

# Online influencers and primary-aged children



Online influencers are social media users who have a significant number of followers online. They use online platforms such as TikTok and Instagram to promote products or partnerships. Many influencers have positive and genuine interactions with their followers, but some use their influence to share harmful ideologies. This guide is aimed at both parents and carers, and teachers who work with primary-aged children.



**How can you support primary-aged children to navigate the online world of influencers?**

## Support children to separate fact from fiction

Some influencers will show a glamorous life with high-value material goods on display and an unobtainable lifestyle. Explain to children that their perceived popularity is intentional to influence others. Promote critical thinking and encourage children to ask, 'what is the purpose of this video? What might it be encouraging me to do?'. Explain that videos are often carefully choreographed and edited to give a false impression of reality.

## Take it all seriously

Influencer content is usually aimed at young people and adults. However, negative and harmful messaging can inevitably reach primary-aged children. Even without viewing the videos, young children may know the names of some of these influencers and repeat some of their beliefs, sometimes without fully understanding the content. It is important to take all mentions seriously, even something that might be said as 'fun'. Approach any incidents in a developmentally appropriate way for the child, reminding them that even things meant as a joke can be upsetting and are inappropriate.

## Watch what they watch

It can be exciting to see children starting to enjoy access to the online world. However, it is important to risk assess their use just as you would their adventures in their real world. Ask what they are watching and watch it too. Discuss the content with children and help them to make sense of the online world. Support children to seek positive influencers and role models online that model empathy, kindness and happiness through non-material means.

## Challenge gender stereotypes

Research shows that the limiting effects of stereotyping on children's aspirations, choices, behaviour, and sense of 'self' start young – children's beliefs and limitations around gender are ingrained by the age of 10. A rigid belief in gender roles and harmful stereotypes are promoted and normalised by some key online influencers. If children are exposed to one viewpoint and one type of role model, they are more likely to subscribe to fixed and potentially dangerous views around gender roles as they grow. This can have limiting and detrimental effects on them and those around them in childhood and in later life.

## Remember appropriate age limits for online platforms

Despite much younger children having access to these sites, most platforms are not suitable for children until they are at least 13 years old. Discuss with children why these age limits are in place and the responsibilities that social media companies hold around the safety of its users.



*Image source: internetmatters.org*

## Explain how social media platforms work

The complicated algorithms that are embedded in various platforms are designed to make you click. They will promote emotion-driven, exciting content that will entice more screen time by promoting videos similar to those already watched. Remind children that if they ever see anything that they are unsure or concerned about they should always seek out a trusted adult for support.

## Share that everyone can be affected negatively

People of all genders can suffer because of harmful messaging from some online influencers. Misogyny, an ingrained prejudice against women, and sexism can be common themes in some videos. These are obviously damaging for girls and women. However, boys and men and those of other genders, are equally vulnerable to narratives around unhealthy masculinities and the inappropriate role models some videos expose them to.



## How Lifting Limits can help

Our charity is dedicated to challenging gender stereotyping and promoting gender equality, in and through education. We provide the training and resources educators need to make visible, for challenge and discussion, gender stereotyping which may exist in the school environment and to equip their pupils to challenge gender stereotyping wherever they encounter it in the wider world.

Please get in touch at [info@liftinglimits.org.uk](mailto:info@liftinglimits.org.uk) to find out more about our programme.

## Further information

### For schools

[Addressing misogyny, toxic masculinity and social media influence in PSHE education \(pshe-association.org.uk\)](https://pshe-association.org.uk)

[Classroom wellbeing toolkit \(annafreud.org\)](https://annafreud.org)

### For parents and carers

[Is my child ready for social media \(thinkuknow.co.uk\)](https://thinkuknow.co.uk)

[Helping children think critically about online influencers | Internet Matters](#)

### In the news

[Fake online influencers a danger to children, say campaigners | Social media | The Guardian](#)

[‘Vulnerable boys are drawn in’: schools fear spread of Andrew Tate’s misogyny | Violence against women and girls | The Guardian](#)

[How to respond to boys inspired by Andrew Tate | Tes](#)