
3. On each side of the box or if brainstorming then in the depicted square ask the following:

4. How are boys and men expected to behave:
 - » At primary school?
 - » At high school?
 - » At university/college?
 - » At work?
 - » At Life?
5. If you behave outside the box, then how might you be labelled? The responses will fall into 3 categories (group the responses):
 - » Misogyny
 - » Homophobia
 - » Other discriminatory language

Facilitators Notes

Facilitate a discussion around the activity. Questions should include the following:

- What is it like trying to fit in?
- Who was in control of the situation?
- Who tells you how to behave in The Man Box?
- How are traditional notions of masculinity such as those that keep us in The Man Box harmful?
- Bringing awareness of the existence of The Man Box is important. In what ways?
- How can we help boys and young men break out of The Man Box?



A Good Man

Thinking beyond the confines of The Man Box

Time required	45 Minutes
Objectives	<p>Group discussion to break down the societal constraints of what it means to be a man in society.</p> <p>To explore the differences between a 'real man' i.e. the man in The Man Box, and a 'good man' i.e. the man who has broken out of The Man Box</p>
Description	A group discussion on the impact of cultural constraints
Resources required	Flipchart, whiteboard, pens

What to do

You could either conduct this activity as a straightforward discussion, brainstorming on two pieces of paper or you ask participants to draw what they think. Whichever you think will work best with the group you are working with – there is room for creativity!

1. Ask group members:
 - » What does it mean to be a "good man"?
 - » What qualities do the men you respect and admire have?
 - » What values and morals do they live by?
 - » What kinds of things do they say and do?
2. Next ask group members:
 - » What does it mean to be a "real man"?
 - » What do people mean when they say "be a man" or "man up"?
 - » What qualities are "real men" assumed to have?
 - » How are they expected to speak and act? How they are not supposed to behave?

Facilitators Notes

- Ask the group what they think about the two sets of responses
- Are the responses similar or different?
- Why?
- How do you think these cultural messages affect boys and young men?
- How do they affect girls and young women?
- Why is it challenging to talk about?



In Search of Respect

Respect/Disrespect Debate

Time required	45 Minutes
Objectives	To understand how feeling respected and disrespected can impact on individuals and lead to consequences like fighting
Description	A group discussion on being respected or disrespected
Resources required	Pens, flipchart paper and cut out scenario statements

Write out Respect on one piece of flipchart paper and Disrespect on another. You could conduct this discussion either sitting down or as a 'moving' debate if you prefer where one end of a room corresponds to Respect and another corresponds to Disrespect.

What to do

1. Hand out the scenarios to individuals, pairs or small groups depending on the size of the group
2. Ask each to consider whether their scenario is Respect or Disrespect and get them to place their statement on a piece of paper explaining their choice.
3. Ask them to justify their choice and whether the rest of the group agrees or disagrees.

Facilitators Notes

Often these scenarios lead onto a discussion about real life scenarios. Be aware of confidentiality – you might have to ask the group members not to share any personal information or share 'real' names.

Ask the group the following questions;

- Is it respect or disrespect?
- Is this disrespectful of another person or yourself? (some of the scenarios are vague on what is being done to whom – have a discussion about how would you feel if this was done to you and how would you feel if you were doing it)
- Why is it respect or disrespect?
- What are the risks? (in a worst case scenario!)
- Could they do anything differently?
- Could someone have intervened?
- Could they ask for help?

Respect/Disrespect Scenarios

You can invent some more scenarios of your own, and even customise them to match local problems in your community.

You pick on someone smaller than you	Starting a fight at a party
Having unprotected sex	Letting a drunk friend walk home alone
Passing out in a doorway	Spiking someone's drink
Getting a lift from a drunk driver	Sending a naked selfie on Snapchat to someone you fancy
Standing someone up	Walking away from a fight
Set a time and a place for someone to fight you who has been spreading lies	Telling a lie about someone you hate on social media



Keeper of the Conch

Caring, Connecting and Communicating

Time required	45 Minutes
Objectives	To share advice and information about being a boy or young man today Explores group's own knowledge/strengths/peer support
Description	Anonymous Peer Problem Solving Exercise A peer problem solving group discussion or 'conch' discussion
Resources required	A 'conch' which could be anything to hand – a wig, a wand, a puppet, a hat, a scarf etc. You will need pieces of paper or post-it notes for people to write their problem on. A hat or receptacle to post the letters in.

What to do

For your information, the term 'conch' comes from the book 'Lord of The Flies' by William Golding and represents a powerful symbol of democracy as society suffers from harmful masculinity in freefall. The person holding the 'conch' can speak uninterrupted.

Explain that only the person with the 'conch' can talk at any one time. This will prevent people from all talking at once and give the discussion a sense of order. This method works well with talkative/lively groups, encouraging less confident group members to speak with the aid of the 'conch.'

1. Allow the group time to write their problems out on the pieces of paper. The problems are anonymous or could be signed using an alias (i.e. Depressed of Dundee, Irritated of Inverness, Glum from Glasgow etc.)
2. A volunteer reads out the first problem and then selects a group member to answer the problem – this could be the person that they think could have the most relevant information regarding the problem or it could be at random.
3. Whoever has the 'conch' gives advice on the problem that has been read out and can nominate further contributors by passing the 'conch' to them.
4. People who have opinions can request the 'conch' in order to express them.
5. Once the reader of the problem is satisfied that they have enough good advice, then whoever is left with the 'conch' reads the next problem out and picks a new conch-holder.
6. Repeat this process until all the problems have been resolved.

TOP TIP

You might want to plant a couple of fun/controversial/relevant problems



An Ideal Future

Believing and Flourishing

Time required	20 Minutes
Objectives	To envisage a positive future and to think confidently and positively about achieving a positive future
Description	A visualisation exercise based on relaxation and mindfulness techniques
Resources required	Peace and quiet

Ensure that the group is calm and focussed, the atmosphere should be relaxed and peaceful.

Go through the following stages with the group:

- Stage 1:** 'Take a few moments to relax and breathe deeply. As your muscles relax, it becomes easier and easier to unleash your imagination'
- Stage 2:** 'Now, imagine another you standing in front of you. This is the most magnificent you that you can imagine – your true self.'
- Stage 3:** 'Take a moment to feel totally happy with your true self. Look at the way your true self stands, breathes, smiles, walks and talks. Look at how you speak to others. Look at how you handle problems and go for goals.'
- Stage 4:** 'Now step into your true self. See through the eyes of your true self and hear what you hear, feel what you feel.'
- Stage 5:** 'Take five minutes and daydream about how life would be different as you live more and more like your true self. Think of a number of situations from the past, present or future and how you would behave.'

- ADAPTED FROM PAUL MCKENNA - 'CHANGE YOUR LIFE IN SEVEN DAYS'



Passing it On

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#IaM



Practitioners Sharing Positive Stories

Celebrating Positive Masculinity

“We really need to work on positive stories”

Part of supporting boys and young men to explore masculinity, is through having positive stories to share which help them to find their place in their community and be their best selves. This came up many times with both practitioners we spoke to as well as young people themselves who had heard of toxic masculinity but never positive masculinity. Practitioners told us that positive stories reinforced the concept of ‘mattering’, whereas negative stories which predominate led to more nihilistic thoughts.

“Toxic masculinity which I think is a term that I’m not comfortable with anyway. It’s almost stigmatising what are guys for these days? What are they? And I’ve had those questions with youngsters who say well...with some expletives in the sentence what am I for? So, I think we need to look at...we really need to work on positive stories, we need to work on positives”

- PRACTITIONER INTERVIEW 5

Practitioners Sharing Stories

Sharing stories about the boys and young men you are working with not only reaffirms ‘mattering’ to them (i.e. Being listened to and having their voices heard), but also sends out the message further afield that boys and young men are actively involved in such positive programmes and discussions about masculinity. So much negativity about boys and young men is defined by the media (both traditional and social) – there needs to be more balance, which can only occur if we as practitioners step up to the mark and start sharing those positive stories.

Here the youth worker from Glasgow, reflects on what went well with their youth-led research project and the change he saw in the young people that took part.

“I feel this project as a whole has went really well. From the group coming together in the beginning and starting off the project. To the project coming to a close and seeing how hardworking and passionate the young people became about the body of work.



The conversations and the experiences shared and gained over the project has been really eye-opening for me as a practitioner but also for the young people, As I feel I can see real growth and learning within each of the individuals whom participated”

- YOUTH WORKER, ROYSTON YOUTH ACTION

Shaping Social Norms

Social and cultural norms are rules or expectations of behaviour and thoughts based on shared beliefs within a specific cultural or social group. While often unspoken, norms offer social standards for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour that govern what is (and is not) acceptable in interactions among people. Practitioners are part of the picture of shaping social norms and as such need to champion positive masculinity for it to become the undisputed social norm. For every story about harmful masculinity we want to share ten stories about positive masculinity.

? Why don't you?

Share stories about boys and young men demonstrating positive masculinity

Give boys and young men a positive shout out – especially where this counteracts negativity locally or in the media. It would make a difference to people's media-shaped perspectives if the positive stories outweighed the negative stories. It would make everyone feel more comfortable and connected in their communities.



Young People **Influencing**

Role Modelling, Cascading and Community Dialogue

What was really positive across the three pilot Imagine a Man areas was the way the young people influenced beyond the confines of their project. Individuals spoke of informal conversations with peers that further cascaded the idea of positive masculinity.

Actively Modelling Positive Masculinity

By taking part in the pilot project, young people gained confidence around talking about positive masculinity and were able to actively model those positive traits of masculinity themselves. It was fascinating to listen to the Glasgow group's podcast and hear the young people treating each other so respectfully, listening and valuing each other's viewpoints and making sure everyone was feeling fully involved.

Cascading Ideas and Teachable and Reachable Moments

By modelling positive masculinity and through becoming more confident in expressing and defining positive masculinity, those who took part in the pilot projects were able to cascade ideas to others in their communities. The idea of 'teachable and reachable' moments based on the work of Paulo Freire (1970) is hugely influential on Community Learning and Development work, based on the notion of empowerment and critical thinking. The results of the pilot strongly suggest that young people went away feeling both empowered and keen to empower others as part of the process.

Community Dialogue

In restorative approaches we talk about restorative conversations fostering better mutual understanding and respect. We know that for boys and young men, respect and its flipside, disrespect are real influencers and drivers of behaviour. A community dialogue between young people and adults can take various forms, such as town hall meetings, focus groups, or panel discussions. The goal of the dialogue is to create a safe space where individuals can share their experiences, insights, and concerns about specific topics that affect the community.

When Royston Youth Action presented the results of their work on positive masculinity to the adults in the community at a community event and listening party for the podcast (a mix of teachers, local community and youth workers, parents and a local boxer/influencer being present) there was a definite sense of respect for the young people presenting, community pride in their work and a shared understanding of what it meant to be a boy or young man in Royston. Overall, a community dialogue between young people and adults can be a powerful tool for building stronger, more cohesive communities that work together to address important issues and create positive change.

? Why don't you?

Support young people to become influencers: A big issue recently is that influencers on social media have had their harmful views about masculinity amplified in the absence of positive views being shared more widely. You could support young people to promote positive masculinity in their communities both online and IRL. #ImagineAMan

Organise an event with adults in the community: Showcase positive masculinity to adults in the community who may have negative views or experiences of young people. Taking a restorative conversations approach see the positives from creating constructive community dialogue. You could create the conditions for mutual respect to flourish.



Youth Led Research

Praxis, Learning by Doing

Social action research is a method of learning underpinned by the tenets of learning by doing. Based on the work of Paulo Freire (1970), it critiques approaches where teachers stand in front of students who become passive recipients of a set message. The approach that we took in year two of Imagine a Man was very much about young people developing their own approach to the research. The learning from the strong youth-led element has been more memorable and of a deeper quality – or grounded theory.

A youth led approach chimed with the reflective nature of the focus groups involved in the baseline research in year one – what if this reflection could be turned into action to form the learning? The three youth groups based in Dundee, Glasgow and Shetland were supported to conduct research on what positive masculinity means in their communities using a youth-led approach that closely followed the 3 main principles of youth work:

- Young people chose to participate
- It must build from where young people are – in their own space, based on their terms
- Young people and youth workers are partners in a learning process

YouthLink Scotland has developed an approach to youth-led research over the last 9 years. This has been a process of defining and refining the approach to supporting young people to conduct research on issues that matter to them.

This is the working definition of youth-led research:

“A process by which young people identify and investigate issues that are important to or affect them (and their communities) with the aim of using that information to create change”

The approach taken is train-the-trainers, which acknowledges the relationships and skills of the youth workers with young people. An experienced researcher provides a training programme in research skills as well as on-going support to the youth groups.

The youth workers and practitioners from each group were trained in youth-led research to support young researchers in their communities. The training included how to write research questions, data collection methods, analysis, dissemination and ethical considerations. As this was a youth-led research approach the young people had complete flexibility about how to conduct their research and share their findings. They were provided with some guidance research questions which they could adapt to their interests.

These included:

- What is positive masculinity?
- What are the opportunities and barriers for young people to develop positive masculinity?
- What conditions are needed for young people to develop positive masculinity (place/space/people)?

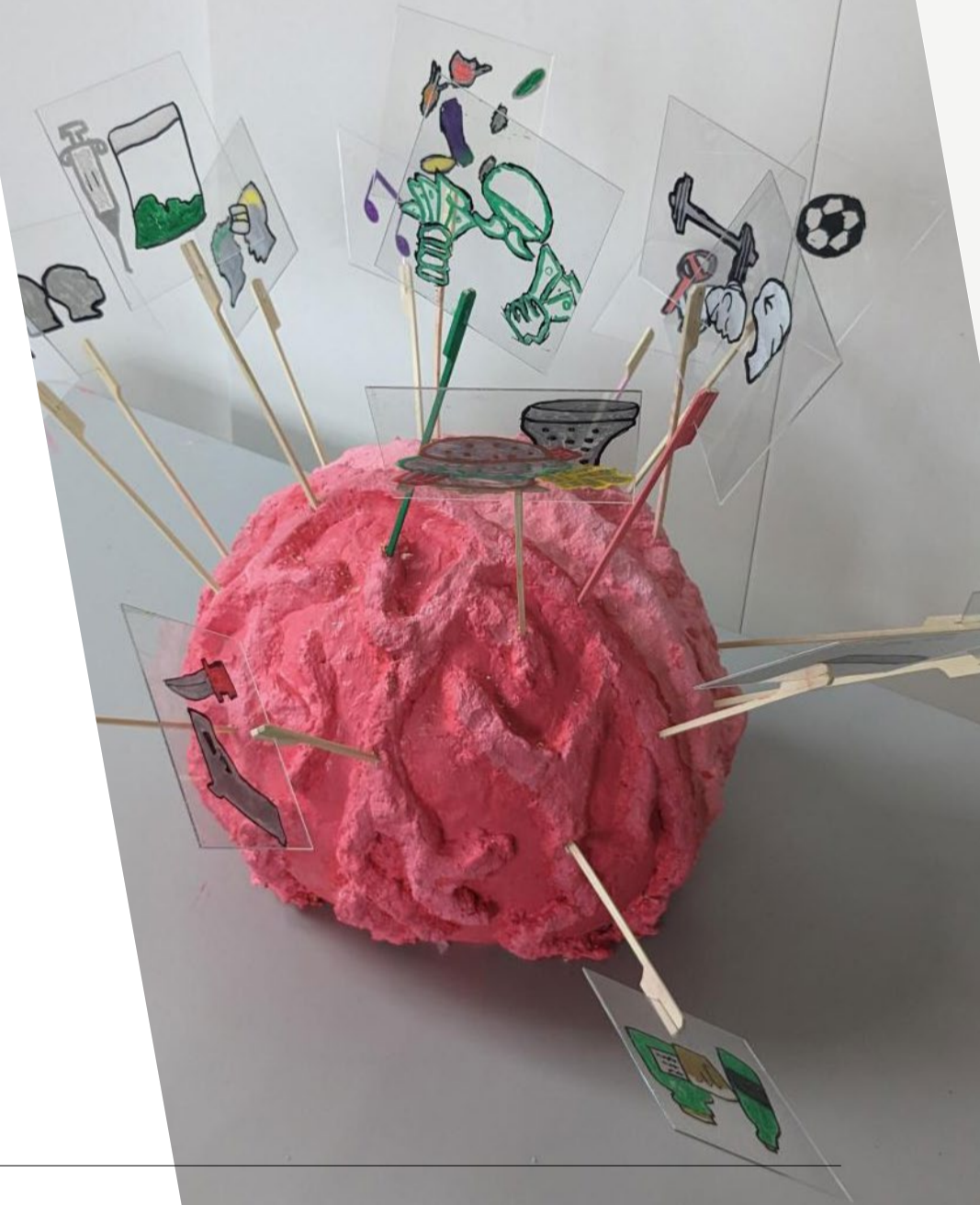
The impact on people involved in the research was threefold:

- Young people who conducted the research gained skills, confidence and knowledge about what positive masculinity meant
- Young people who took part in the research gained insight into what positive masculinity meant to them
- Adults in the community who listened to the research results benefited from seeing positive role models for masculinity and learning about young people's views



Why don't you?

Support young people to develop a youth-led piece of research: We know that this approach creates much deeper learning for both participants (those actively researching) as well as the recipients of the research (those being researched). It's a great way of developing skills, confidence and knowledge harnessing reflection and being empowered. Why not consider partnering with an experienced researcher to help support the development of this research? Potentially a local university may be able to help.



Peer Education

Being an Ambassador of Positive Masculinity

Involving young people in delivering important messages to their peers can make a big difference to how they are received. That's why we often work with peer educators to help with our violence prevention programmes. Peer education is a supported process. Peer influence is a more organic iteration of a peer to peer model. Both are legitimate in that they can help spread the word about positive masculinity.

Peer influence is important. Young adolescents are going through a transition where they like to speak to their peers and hear what they have to say, literally on any subject. It can be easier to talk to a peer than say an adult, especially on personal topics such as masculinity. Supporting and training young people to speak to other young people in a language they understand and with similar experiences is an effective strategy.

Not only does peer education give young people a voice, it also gives peer educators a whole new set of skills. It helps create positive role models and shape new norms and behaviours.

We know that a lot of the violence in society whether gender-based or not is cultural, where it has in some way been normalised. We can break those cultural and social norms by nurturing confident and knowledgeable young people who can guide their peers towards different ways of seeing the world and others.

The peer to peer model is an important aspect of spreading the word about positive masculinity. Most of the young people who took part in the project had not heard about it, but had heard about harmful or 'toxic' masculinity. Young people must have agency to articulate, debate and challenge what constitutes positive masculinity. Practitioners can support the conversations initially, but the real work happens afterwards when young people are socialising and having normal conversations.

? Why don't you?

Support young people to deliver peer education: Get a group of young people together who would like to have more direct involvement on the development of positive masculinity. Potentially this could be a group of young people that you have engaged with who want to go further with their understanding and impact others.

Share 'Lived Experiences' that support the development of positive change: You can have an impact by sharing positive stories of change and by supporting young people to share their own insights of change and how it has impacted them personally.

Creating **Brave Spaces** – Room for Enquiry and Reflection

Young People Supporting Young People

“What we are advocating is the development of more brave spaces for boys and young men to support their shared positive enquiry and reflection on masculinity.”

Caring and connecting is an important element of developing a positive masculinity – this came across strongly in our focus groups and pilot projects. Brave spaces are where you can be vulnerable or challenged (hence brave rather than safe). The project in Glasgow began with a residential which acted as a quick catalyst for young people to make connections, to care and bond through humour and shared purpose. This was effectively their brave space.

Men’s Sheds

The Men’s Shed movement is a grassroots organic movement that advocate the creation of spaces for adult men to meet. These spaces support men to form connections, pursue shared hobbies, and have been important in supporting mental health. What we are advocating is the development of more brave spaces for boys and young men to support their shared positive enquiry and reflection on masculinity.



? Why don't you?

Support young people to develop a Brave Space: We have learned about the importance of brave spaces, a space where young people can feel both vulnerable and challenged. You could look at the potential of creating a brave space within your community or organisation and involve young people in the design of this space.

Hope for the future

Imagine a Man

Hope for the future is necessary to give a sense of purpose and direction. Without hope, we may become disillusioned and apathetic, feeling that our efforts are meaningless and that the future is bleak. We need hope to strive for a better future.

Having hope helps us to cope with the challenges and uncertainties of the present – and these can feel like uncertain times at the moment. Richard Reeves argue that boys and young men have struggled to articulate a new role for themselves in a more equal society and that our culture and institutions need to wake up to the fact that boys and young men are not flourishing.

The Imagine a Man project began with a simple premise, one that didn't make assumptions:

What is it like to be a boy or a young man in Scotland?

The response to this premise was reassuring. Boys and young men are very aware of the impact of cultural harmful stereotypes and the impact it has on negative behaviour. Boys and young men

are reflective and on the whole want an equal society. Their aspirations and hopes for the future were much the same as anyone's; to own a home, to provide for partners, to have stability.

Hope for the future give us the resilience and strength to endure difficult times, and to see beyond our current circumstances to making our dreams come true.

Moreover, hope can inspire us to take action and work towards positive change. It can fuel our creativity, innovation, and problem-solving skills, as we seek to create a better world for ourselves and future generations.

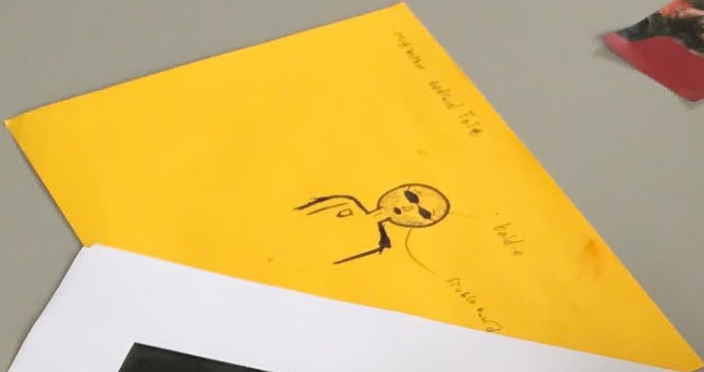
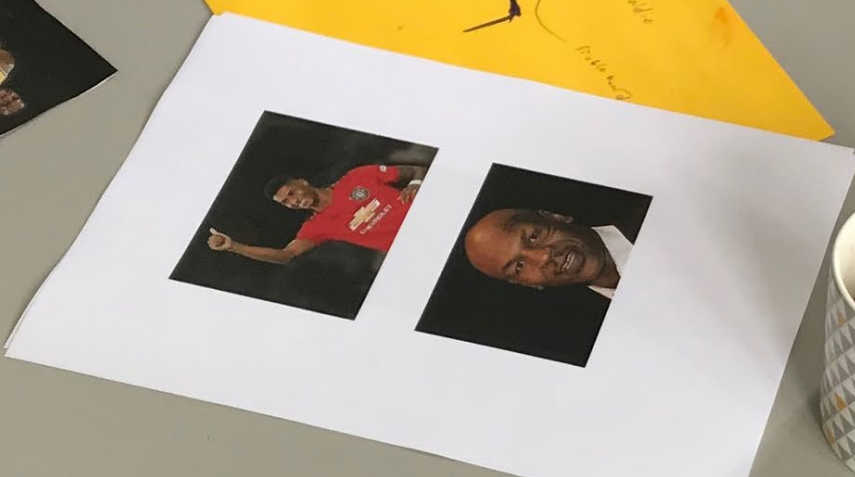
Not a single boy or young man during year two disputed the benefit of talking about and advocating positive masculinity. Everyone who took part felt that they had benefited.

Positive masculinity offers a narrative of hope, of transformation and of change.

? Why don't you?

Support young people to Imagine a Man:

Talk to young people about positive masculinity and encourage them to adopt the values, attributes and qualities of positive masculinity. Talking about positive masculinity is an important way to promote healthier gender norms and create a more equitable and inclusive society.



Passing it On Activities



Breaking the Mould

Positive Stories

Time required	45 Minutes
Objectives	Group discussion to explore negative and positive stories in the media.
Description	A group discussion on the impact of the media.
Resources required	Flipchart, whiteboard, pens, the day's newspapers (a broad selection), scissors and glue or sellotape.

What to do

1. Hand out the days newspapers. Ask either as a group or as a smaller group (you may need a few copies of the papers if doing small group work)
2. Make a collage out of the day's papers with all the negative stories about boys and young men on one sheet of paper and all the positive stories on another.
3. Ask the group the following:
 - » What do you notice?
 - » Are there common themes?
 - » What do you think an older person in the community would think?
 - » Why?

4. Now pick a positive news story, or expand on one or think of a scenario from your experience and think of ways of getting the word out to the community.
5. Mark these different ways on a post it, or flipchart. Now you have the start of a positive media campaign!

Facilitators Notes

Often these scenarios lead onto a discussion about real life scenarios. Be aware of confidentiality – you might have to ask the group members not to share any personal information or share 'real' names in their stories.

Ask the group the following questions;

How would you showcase positive masculinity?

What is the difference you want to make: to boys and young men, to all young people, to the community?



Life's River Journey

Lived Experience

Time required	45 Minutes
Objectives	A personal reflection on where an individual's views have changed using a narrative structure and the metaphor of a river
Description	A personal and visual exercise
Resources required	Pens and flipchart paper

Lived experience refers to the unique and personal experiences, perspectives, and knowledge gained by an individual through their own life experiences. Lived experience is subjective and shaped by factors such as culture, upbringing, social class, gender, race, and sexuality. It is often used in discussions around social justice, advocacy, and policymaking to highlight the importance of centring the voices and experiences of those who are directly impacted by social issues.

Everybody has a lived experience.

What to do

1. Ask participants to imagine a river. Ask them to describe what the river looks like, what it sounds like, and what it feels like to be near it. Now get them to draw their river.
2. Explain that the river is a metaphor for lived experience. Like a river, lived experience is always flowing and changing. It is shaped by the landscape it passes through, and it can be affected by external factors such as rocks, lighthouses, whirlpools, rapids, bridges, storms, etc. Add these life experiences to their drawings – they can be as creative as they want!
3. Ask participants to reflect on their own lived experience. Encourage them to think about how their experiences have been shaped by the environment they grew up in, their relationships, their culture, and other factors.
4. Ask participants to share their reflections with the group. Share drawings – explain about images they have used (rocks, sharks, sea monsters) Encourage them to think about how their experiences are similar to or different from those of others in the group.
5. Finally, ask participants to think about how they can use their understanding of lived experience to build empathy and understanding with others. Encourage them to think about how they can use this understanding to create positive change in their communities.



What have I learned?

Evaluation and Reflection

Time required	45 Minutes
Objectives	A personal reflection on where an individual's views have changed using a storytelling approach
Description	A personal exercise
Resources required	Pens and paper

What to do

1. Set the scene:

Ask the participants to take a moment to think about their time being part of the project on positive masculinity.

Ask them to take a few moments to reflect on this experience and think about what they learned from it. Is there a good story that they can share with the group that demonstrates their learning or enjoyment of the experience?

2. Share the story:

Ask each participant to take turns sharing their story with the group. Encourage them to use descriptive language to paint a vivid picture of the experience and to include any relevant details or emotions that they felt.

3. Reflect on the story:

After each participant has shared their story, ask the group to reflect on what they heard. Some questions you could ask include:

- » What did you find interesting or surprising about the story?
- » What did you learn from the story?
- » Can you relate to the experience the storyteller shared? If so, how?

4. Apply the story:

After the group has reflected on each story, ask them to think about how they can use these stories to influence others.

Some questions you could ask include:

- » Who can you share your story with?
- » How can you share your story – what forms could this take? (social media, an article, blog post etc.)

5. Sum up by talking about the ripple effect and how it is important to keep conversations about positive masculinity going.



And Finally...

Imagine A Place

Time required	45 Minutes
Objectives	<p>A personal reflection on what a place might look like if positive masculinity prevailed.</p> <p>What would this look like for boys and young men?</p> <p>What would this look like for girls and young women?</p> <p>What would this look like for the community?</p>
Description	A personal exercise
Resources required	Pens and paper

What to do

1. Begin by asking participants to close their eyes and take a few deep breaths to relax.
2. Then, ask them to imagine a place where positive masculinity is the norm. Harmful masculinity does not exist. This could be a real (your own community, county or country) or an imaginary place, and it can be as specific or as general as they like.
3. Encourage them to use their senses to fully immerse themselves in this imagined world. What does it look like? What sounds can they hear? What smells are in the air? What does it feel like to be there?

4. Once they have a clear picture in their minds, ask them to describe this place. What behaviours, attitudes, and traits are considered positive? What values and beliefs underlie this culture of positive masculinity? What would happen to anyone displaying harmful masculinity?
5. Next, ask participants to reflect on how they feel in this imagined world. Do they feel safe, respected, and valued? How does this culture of positive masculinity impact their own sense of self and their interactions with others?
 - » How is this place for boys and young men?
 - » How is this place for girls and young women?
6. Finally, ask participants to consider how they can bring the best elements of this imagined place into being. What changes can they make to promote a more positive, healthy, and inclusive form of masculinity? How can they support and uplift those around them to embrace these values and behaviours?



Many thanks to all those who took part in the research and contributed to this resource



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**Imagine
a Man**

~~No knives~~
Better lives



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