



GBV CONVERSATION GUIDE

FOR ADULTS SUPPORTING

YOUNG MEN 14-18

SW21-205/2026E-PDF
ISBN 978-0-660-99222-8



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INTRODUCTION

This guide was created to support parents, caregivers, educators, coaches, mentors, and other trusted adults in having thoughtful, grounded conversations with teen boys aged 14-18 about gender-based violence (GBV), masculinity, consent, relationships, boundaries, and safety.

It is important to know that GBV affects people of all genders. While men and boys can be victims and survivors of violence, women, girls, and people from marginalized communities are most affected by GBV. Most GBV is caused by men or boys, regardless of the victim or survivor's gender. This is part of why men and boys of all ages play an essential role in preventing and ending GBV – they are peers, friends, classmates, teammates, and emerging leaders whose influence shapes group norms, online spaces, and everyday interactions. Engaging adolescent boys directly is not about assigning blame. It is about recognizing their capacity to challenge harmful norms and build healthier cultures of respect.

Young men today are hearing conflicting messages about masculinity as they move through their teenage years. They may feel pressure to be confident, dominant, and unemotional. They may care deeply about fairness and respect, while also seeing online narratives that frame relationships as competition or control. Without trusted spaces to reflect on these messages, many are left to sort through them alone.

Your presence matters in this process. Adults play a powerful role in shaping how teen boys understand strength, responsibility, accountability, and care. This guide will help you explore topics such as power, online influence, consent, accountability, and everyday action in prevention.

You don't need to have all the answers.

These conversations are not about educating or lecturing the young men you care about. They are about creating space for honest thinking, reflection, and growth over time. Teens you speak to may respond with curiosity, humour, skepticism, silence, or strong opinions. You, as the trusted adult, may worry about saying the wrong thing. This guide is designed to help you move through those moments with steadiness and care.

These conversations do not need to be formal. They often emerge naturally while watching sports, reacting to something online, discussing something in the news, or talking about a real-life situation.

Lower-pressure settings such as walking, driving, or doing an activity together often make it easier to explore complex or sensitive topics.

Throughout this guide, when we use the terms boys or men, we are referring to anyone who has a relationship with masculinity. This includes people who identify as men or boys, as well as those who are socially perceived or treated as masculine, regardless of sex assigned at birth. Experiences of masculinity are diverse and shaped by culture, context, and lived experience, and this language is used with that diversity in mind.



CONTENT WARNING

This guide discusses GBV, including topics like abuse, harassment, and harm that can happen in person or online. These topics may be difficult, especially if they connect to your own lived experience.

Take care of yourself as you use this guide and step away if you need to. Support is available should you need it. While you are encouraged to look for support in your local area if you need it, here are some national supports you can access:

- [Support services](#) for those affected by GBV
- [Mental health supports](#)

CONFIDENTIALITY AND REPORTING

It's possible that these conversations may include disclosures about experiencing harm, witnessing harm, or causing harm. Adults are often more prepared for disclosures of experiencing harm, since they are more common, and you may feel less confident responding if a young person discloses causing harm. Being prepared helps you respond calmly and appropriately.

If they disclose experiencing harm:

- Focus on listening
- Acknowledge what was shared
- Prioritize safety and support
- Avoid minimizing, questioning, or rushing to solutions

If they disclose harming someone else:

- Remain calm and avoid shaming
- Focus on safety, responsibility, and next steps
- Avoid trying to handle the situation alone

Mandatory Reporting: If you are in a role with mandatory reporting obligations (for example, certain educators, social service providers, or healthcare workers), be clear about your responsibilities before the conversation begins. If a disclosure meets the threshold for reporting, explain this calmly and transparently, and involve the young person in the next steps as much as possible. **The duty to report is not limited to professionals; anyone can report it.**

You can say: *"I need to report this to keep people safe. I can still support you through what happens next."*

Non-Mandatory Reporting: If you are not a mandated reporter, for example, a parent, caregiver, mentor, or trusted adult, it's still important to know where to turn. If a disclosure raises concerns about safety, you can seek guidance from:

- Local crisis lines
- Sexual assault centres
- Youth support services
- Trusted professionals, such as counsellors or social workers

You can say: *"This is something we shouldn't handle alone. Getting support is part of keeping people safe."*

The duty to report is not limited to professionals. In Canada, all adults share a legal responsibility to report suspected child abuse or neglect. Reaching out for guidance is a responsible step. There are resources available at the end of this guide to help you and the youth you're supporting.

PREPARING YOURSELF BEFORE THE CONVERSATION

Before starting these conversations, take a moment to reflect on your own beliefs about masculinity, relationships, and even GBV. Many adults grew up hearing messages like “boys will be boys” or “real men don’t show emotion.” Even if we no longer agree with those ideas, they can still shape how we respond. Noticing your assumptions helps you show up more intentionally.

Topics like masculinity, consent, power, online harm, and GBV can bring up strong reactions. You might feel protective, frustrated, uncomfortable, or unsure. That is normal. Being prepared does not mean being perfectly calm. It means:

- ➔ Being aware of your reactions and choosing how they show up
- ➔ Noticing if you feel activated, and slowing down
- ➔ Pausing and returning to the conversation later, if needed

The teen boys you’re speaking to may ask direct questions about sex, dating, friendships, school life, or online culture. They may also share something personal. Your role is to:

- ➔ Listen first
- ➔ Avoid rushing to fix or control the situation
- ➔ Support them in thinking through options

If a teen shares something that raises safety concerns, follow the reporting guidance in this guide (in the section directly above). Outside of those situations, respect their confidentiality.

CREATE AN OPEN AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Conversations work best when they feel respectful and open. Here are some helpful tips for creating an open environment for conversation:

- ➔ Speak with the young person, not at them
- ➔ Use curiosity instead of correction
- ➔ Allow for pauses and mixed feelings
- ➔ Avoid turning the conversation into a debate or rushing to solutions

It can be useful to start by checking in about what they already know, what they’re curious about, or what feels relevant to them right now. You don’t need to have all the answers – learning and conversation can happen together.



DURING THE CONVERSATION

As you get into these topics keep these strategies in mind.

Ask open-ended questions

Open-ended questions invite reflection instead of a simple “yes” or “no.” They help encourage critical thinking and can help boys think out loud, explore their ideas, and feel less judged. These questions often start with “how,” “what,” or “why.”

- ➔ “How do you think messages about being a guy show up in your life right now?”
- ➔ “What do you and your friends think respect looks like in dating, friendships, or relationships?”
- ➔ “How do you decide what kind of man you want to be when you get older? Who or what is influencing you most?”

Practice active listening

Listen actively, reflect back what you hear, validate feelings, and allow pauses. You don't need to fix everything. These conversations are about exploring things together.

- ➔ “That makes sense.”
- ➔ “I can see why that would feel complicated.”
- ➔ “Thanks for telling me. Do you want advice, or do you want me to just listen?”

Share experiences

Sharing your own learning, mistakes, and how you handle emotions or examples from others can help to show healthy masculinity in action.

Examples:

- ➔ “I'm frustrated, so I'm pausing before we continue.”
- ➔ “I don't have the answer, but let's figure it out together.”
- ➔ “I'm still unlearning some stuff I grew up with about 'how guys should be.' I'm not here to lecture you. I'm more curious about what you've noticed.”
- ➔ “I don't have a perfect take on this. I'm asking because I want to understand how it feels for you to be a teenager today.”

If they joke, shut down or say “whatever”:

- ➔ “Fair. I'm not trying to make this heavy. I'm interested because it affects our lives more than we admit.”
- ➔ “We don't have to go deep. I'm just checking what you think.”
- ➔ “Okay. If you ever want to talk about it later, I'm around.”

WRAPPING UP THE CONVERSATION

These conversations don't have to happen just once. Being reassuring and leaving an open door allows you to have ongoing communication and support them as new things come up.

- ➔ “I'm glad we could talk about this.”
- ➔ “We can come back to this anytime.”
- ➔ Share additional learning and support resources, including the [It's Not Just](#) modules.
- ➔ If you didn't know the answer to something, find out and follow up – and commit to learning more together.



HEALTHY MASCULINITY AND EMOTIONAL LIFE

There isn't one "right" way to be a man. Healthy masculinity means giving boys and young men space to feel, connect, care, ask for help, and handle conflict without harming others. Some express themselves through art, music, or fashion; others through sports, building things, or school leadership, among other things. The goal isn't to force boys to be a certain way, it's to remove the rules that say, "real men don't do X." Emotional awareness, empathy, and connection support healthier relationships and help prevent GBV.

Many teenage boys face mixed messages: be strong, independent, confident, but also emotionally aware and caring. Without guidance, some hide emotions, act tough, or shut down. Adults may have learned the same lessons. Culture, family, community, and identity shape masculinity, and teens may juggle multiple, sometimes conflicting expectations.

Emotions often show up in the body first and look like tension, tightness, or urges to lash out or withdraw. Noticing these early helps prevent escalation in relationships, conflicts, or online spaces.

Let's be honest. You don't need to be "done your own work" to guide them. Be honest about your own learning – admitting you're still figuring things out often helps teens engage more than certainty or lecturing.



WAYS TO BRING IT UP

Use everyday moments as entry points: conversations about friendships, dating, school life, online culture, sports, gaming, or something you're watching together. The goal is to keep it natural and low-pressure.

Simple, low-pressure openers:

- ➔ "Do you ever feel pressure to act a certain way because you're a guy?"
- ➔ "At school or with friends, do you ever feel like there's an unspoken script about how guys are supposed to act?"
- ➔ "When you're stressed, like with school, sports, friends, or family, how does it usually show up for you?"

Using shared media (watch something together as a start):

- ➔ "What messages does this send about men? What feels true? What doesn't feel true?"
- ➔ "What does this leave out about guys' experiences, or about what it's like being a guy your age?"
- ➔ "What do you think about how that coach talked to that player?"

Questions that open up a conversation about emotional life without making it awkward:

- ➔ "When things get stressful with school, sports, friendships, or relationships, what normally happens for you? Like, do you think you shut down, distract, get irritated, or push through?"
- ➔ "What kinds of emotions feel easiest to show? Which ones feel harder?"
- ➔ "Who do you feel you can actually be real with?"

"Healthy masculinity comes with emotional intelligence. Boys are taught to express anger, and much less sadness. Healthy masculinity means being able to recognize the more vulnerable parts of your personality and emotions, such as sadness, empathy, and compassion."

- Gabriel (Focus group participant)



POWER AND RELATIONSHIPS

Teenagers experience power daily, sometimes without knowing it. It shows up in who gets listened to, who sets the tone, and who feels pressure to go along. Power can shift depending on the situation: someone may feel confident with friends but powerless at school or home.

Things like social status, age, popularity, physical size, ability, gender expectations, and online influence shape how comfortable someone feels saying no, making decisions, or taking responsibility. Gender norms and culture often reinforce narrow ideas about how people “should” act. Your role is to help boys notice these dynamics, not assign blame.

WAYS TO BRING IT UP

Start with real-life examples instead of abstract ideas.

Conversation Prompts:

- “In your friend group, who usually decides what you’re doing or where you’re going? What makes their voice carry more weight?”
- “At school, on a team or in a club, who tends to have the most influence: the captain, the most popular person, the loudest one? How does that change what people feel comfortable saying?”
- “Have you ever gone along with something with friends, at a party, or online because it felt easier than pushing back?”
- “When have you seen someone’s status or influence make things uncomfortable or harder for someone?”

If conversation stalls, name examples: popularity, being older, athletic ability, academic reputation, or who controls the group chat. Ask which of these matters most and which ones create pressure, even when no one says it out loud.

Linking power to relationships:

Once you’ve explored group dynamics, you can gently connect these ideas to dating and relationships:

- **[Depending on the teen’s age]:** “In dating/intimacy/sex with someone you like, who usually sets the pace or decides what happens next?”
- “Do you think both of you feel equally comfortable speaking up or slowing things down?”
- “How do things like popularity, age, reputation, or confidence change how easy it is to say yes or no?”

These questions help boys notice how expectations, influence, and pressure shape choices, even when no one is trying to cause harm.



Supporting self-discovery and reflection:

Reflection is most useful when it relates to real experiences. Rather than asking boys to analyze themselves or others, help them notice how things tend to play out in everyday situations with friends, at school, or online.

Examples:

- ➔ **Group chat goes sideways:** “What usually happens after a joke or comment shifts the vibe?”
- ➔ **Someone says no:** “Does the group respect it, or brush it off? Does it depend on who says it?”
- ➔ **One person making decisions for the group:** “Does anyone feel comfortable pushing back? Why?”
- ➔ **Team or class dynamics:** “What happens when someone challenges the captain, the most popular person, or someone everyone looks up to?”

Normalize uncertainty:

- ➔ “You don’t have to figure it all out. I’m just curious what you’ve noticed.”
- ➔ “Sometimes we only understand things clearly after the fact. That’s normal.”
- ➔ “Sometimes there isn’t a clear right answer. I’m just interested in how it looks from your perspective.”

The goal is awareness of how influence, pressure, and expectations shape friendships and relationships. If your conversation brings up something personal or difficult, you can acknowledge this, keep the door open, and remain supportive:

- ➔ “Thanks for sharing that with me. If you ever want to talk more about it, I’m here.”

“In some situations, I have the ability to stop something bad from happening, but I also feel trapped because if I act, I might get targeted or teased.”

- Matthew (Focus group participant)



UNDERSTANDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence (GBV) is harm caused because of someone's gender, gender expression, or perceived gender. It can be physical, emotional, sexual, or economic (for example, controlling someone's access to money or resources), and is often linked to inequality, harmful stereotypes, and abuse of power.

GBV exists on a spectrum, from disrespectful comments or jokes, pressure or coercion, and ignoring boundaries, to more serious harm in friendships, relationships, or online spaces. Many teenage boys may not see these actions as harmful or violent or may not witness obvious harm, so framing GBV as patterns of behaviour helps make it relevant without implying blame.

SOME IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION

- ➔ GBV is shaped by systems like gender norms, power, and inequality.
- ➔ Individuals still have choices in how they act and how they respond to what they see.
- ➔ Avoid framing GBV only as bad people or bad apples doing bad things, or only as a systemic (huge societal) problem that feels impossible to change. Help boys see that everyday actions and choices also matter.

WAYS TO BRING IT UP

Use everyday reference points like media, sports, online posts, or gaming, instead of definitions.

Some questions you can ask:

- ➔ "When something comes out about a celebrity, athlete, or influencer, what makes some stories blow up and others barely get talked about?"

- ➔ "How do you think fan loyalty or reputation affects how people respond to accusations?"
- ➔ "Does it change how people react if the person accused is successful, popular, or well-liked?"

If boys respond more defensively (e.g., "He's a good player" or "We don't know the full story" or "People get falsely accused"), treat it as an opening for reflection rather than as a debate:

- ➔ "It can be hard when someone you respect or look up to is involved. What makes that explanation feel convincing?"
- ➔ "When a victim decides to speak up, what do you think they might be risking?"
- ➔ "How do you imagine this might feel from the victim's side of it?"
- ➔ "Can someone be successful or admired and still cause harm?"
- ➔ "What do you think taking responsibility could look like in this situation? Is that easy or hard to do? Why?"

Ask them about a time when they shared something personal or difficult and were met with questions or disbelief. How did that make them feel?

Emphasizing agency without blame

A key message for adults to reinforce is that boys are not responsible for ending GBV on their own, and they are not powerless to prevent it, either.

You might say:

- ➔ “Small choices, like how you talk about people, how you respond to jokes, how you handle pressure with friends, matter more than people realize.”

This framing helps boys see themselves as capable of contributing to prevention without feeling accused or overwhelmed.

TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED VIOLENCE

Technology shapes how boys connect, socialize, and build friendships and relationships. It also shapes how harm can happen. GBV can show up through online harassment, image-based abuse, pressure to send or share intimate photos, cyberbullying, or threats tied to reputation, friendships, or social status.

Sextortion (sexual extortion) is a type of online blackmail where someone threatens to share a sexual image or video of a person unless that person sends money, sends more images, or does something else they are asked to do.

Sextortion is a growing concern for youth and affects both boys and girls. However, it is important to know that around 91% of financial [sextortion](#) victims are boys aged 14-17¹, often after being contacted through social media platforms such as Instagram or Snapchat. Shame, embarrassment, or fear can make it difficult for boys to tell adults what is happening, which can increase their risk and isolation. Talking openly about sextortion and other forms of online harm can help boys recognize warning signs and know where to seek help.

Rather than focusing only on “bad actors,” help boys to think about digital responsibility, consent, and self-protection.

Naming online harm clearly

Discuss real scenarios:

- ➔ “Have you ever heard of someone’s private images shared without their permission?”
- ➔ “How easy is it for things to spread once they’re sent?”
- ➔ “What happens in group chats when someone becomes the target of jokes?”
- ➔ “Have you seen situations where someone’s private content was shared, like after an argument, breakup, or falling out? What do your friends usually do when something like that shows up in a group chat?”
- ➔ “What would you do if someone threatened to share something personal you had sent them?”

If a boy discloses that he has been harmed, you can both provide and access these resources to seek advice and guidance: [GetHelpNow](#) and [Cybertip.ca](#). Return to Section 1 for support on handling disclosures.

BOUNDARIES AND CONSENT

BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are the personal limits people set around what feels safe, comfortable, or acceptable. They are not only about physical contact. They can also include emotional boundaries, time boundaries, digital boundaries, and sexual boundaries. These limits can look different for boys of different ages and may change depending on the situation or relationship.

For boys, boundaries can be complicated by expectations about being easy-going, always available, sexually confident, or “down for anything.” Some may feel pressure to go along with jokes, plans, sexual situations, or group behaviour to avoid looking awkward, inexperienced, or weak. Helping boys learn to recognize and express boundaries clearly is part of developing self-respect and respect for others.

It's important for boys to practice what setting boundaries might look or sound like, including:

- Saying “I’m not into that,” when friends are pushing them to send something, make a joke, or keep something going that doesn’t feel right.
- Choosing not to go along with risky behaviour, or not to “prove” themselves, even if others are hyping it up or questioning them.
- Stepping away from a situation that’s escalating, whether that’s an argument, a party, a group chat, or a friendship or relationship conflict.
- Deciding not to share intimate photos, passwords, or private conversations, even if someone says, “If you trusted me, you would.”
- Hearing “no,” hesitation, or silence from someone they’re dating and backing off immediately, without trying to convince, tease, or wear them down.



CONSENT

Just as setting boundaries is important, so is respecting other people's boundaries. That's what consent is. It means everybody agrees actively, willingly, and throughout the situation. Sometimes situations can feel confusing due to uncertainty, social pressure, alcohol or other substances, or power dynamics. In those moments, the safest approach is to stop and make sure everyone feels comfortable and on the same page. Boys often hear "take initiative," but are also told to respect boundaries, and they need to understand that respecting boundaries and hearing enthusiastic consent always come first.

One way to help understand consent is by remembering these five elements.

- Freely given
- Reversible
- Informed
- Enthusiastic
- Specific

Key points:

- Consent is about how people relate to each other, not just avoiding harm.
- Notice verbal and non-verbal cues.
- Check in when things feel unclear.
- Consent under pressure, fear, the influence of drugs or alcohol, or discomfort isn't freely given.



WAYS TO BRING UP CONSENT

Start with everyday scenarios rather than rules.

- **[Age-dependent language]:** "In dating/sexual/intimate/hookup situations, how do guys your age usually figure out if someone is actually into it?"
- "Do you think there's pressure on guys to keep things moving, even if they're not totally sure?"
- "Have you ever felt unsure but didn't want to look awkward or inexperienced?"
- "How do you handle rejection? What do you think is a healthy way to respond?"

Checking in and noticing cues

- Consent is active and ongoing. Uncertainty or silence is a cue to pause and check in.
- Explore enthusiasm vs. hesitation, body language, silence, or withdrawal.
- Normalize checking in during an interaction as care:
 - ↓ "Are you good with this?"
 - ↓ "Do you want to keep going or take a break?"
 - ↓ "We don't have to do anything if you're not sure."

ONLINE SPACES

Online spaces play a big role in how many boys form identity, community, and relationships. Social media, group chats, gaming, YouTube, and online forums can shape ideas about masculinity, dating, success, and status.

- ➔ Not all online content is harmful. Many boys go online for learning, motivation, financial tips, fitness advice, entertainment and gaming, or connection.
- ➔ Online platforms use algorithms that show more of the same type of content once someone engages with it.
- ➔ Over time, this can narrow what someone sees and make certain ideas feel more common or “normal” than they really are.
- ➔ This can shape beliefs about gender, relationships, and power without someone fully realizing it.



THE “MANOSPHERE”

One group of online communities that may shape beliefs is what’s referred to as the manosphere. The manosphere can appeal to teenage boys because it features content about their interests and speaks to some of the things they may be going through and feeling (like rejection, insecurity, and isolation). **However, these communities also often promote rigid and adversarial ideas about gender:**

- ➔ Relationships may be framed as power struggles rather than mutual care or respect.
- ➔ Messages may suggest that dominance, control, or emotional detachment lead to success.
- ➔ Women are often portrayed in misleading or negative ways.

WAYS TO BRING IT UP

Start with curiosity about their life online.

- ➔ “What kind of content do you see a lot of on your feeds?”
- ➔ “Do you think what you see is what most people see?”
- ➔ “Do you notice the algorithm pushing certain themes or creators?”

Exploring mansphere ideas without debating

When talking about the mansphere, it helps to make clear that you are trying to understand what boys are hearing and what they think about it. The goal is not to catch them saying the wrong thing or to label them. It is to open up conversation about the messages they are seeing online and how those messages shape ideas about gender, masculinity, influence, and relationships.

For example, if terms like “red pill,” “beta,” “alpha,” “high-value,” etc. come up:

- “I’ve heard people use that term. What do you think it means?”
- “Where do you think that idea comes from?”
- “Does that match what you’ve actually seen in real life?”
- “Why do you think that kind of message appeals to some boys?”

Red pill:

An online term people use to say they’ve “figured out the truth” about dating or gender. It’s often used to push the idea that men and women are in competition.

Alpha:

A word used to describe a man who is seen as dominant, confident, and in charge.

Beta:

A word used to describe a man who is seen as less confident or lower status. It’s often used as an insult.

High-value (man):

A term used online to rank men based on money, looks, status, or power.

Invite analysis rather than giving answers, and encourage thinking about trust, respect, and healthy relationships online:

- “What emotions do you think that content taps into?”
- “Does it make relationships feel like connection or competition?”
- “Do the guys you respect in real life act like those influencers describe?”
- “Does this kind of content make boys feel more confident, or more pressured?”



ACCOUNTABILITY, RESPONSIBILITY, AND SUPPORT

Talking about accountability is important because it's challenging for many boys. It can be hard for someone to accept they caused harm, especially if they see themselves as a "good guy." Realizing they hurt someone can create tension:

- ➔ "If I'm a good person, I wouldn't do harm, so maybe it wasn't really harm."
- ➔ Denial or deflection can feel safer than facing that both can be true: "I am not a bad person, but I caused harm."

Accountability isn't about labelling someone abusive, it's about:

- ➔ Recognizing the impact of what happened
- ➔ Taking responsibility
- ➔ Committing to do things differently

Accountability is a process, not a one-time moment. Reflection, repair, and sustained change matter more than quick apologies. Your role is to support responsibility, safety, and learning, while following reporting requirements (see Section 1 for mandatory / non-mandatory reporting).

WAYS TO BRING IT UP

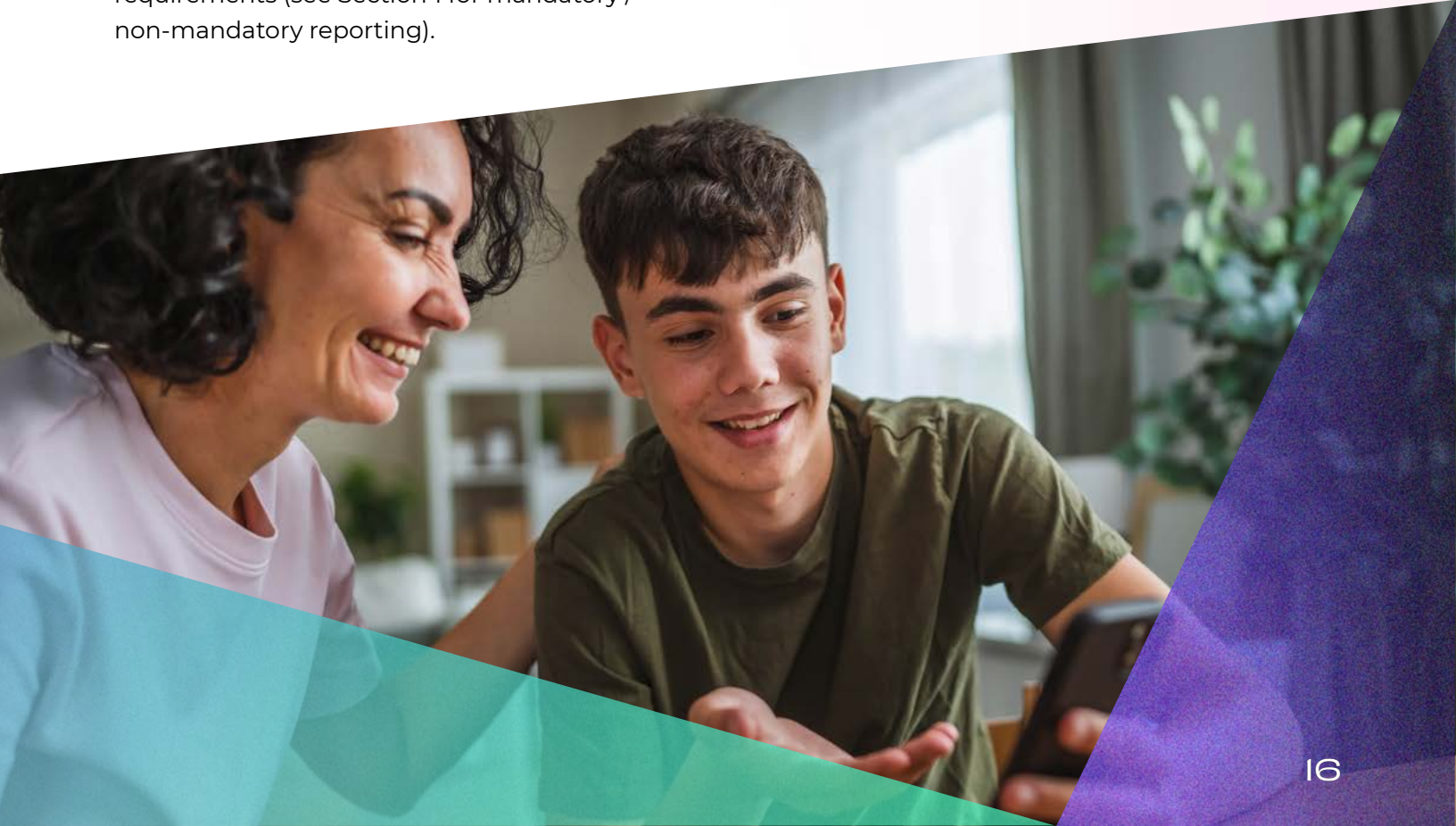
Explore what accountability means:

- ➔ "When you hear the phrase 'take accountability', what comes to mind?"
- ➔ "Does taking accountability feel more like support, punishment, or something else?"
- ➔ "What do you think it should look like when someone messes up or hurts someone?"

Introduce responsibility without blame.

You might say:

- ➔ "Being accountable doesn't mean you're a bad person. It means taking responsibility and trying to make things right."



IMPACT VS. INTENT

When something harmful happens, people often focus on what they meant to do. Intent is about what someone was trying to do, whereas impact is about how it actually affected the other person. Both matter, but harm is understood through impact, not just intention.

For example, a boy might say, "I was just joking," or "I didn't mean anything by it." That may be true about his intent. But if the other person felt embarrassed, pressured, or unsafe, the impact is still real.

Prompts:

- ➔ "What do you think the difference is between intent and impact?"
- ➔ "Why do you think people struggle more with impact than intent?"
- ➔ "What would accountability look like if a joke in a group chat actually hurt someone?"

Calling in / being called in

Explore openness to feedback:

- ➔ "What makes it easier to hear feedback without shutting down?"
- ➔ "What helps you stay open and not get defensive when someone says you crossed a line?"

Model respectful language:

- ➔ "I'm telling you this because I respect you."
- ➔ "That didn't sit right with me. Can we talk about it?"

SUPPORTING ONGOING CHANGE

Shift focus from shame to action:

- ➔ "What do you want to do differently next time?"
- ➔ "Who could help keep you accountable?"

"There's this built-in fear of opening up...adding on the layer of masculine expectations, men are supposed to be comfortable and strong, which makes it harder to be open."

- Ashley (Focus group participant)



BYSTANDER INTERVENTION AND EVERYDAY ACTION

With a better understanding of GBV, teen boys can begin to recognize it and think about how they might respond. This can feel risky for many youth who worry they may feel awkward or it could put them on the outs socially.

That's why it's important for them to know they have options.

BOYS HAVE OPTIONS

When something feels off, they can choose how, or whether, to respond.

➔ **Direct:** Say something in the moment.

- ↓ "That's not funny."
- ↓ "That's not cool."

➔ **Distract:** Shift the situation.

- ↓ Change the topic or ask an unrelated question.
- ↓ Pull someone into a side conversation.

➔ **Delegate:** Bring in help.

- ↓ Ask a friend to step in with them.
- ↓ Loop in someone with authority (coach, teacher, supervisor).
- ↓ Use platform reporting tools when needed.

➔ **Delay:** Check in afterward.

- ↓ "Hey, I noticed what happened earlier. Are you okay?"

➔ **Document:** Write down or record what is happening (whether it's online or in-person) if it is safe to do so.

- ↓ This might include writing down what they saw or when something occurred.
- ↓ If what they wrote down is shared, it should be given to the person affected so they can decide what to do with it.
- ↓ Never publish a video without the consent of the person affected.
- ↓ If the incident involves intimate images, never save or share them. Instead, note when and where the image was shared and who was involved.

You can ask them:

- ➔ "Which of these feels doable for you?"
- ➔ "Which feels risky?"
- ➔ "What would make it easier?"



WORKING THROUGH REAL SITUATIONS

Use concrete situations rather than hypotheticals. Real examples help boys think through what responding might actually look like:

- ➔ “If someone shares a nude in a group chat, what options do you actually have?”
- ➔ “If someone makes a rape joke at lunch when you’re at school or on a team, what would you feel comfortable saying, if anything?”
- ➔ **[Age-dependent question]:** “If you hear a friend start blaming girls or young women for his dating frustrations or repeating ‘red pill’ ideas, what question could you ask instead of debating? What would calling him in look like?”

Naming the Cost

Acknowledge reality that speaking up can feel risky:

- ➔ “Speaking up can sometimes cost comfort or popularity.”
- ➔ “Sometimes the hardest part is not knowing how people will react.”

Then ask:

- ➔ “What feels worth the risk to you?”
- ➔ “What kinds of support would make it easier for you to speak up if something feels off?”

Linking Back to Emotion

Intervening often connects to emotional awareness and peer pressure.

- ➔ “What feelings come up when you imagine stepping in?”
- ➔ “How does pressure to ‘stay cool’ or not stand out show up when you think about stepping in?”

“Sometimes you can tell when one of your buddies is out and you know something’s wrong, but they don’t want to talk about it. And there’s a point of just being like, you don’t need to talk to me about this, but if you feel ready, it’s here.”

- Cameron (Focus group participant)



CONCLUSION

Talking about GBV is never easy. These conversations can feel especially difficult with boys if they feel they are being targeted or blamed. That's why it's important to approach them with openness and curiosity, focusing on awareness, empathy, and practical skills.

These conversations are not meant to happen just once. Building trust and understanding takes time. Keeping the door open, checking in, listening without judgment, and staying curious helps boys know you are someone they can talk to and explore these issues with.



24/7 SUPPORT SERVICES

[Kids Help Phone](#): Confidential chat, text and phone mental health support services for kids, teens and young adults.

1-800-668-6868

[Hope for Wellness Help Line](#): Counselling and crisis intervention offering immediate help to Indigenous peoples across Canada.

1-855-242-3310

We Matter Campaign for Indigenous youth

[Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline](#): Chat and text support to connect human trafficking victims and survivors with support services.

1-833-900-1010

[Trans Lifeline](#): Confidential peer support and resources for trans and gender-diverse people, not connected to the police.

1-877-330-6366

[RiseUp \(by Kids Help Phone\)](#): Confidential support and resources specifically geared toward African, Caribbean, and Black youth and their well-being.

Texting [RISE to 686868](#)

Resources specifically for men and boys:

[Men&](#): Confidential phone and chat line and resources specifically geared toward men 1-833-327-6367

[HeadsUpGuys](#): A mental health resource specifically geared toward men

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

You can find a glossary of terms and GBV learning modules for youth at [Canada.ca/ItsNotJust](#)

[White Ribbon: Boys are at Risk: Confronting the Rise of ONLINE Misogyny and Harmful Ideologies](#)

[White Ribbon Men's Engagement in Gender-Based Violence Prevention](#)

[White Ribbon: My Friend, Max Hate](#)

[Debunking the Manosphere myth resources](#)

[White Ribbon: Youth Engagement in Prevent Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking](#)

[White Ribbon resources on everyday allyship and intervention](#)

[White Ribbon Allies for Gender Equality Toolkit](#)

¹ [Sextortion: It's a scam. It's trending. You can make it stop!](#) (Royal Canadian Mounted Police)