

Hidden Trends of Disrespect

Do you know what's influencing your kids?



Australian Government

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
LET'S STOP IT
AT THE START

Hidden trends of disrespect

Social media and online platforms are a normal way to maintain relationships with people, read news, watch videos, and play games.

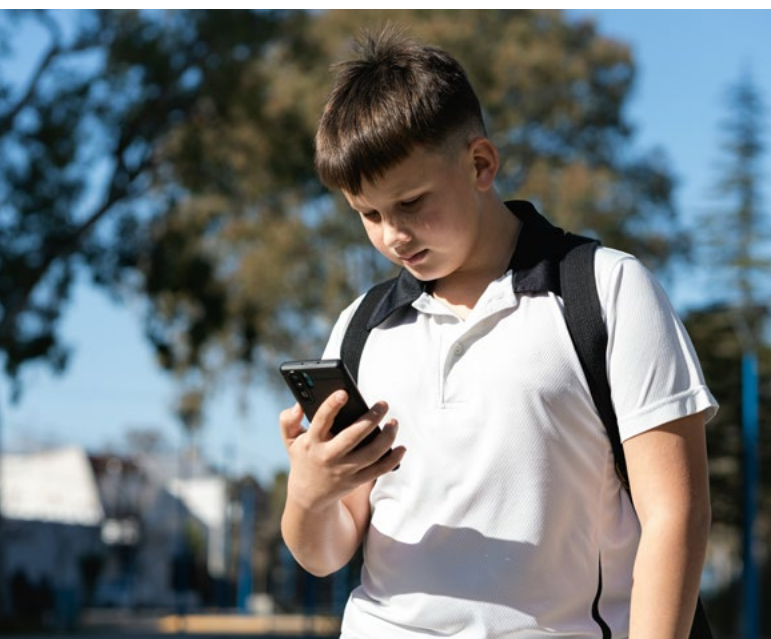
Young people spend so much time online—especially during their teenage years, and the content they watch can influence and shape their views and behaviour.

Most social media platforms are powered by complex algorithms that show us profiles or posts they think we're likely to engage with. This means as well as seeing posts that may make us happy, we may also be exposed to disrespectful and aggressive content at any time.

As parents and carers, it can be difficult to censor or moderate the content young people may be exposed to online. To support our young people, we need to develop a better understanding of what they are seeing and hearing and the impact this may have on their perceptions of respect and respectful relationships and violence towards women.

Most victims of family, domestic and sexual violence are women, and most violence against women is perpetrated by men.

However, we know that there are many different ways in which people may experience violence. This guide aims to support adults to understand the hidden trends of disrespect that young people are exposed to.



Disrespect online

Harmful content and disrespectful behaviour online can look like:

- degrading or sexist language in comments
- discriminating language or treatment of women in online gaming
- sharing personal or intimate photos or videos of someone without their permission
- sharing intimate, sexual or violent content with other people
- 'memes' or jokes about rape, stalking, or women being inferior to men
- promoting attitudes that excuse and minimise harassment and violence or blame the victim
- slang words and phrases that originate from harmful or disrespectful language
- influencers or people with large followings that are disrespectful to others or perpetuate dangerous behaviours and thoughts about gender norms.

It can be easy for young people to fall into the trap of thinking the posts they see on social media reflect real life. Most of the time they are exposed to exaggerated personas of people trying to get attention.

The pressures from social media are very real and they have consequences for all of us. They can affect a young person's mental health, as well as change their attitudes and behaviours.

It's important to help young people to understand and deal with negative and challenging content. By talking openly and often you can help a young person develop the skills they need to have healthy, respectful interactions online and in the real world.

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Social media algorithms and harmful content

Social media algorithms affect what we see. Many algorithms tailor themselves to show us the content that we interact with the most. For example, the more a young person engages with a post by liking, commenting, or sharing, the more likely they will start seeing similar posts about the same topic in their feed.

Following an account often means that similar accounts may be suggested to the young person. It also means that if they report, or unfollow an account, the algorithm is less likely to show these again.

If someone engages with potentially harmful content including content that is disrespectful to girls, women and people who are gender diverse or fluid, or contains misogynistic, homophobic and/or violence-supportive messages, it will lead them to seeing more of the same material or increasingly harmful material in their feeds. Sometimes the algorithms can contribute to content 'going viral' by spreading it quickly and widely, and this can amplify misinformation and extreme views.

Social media influencers often target young people, including young boys and men, with this content, even if they don't look for it. Sometimes the content can be disguised as positive or helpful by initially focusing on healthy lifestyles, sporting achievements and mental health. This can pull young people in, while subtly (or openly) introducing and weaving in more harmful content, which can then intensify once they interact with it.

A lot of what we are shown is influenced by what we search, watch and engage with. The more positive content we engage with, the less offensive or disrespectful content will be shown to us.

It's important to remind young people that they don't need to engage with everything they see in their feed, especially if it upsets them or makes them feel uncomfortable.

You can also familiarise yourself and your young person with ways to block or report accounts, or posts that are promoting harmful or disrespectful content. This will help ensure you see less similar content, and could even result in the harmful content being removed.

The eSafety Commissioner has resources to help you [report online harm](#).

The link between online disrespect, violence-supportive attitudes and violence

With young people spending so much time online, what they see and do can impact on their behaviours and beliefs.

Online disrespect is one of many ways in which violence-supportive attitudes can start to develop. Increasingly, we are seeing a number of harmful online influencers rising in popularity. These influencers specifically tailor their content to appeal to young men and boys initially through posts or memes about health, sporting achievements and business success, and then through posts that subtly (or openly) encourage boys to be misogynistic, homophobic, disrespect women and girls and people who are gender diverse or fluid, and engage in violent behaviour. These posts can lead people towards online communities with extremist views for example, the incel (involuntary celibate) movement.

Over time, these disrespectful views can start to be normalised and impact behaviour, and if left unchallenged, can shape the type of person and partner they grow up to be.

Contributing to disrespectful content

Communicating online should be approached with the same care and respect as face-to-face interactions.

Sometimes online, people feel the need to engage in or voice an opinion on everything, or share shocking things they see with others as entertainment. Interacting with and sharing disrespectful content amplifies it and causes more of the same or more extreme harmful content to be shown. People can feel a sense of anonymity online, forgetting that our online comments and the images or information we share have a real impact on other people's lives. Disrespectful comments and liking or sharing rude, humiliating content can be harmful to someone's mental health, their privacy and/or reputation.

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Disrespectful language

An example of how harmful attitudes start to feel normal is the use of disrespectful and degrading language.

Slang terms or phrases are often used online and some can be positive but others are more harmful. These terms are rapidly changing and their popularity grows and shifts over time. As adults, it can be difficult to understand what they mean, or 'keep up' with the language being used by our young people. The language can sometimes have multiple meanings, but very often, it is intended to be negative and insulting.

Here are some of the current terms commonly used online, that are rooted in disrespect.

Beta:	This term is used as an insult to describe a less dominant man. It promotes aggression, domineering behaviour, and reinforces harmful stereotypes about masculinity. <i>'If you listen to a woman, you are pandering to her. She's in control and you are a beta.'</i>
Gyatt:	A term used to express excitement after seeing a curvy woman. It encourages young people to see and treat women as objects.
Simp:	This term is used to describe a man who is 'subservient' to a woman in order to win her affection. It's often used to criticise a man for being attentive, respectful, or supportive of women. <i>'You got her flowers? Ew, you are such a simp, stop being so desperate!'</i>
Negging:	This is a 'pick up' technique where someone emotionally manipulates another person by giving them a backhanded compliment or veiled insult. This is designed to make them feel insecure and seek the perpetrator's approval. It is a form of verbal abuse, often used as an element of controlling behaviour. <i>'Oh you put on makeup today? You actually don't look so bad when you put effort into your appearance.'</i>
Alpha:	This term is often used to describe and idealise a man who is dominant in his relationships with others. It promotes aggression and reinforces harmful stereotypes about masculinity. <i>'An alpha is high status, demands respect, and doesn't cater to women.'</i>



Resources

There are resources and tools available on the *Stop it at the Start* website, www.respect.gov.au, to help you learn more about the issue, the type of information young people are engaging with online and ways you can talk about it.

The Issue Explained

Understanding and talking about violence against women in Australia.

Generation Respect

This is a practical guide to help adults talk to other adults about raising respectful young people.

The Conversation Guide

A guide to having conversations with young people about respect.

The Excuse Interpreter

Discover the hidden meanings behind the words we use to talk about disrespect between men and women.

Support Services

This page offers a range of support services that can be contacted if you need support or are at risk of experiencing violence.

Find out more

The Line

The Line encourages healthy and respectful relationships by challenging and changing attitudes and behaviours that support violence. The Line is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. It is delivered by Our Watch. www.theline.org.au

Student Wellbeing Hub

The Student Wellbeing Hub is a one-stop shop for information and resources on safe school strategies to assist teachers and school leaders, students, parents, specialist professionals supporting students and pre-service teachers. www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au

eSafety Commissioner

eSafety is Australia's independent regulator for online safety, educating Australians about online safety risks and helping to remove harmful content such as cyberbullying, cyber abuse, and intimate images or videos shared without consent. The eSafety site has many resources and tips for keeping children safe online. You can also report online harm at www.esafety.gov.au

Say It Out Loud

Say It Out Loud encourages members of LGBTQ+ communities to have healthy relationships, get help for unhealthy relationships and support their friends. www.sayitoutloud.org.au