

Boys, belonging and the manosphere: early action in a digital age

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TUESDAY 8 SEPTEMBER 12:00PM

EVERY CONVERSATION MATTERS

SHIFTING CONVERSATION TO ACTION

Boys, belonging and the manosphere: early action in a digital age

Presenters:

- Alice Dolin Researcher, NAPCAN - moderator
- Tessa Boyd-Caine CEO, ANROWS
- Ben Vasiliou CEO, The Man Cave
- Ruby Leahy Gatfield Head of Research and Evaluation, Teach Us Consent

In this webinar on **Tuesday 8 September 2026** the speakers discussed:

- **Understanding the manosphere** - How harmful online content packages rigid masculinity, grievance, misogyny and control in ways that can appeal to boys and young men.
- **Algorithms and online influence** - How social media platforms, profit-driven algorithms and emerging technologies can push increasingly harmful content into young people's feeds.
- **Impact on boys and relationships** - How these messages can affect boys' wellbeing, identity, education, relationships and attitudes towards women and others.
- **The role of adults and communities** - How parents, educators and role models can respond through open conversations, healthy modelling, curiosity and critical media literacy.

Overview

This webinar explored boys, belonging and the manosphere, examining the messages young people are receiving about masculinity and relationships both online and offline, and the impact these influences can have on their relationships, education, wellbeing and sense of self.

The discussion unpacked how harmful manosphere content can connect boys' genuine experiences of loneliness, insecurity and uncertainty with rigid ideas about masculinity, grievance, misogyny and control. Panellists also explored how algorithms, social media

business models and emerging technologies such as AI can amplify and normalise harmful content, even when young people are not actively seeking it out.

Importantly, the conversation focused on what adults can do. Parents, educators, role models and communities continue to have a powerful influence in young people's lives through modelling healthy relationships, creating safe and curious conversations, strengthening critical media literacy and helping young people navigate what they encounter online.

Speaker quotes

- "We have not lost our kids to these online influences. Please have some hope. We can still give our kids good advice and good role modeling." - **Ben Vasiliou**
- "It's about patience and long term questions. So you don't have to get to the crux of the conversation today." - **Ben Vasiliou**
- "We know that rigid gender norms harm all of us." - **Tessa Boyd-Caine**
- "Teachers need to be supported by principals and their peers. They also need to be supported by the parents and the community that their schools sit within." - **Tessa Boyd-Caine**
- "It's not that men and boys are seeking out this content. It's that the machinery that drives these platforms requires them to take people into these kind of rabbit holes." - **Ruby Leahy Gatfield**
- "Big tech don't ask our consent to see that information." - **Ruby Leahy Gatfield**

Resources and links:

- Jesuit research referenced by Alice - <https://jss.org.au/programs/research/the-man-box/>
- NAPCAN's Love Bites Respectful Relationship Education program: <https://www.napcan.org.au/programs/love-bites/>
- The Man Caves workshops: <https://themancave.life/programs/>
- Resources from the Man Cave: <https://themancave.life/>

Questions from audience:

Q: What percentage of your program is dedicated to mental health, inner happiness, confidence building?

A: Yes, mental health is absolutely important. Supporting boys and young men to understand and talk about their emotions, feel connected, seek help when they need it and develop a positive sense of self is a vital part of prevention.

At the same time, this work needs to go beyond individual wellbeing alone. It should also help young people build empathy, respectful relationship skills, healthy boundaries and the confidence to challenge harmful pressures or gender stereotypes.

The Man Cave's work is a good example of this broader approach. As a preventative mental-health charity for boys and young men, it places strong emphasis on emotional literacy, wellbeing and help-seeking, while also supporting participants to explore masculinity, relationships, consent and respect. Its workshops and resources are designed to help boys build healthier relationships with themselves and the people around them. You can find out more about this at <https://themancave.life/>

Q: Is Digital Literacy, Sex Ed and Respectful Relationships enough to keep children safe from toxic masculinity and today's digital reality?

A: High-quality Respectful Relationships workshops can give young people practical skills around consent, boundaries, respectful communication, help-seeking, online behaviour and challenging harmful stereotypes.

But workshops aren't solutions alone. Creating change requires ongoing, age-appropriate learning that is reinforced at school, at home, among peers, in sport and community settings, and online. It also requires adults and organisations to model the respectful, equal and inclusive culture we want young people to experience.

Programs such as NAPCAN's Love Bites can be an important part of that work. Love Bites offers Respectful Relationships Education for young people aged 11–17, alongside facilitator training and practical resources that support continued conversations and learning beyond a single session. The aim is not just to provide information, but to help young people build skills they can practise over time: in relationships, online and in their communities.

Theme

The theme for National Child Protection Week (6 - 12 September 2026) is

Every Conversation Matters: Shifting Conversation to Action



The following sheet provides links to resources and topics that were mentioned in the above webinar, to help us **shift this conversation into action**.

Recordings & Resource Sheets for the National Child Protection Week 2026 webinars will all be available on the [NAPCAN website](https://www.napcan.org.au).

Social media tiles from the webinar are available on our [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Instagram](#)

For more information, contact:

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Thank you for your commitment to ensuring every child in every community has a fair go.

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