

# WORKING WITH YOUNG MEN:

## ADDRESSING SENSITIVE AND CONTENTIOUS ISSUES

**15 YEARS OF NORTHERN IRELAND DATA**

**30 YEARS OF PRACTICE**

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# Beneath & Beyond Masculine Masks

**Principles and Practices for engaging boys and young men in sensitive and contentious issues**

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***Recommended citation:***

Walsh, C. & Harland, K. (2016) *Working with Young Men: Addressing Sensitive and Contentious Issues*. Belfast: Northern Ireland: Engaging Boys Effectively.

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## Introduction

Since 2000 Dr Walsh and Dr Harland worked alongside Professor Sam McCready at Ulster University's inaugural Centre for Young Men's Studies. Throughout our research we designed methodologies whereby young men would be encouraged to talk honestly about their experiences without feeling judged for what they said. We were aware from previous experience that young men may be reluctant to talk about certain issues or feel pressure to say things that they believed the researcher or practitioner wants to hear (Harland, 1997). Since 2000 a substantial body of evidence been collated with over 1000 boys and young men that aimed to discover 'what works' through practice informed by research. In particular, a 5 year longitudinal study 'Taking Boys Seriously' (2012) tracked a cohort of 378 young men in schools across Northern Ireland. This study generated a wealth of evidence around the lives and experiences of young males transitioning from childhood into adolescence. The study was initiated in response to concerns about boys' educational underachievement and wider concerns about their health and well-being. The study utilised a creative mixed methods approach that placed boys' thoughts, experiences and opinions at the heart of data collection. The publication *'Boys, young men and violence: masculinity, education and practice'* (Harland and McCready, 2015) is a further example of how the voices of boys and young men influenced our research and practice development.

Many reading this resource toolkit will be highly experienced educators or practitioners with in-depth experience of working with boys and young men in various contexts. Our intention therefore is not to tell educators and practitioners what to do but to share how our experience, knowledge and understanding of boys and young men has informed and shaped the way in which our practice has developed. This resource is intended to enhance the confidence and capacity of practitioners to engage young men in sensitive and controversial issues. The intention is not to provide a comprehensive programme, but to communicate an approach developed over many years, underpinned by a series of principles, that can then be generalised (and built upon) by practitioners with existing skills and expertise.

This resource outlines an approach to working with boys and young men around contentious issues that is evidence based. The resource compliments the two day training 'Engaging Young Men in Sensitive and Contentious Issues' programme. It aims to encourage practitioners through their practice to get *beneath* the masculine masks that often impact so negatively upon behavior and prevents young men from being who they really are. The resource provides practical suggestions for practitioners to support boys and young men to move *beyond* masculine masks and help unlock the untapped energy and talents that undoubtedly lie within each young man.

This sustained commitment to engaging boys and young men has resulted in the development of a model of practice underpinned by:

1. An appreciation of the complexities associated with how boys and young men construct their masculinities
2. An appreciation that hegemonic notions of masculinity impact on the development of young male attitudes, beliefs and behaviours
3. An understanding of social learning and in particular the impact that social systems have in sustaining normative views of masculinity
4. An approach underpinned by an understanding of how social ecological perspectives impact upon behaviour and behavioural change
5. An understanding that boys and young men possess large amounts of untapped potential and unharnessed strengths
6. An appreciation that many young men engage in risk taking behaviours that can be dangerous to themselves and others
7. An understanding that young men can be both victims and perpetrators of violence
8. An appreciation that risk taking behaviours amongst young men are associated with their age, stage of development and situated within an ecological framework.
9. An appreciation how non formal educational approaches are effective in engaging boys and young men in issues that are not part of formal education curriculum.

The themes that were developed with young men that inform this resource:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Experiences of being a boy and young man |
| 2 | Perceptions of what it means to be male |
| 3 | Attitudes and beliefs |
| 4 | How these beliefs impact upon behaviour |
| 5 | Skills and strategies to address and respond to behaviours |

Objectives of the toolkit:

## Overall aim of this toolkit:

To increase the capacity of practitioners to engage boys and young men in issues that affect them and those around them.

| | |
|---|---|
| **1** | To promote the importance of listening to boys and young men and identifying the issues that are important to them |
| **2** | To situate young men's voices within an evidence base of existing research and practice |
| **3** | To provide practical tools that enable practitioners to safely and confidently address sensitive and contentious issues |
| **4** | To provide a way for practitioners to describe these processes as well as their own desired outcomes |
| **5** | To work towards finding creative ways to connect boys and young men to their communities, adults and decision making processes |

## Anticipated outcomes:

Young men's voices and their experiences will underpin practice



Practitioners will be equipped with tools to directly explore sensitive and contentious issues with young men and that engage them in those areas



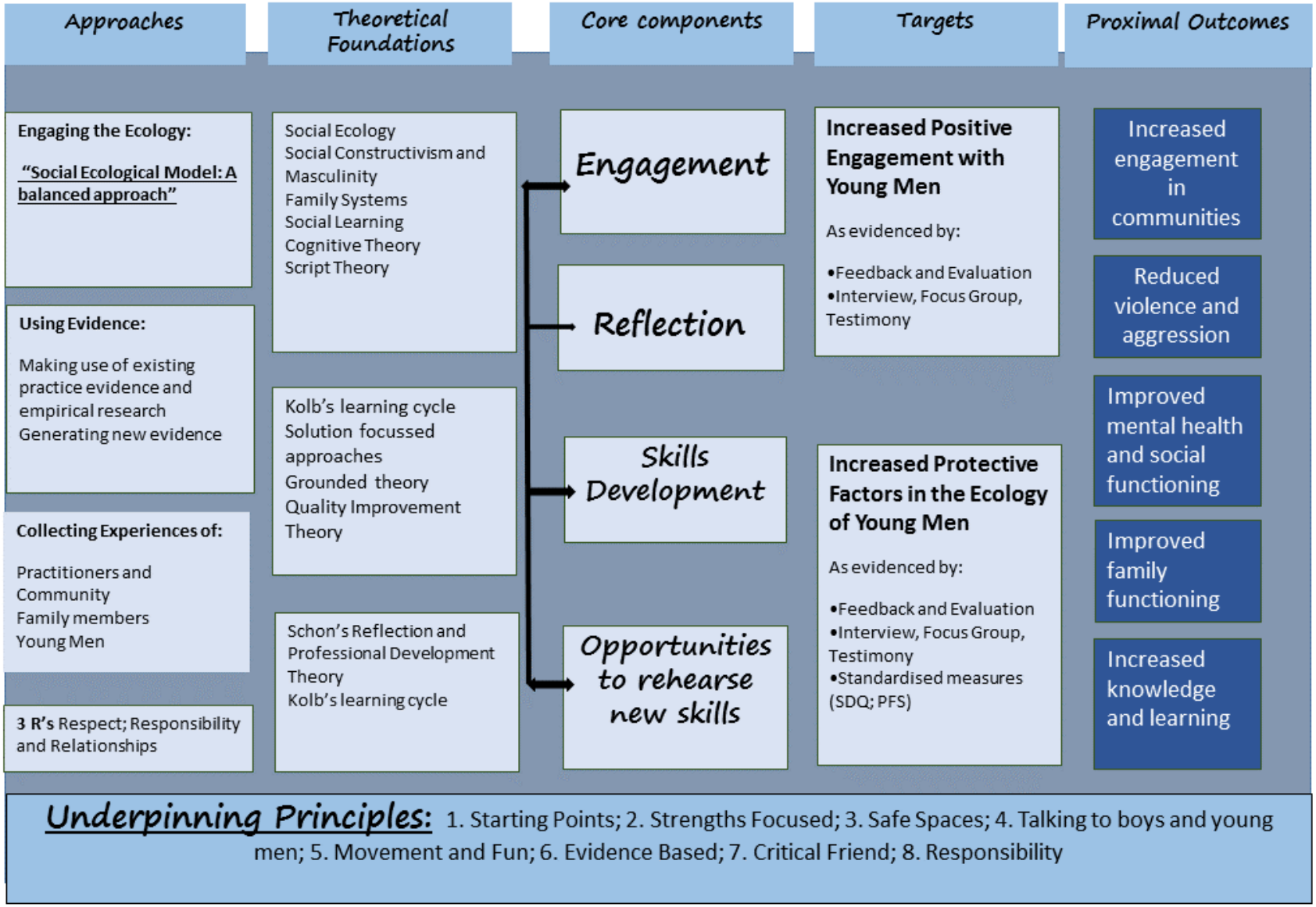
An additional body of evidence will emerge informing 'what works' when engaging young men and improves outcomes for young men, young women and the communities they live in



## Assumptions

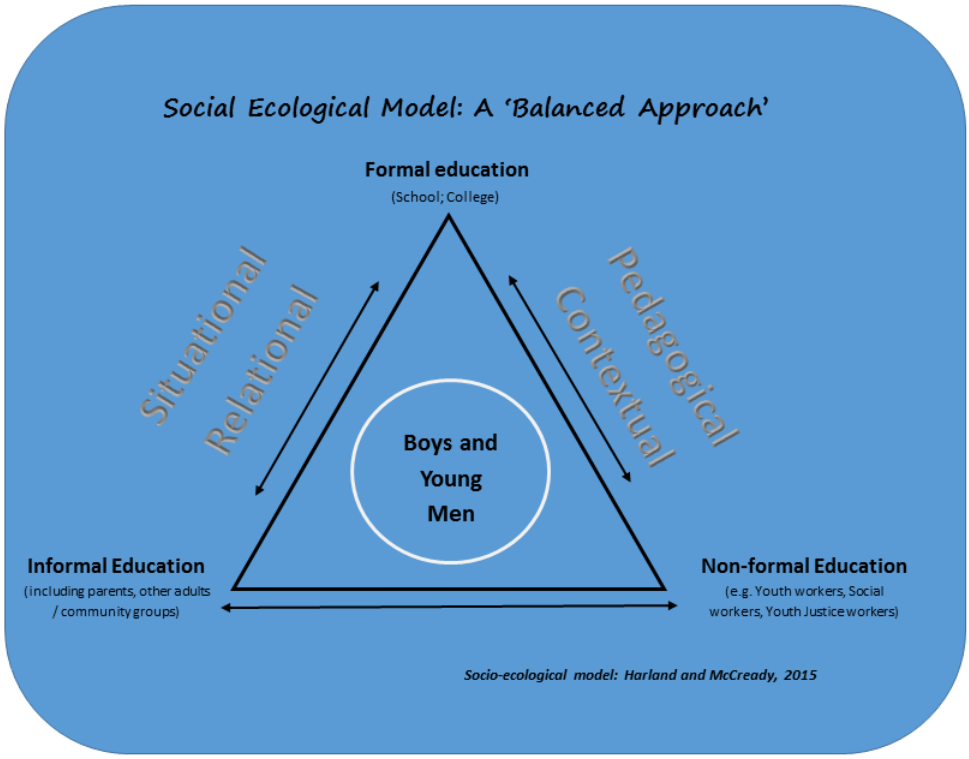
1. Despite many young men being supported by skilled practitioners within the fields of education, youth work, social care, youth justice, social work and psychology, practitioners report finding it difficult to successfully engage young men and are often discouraged by outcomes.
2. Our approaches to engaging boys and young men are underpinned by our own research, years of practice development and the establishment of clear principles.
3. Our practice has been heavily informed by the voices and real-life experiences of boys and young men
4. The principles and methods outlined in this resource can be useful in supporting practitioners to more effectively engage boys and young men

## The WALHAR Model for working with young men:



## The Socio-ecological approach to engaging young men:

Core to the model is four areas that we believe can be useful for practitioners to consider when working with boys and young men in a social ecological context. In doing this we place emphasis on the practitioner's skills, knowledge and self-awareness as opposed to their gender. These areas are not meant to determine what a practitioner educator should do, or how to do it, or what issues they should address with boys and young men. Rather they are offered as part of an overall ecological framework for supporting practitioners in their work with boys and young men. The areas are presented under four interconnected headings: *Relational; Contextual; Situational;* and *Pedagogical.*




### Relational consideration for working with young men:

The importance of relationships is core to many approaches to working with children and young people. The practitioner is committed to building critical, meaningful relationships with boys and young men and is aware of the qualities that young men look for in a practitioner. These are respect, trust, genuineness, humour, empathy, support and acceptance. The practitioner sees young men as an asset and is reflective and a highly skilled communicator

who is a confident, competent and self-aware individual who is genuine and transparent. The practitioner's focus is on developing boys and young men by helping them acquire new skills and confidence through promoting their voice and extracting knowledge and meaning from their experiences and ideas. The nature of the relationship enables the practitioner to challenge stereotypes and behaviour that is discriminatory, offensive, sexist, or potentially harmful towards others.

## Contextual considerations for working with boys and young men

The local and global social contexts of young men's lives has a strong bearing upon their thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and behaviour, yet this is rarely addressed within many educational settings. The practitioner will be aware that factors that impact upon boys and young men's lives must be considered within a wider context of socio-economic issues such as poverty, class, race, ethnicity, social disadvantage and the decline in traditional industries. The practitioner will encourage boys and young men to explore ways in which masculinities are constructed and how this can influence male behaviour. The educator can also explore why certain types of masculinities are dominant while other masculinities may be perceived as subordinate. This focus can support the practitioner to explore sensitive and contentious (such as violence) and how this is experienced by boys and young men, both as perpetrators and victims. By addressing issues that boys and young men do not typically discuss, for example within formal education, will encourage discussion and dialogue that is driven by the voices of young men and therefore issues that are important to them. This approach requires active listening on behalf of the educator and facilitation skills that enables boys to talk. In all of our work we have consistently found that boys and young men have plenty to say when a supportive environment is created. Practitioners do not see their work in isolation but understand that work with boys and young men often necessitates a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency agency approach involving schools, teachers, parents, youth services, youth justice, social and health services, police, community safety initiatives and local community groups. The role of the practitioner is to support boys and young men to reflect on how communities and societies work; it encourages and promotes their ideas and solutions to the issues facing them, their community or wider society. This focus will help boys to feel better connected to other aspects of community life and increase their understanding of how their own education and

learning is connected to the wider community. In our model for example, the practitioner, as a non-formal educator, could be the bridge between school and the local community thus providing a connection between the formal and non-formal and informal.

## Situational considerations for working with boys and young men

The practitioner supports boys and young men to evaluate and reflect upon the contexts and circumstances of their everyday life and to find creative ways to address the specific issues which affect them. This involves the exploration of young men's sense of alienation within their communities and their absence from decision making processes. The practitioner will be aware that the environment, rather than young men, may be a problem. This will involve exploring how geographical areas can be made safer for boys and young men, and others, and examining why older adults may be suspicious and distrusting towards certain young men. The practitioner will support young men to develop critiques of economic, political and cultural structures to help better match their expectations with reality. The practitioner also explores why certain boys and young men may not seek emotional support. By encouraging boys and young men to talk about themselves and their lives, and by linking this to emotional intelligence, this will increase boys` self-awareness of their internal world of feelings and emotions and how these can impact positively upon their behaviour and wellbeing. This complex area of appreciating male experiences is integral to working effectively with boys and young men, particularly when addressing for example, their experiences of violence (or the threat of violence) or exploring alternative ways to respond to potential incidents of conflict.

Our experience is that role play is an effective method of working and can be physical and participative activity that combines movement and creativity that can enable young men to see and experience tangible and realistic alternatives to everyday scenarios they face. Role play can provide an opportunity to explore feasible alternatives to existing problematic situations and enable exploration of appropriate social responses. In our experience the use of role playing in the `*Taking Boys Seriously*` research in schools was very effective in engaging boys in their learning and encouraging them to talk about real life situations. Whereas many boys found some school subjects boring, they found the non-formal education interventions through the use of role plays for example, excited their curiosity and enabled them to engage in potentially sensitive issues.

Using creative methods such as `*story telling approaches*` meant that controversial issues (e.g. violence against the person, alcohol and drug misuse) were less personal, yet enabled boys to readily identify with the issues being raised. This methodology was highly effective and fully engaged boys` participation and captured their imagination. The boys very quickly connected stories to their own lives. This gave boys a sense of control over content and increased their confidence to participate in discussions. This methodology led to intense facilitated discussions amongst boys.

The sessions that involved connecting boys and young men to their lived experiences, increased their knowledge and helped them rehearse new skills in regard to resolving potential conflict and violent situations. Boys appreciated being asked about what they were thinking and responded to being encouraged to share their experiences and feelings. They reported feeling positive about being listened to and experiencing that their opinions were being valued. The interventions challenged the notion held by practitioners could not easily engage in issues that affect them. In contrast the interventions enabled the educators to penetrate deeper aspects of the inner world of boys and young men.

A key feature of our sessions was encouraging boys and young men to examine hegemonic beliefs that emphasised men's use of 'power' and 'control' over others. This underpinned all that we engaged boys and young men in. We saw this as the foundation for addressing other challenging work around boys and young men's attitudes and behaviour in regard to issues such as violence, against peers, within relationships, crime, sectarianism, sexism, racism, homophobia, cyber bullying, mental health and risk taking.

## Pedagogical considerations for working with boys and young men

Pedagogy is central to improving educational outcomes. This includes the need to facilitate a broadening of boys and young men's narrow constructions of gender and male identity through non formal education. But this needs to be informed by understandings of masculinities. This has important training implications for a range of professions that work with young men as it suggests that working with boys should be underpinned by knowledge and understanding of the complexities and contradictions in the construction of masculinity and what young men tell us about transitioning from a boy to a man.

The approach acknowledges the value of non-formal and informal education in supporting and complementing a boy's formal education and learning. It is concerned with a young man's personal and social development through an empowering practice approach, emphasising their participation. It aims to bring about agreed and desired changes in individuals, communities and society. The approach supports boys and young men to identify and accept their responsibilities as individuals and as citizens. It respects and values young men as a resource/asset for society. It is founded upon, and wedded to, establishing critical meaningful relationships with young men based upon the value set of respect, openness, trust and choice. It aims to provide a safe space for young men to explore issues, fears, behaviours and aspirations through a combination of reflective and participatory activity.

Creating effective learning environments are necessary to fully engage boys and young men. This is not to suggest that one learning style fits all boys. Educators in formal and non-formal education have many opportunities to connect learning and curriculum to the reality of young men's lives outside of school. Learning methods should aim to engage, motivate, stimulate and excite boys and young men. The use of movement, energy and creating a sense of adventure significantly reduces boredom and enhances learning with boys and young men.

An underpinning theme of our longitudinal study was reflecting upon masculinity. This was important as quantitative data had highlighted shifting complexities within the formation of masculine identities throughout early to mid-adolescence. The sessions were designed to enable boys to reflect upon male attitudes and their behaviour whilst challenging their hegemonic beliefs about men and masculinity. Themes addressed in sessions were: Masculinity and Becoming a Man; Boys and Young Men and Emotions; Boys and Young Men Conflict and Violence; Personal Safety & Anger; Risk Taking; Education and Learning; Health; Male transitions and Life skills.

This approach does not necessarily require additional resources. Rather the focus is on finding more creative ways of engaging and responding to the needs and issues that are important to boys and young men in environments where they feel safe and are conducive to learning. It requires more collaboration amongst professions in order to provide added

value and support that can complement formal education. Our 'Balanced Approach' model firmly places the voice, needs and interests of boys and young men at the centre of the learning process. It encourages expression of thoughts, feelings and expectations. The ecological model is underpinned by principles of empowerment, participation and accountability that aim to bring about desired changes in individuals, communities, institutions and wider society.

## Core interventions:

**Engagement** (E)

**Reflection** (R)

**Skills development** (S)

**Opportunities to rehearse new skills** (O)

## Underlying principles that inform each activity:

### Work with Boys and Young Men

1. **Staring points**

Often the focus of work with boys and young men is concerned with addressing issues such as behaviour, motivation, school performance, academic achievement, social justice, anti-social behaviour, crime, sexism, violence and discrimination. Essentially the focus of practice will depend on the context in which you work. For example, if you are working with boys in school your primary focus will likely be on academic attainment and preparing boys for the future. In a youth justice context your primary focus may be on managing behaviour and issues concerning law and order. If you are a health worker, your focus may be on a young man's mental health and wellbeing or physical health. As a youth worker, your focus may be on personal and social development. If you are involved in sports, your focus may be on participation, competition, success and winning. If you are a parent, your focus on your son may be on personal safety, education, health, moral development, social relationships, peer relations, growth and personality development and overall general

wellbeing. The point we make is that starting points are important in developing practice with boys and young men as this will determine the purpose of your work.

**2. Strengths focussed**

Whilst commissioners and some practitioners tend to focus on deficits, needs or challenges with young men, we have found this to be counterproductive. Of course, pathways into many projects tend to be dependent upon a well-defined 'problem'. However, this does not mean that responses to these difficulties, which are often behavioural, should continue to focus on the problem area. When engaging with men, many of whom would be considered to be 'at risk', each bring their own skills, aptitude and interests. It is of no surprise to those of you who work with young men that whatever needs are presenting, they are often outnumbered by the strengths boys and young men have. Whether it's in the ability to engage others, their humor, their ingenuity and innovation, their story telling ability or their resilience in spite of all that they have experienced. Focusing and harnessing these strengths enables engagement to be of much more substance.

**3. Safe spaces**

We all know that despite the best plans, the environment can have a huge impact on a conversation, intervention or session. In all aspects of our lives, the physical environment (seating, lighting, clutter, open/closed space) as well as the social environment (who is present, timing) has a massive impact on how successful a conversation/session/or intervention may be. For example, most of us intuitively know that having a personal conversation with a friend in the middle of the small lunchroom would be counterproductive. Likewise, we know that having a discussion regarding a relationship concern with a partner over a family breakfast probably wouldn't be the best start to the day for anyone-especially you! The same is true for engaging young men, particularly around sensitive issues. In our experience, young men have no problem discussing sensitive issues individually or even in a group setting. However, the environment must be right and the skills of the practitioner in creating a safe space is critical. Attention must be paid to both the physical and social environment, ensuring that both are conducive to meaningful engagement. It is also true that the practitioner must present as confident in discussing the same issues that they expect young men to reflect upon. Whilst it is difficult to outline what the actual environments would look like in all instances, one strategy that has worked very successfully before has

been the openness of the practitioner and their own willingness to take risks with their own reflections. Of course there is balance between professional reflection and unprofessional disclosures.

### 4. Talking to boys and young men

If we are to work effectively with boys and young men, we must first come to understand the world they inhabit. Yet in our research boys have consistently reported that they were rarely provided with opportunities to reflect upon or discuss sensitive or contentious issues. Subsequently we believe it is important to support and encourage young men to talk openly and honestly about issues that are real to their lives. This may on occasions involve the practitioner challenging certain attitudes and behaviours. We have found that through open discussion and engaging boys and young men in creative group activities, they were open to sharing experiences and can respect different opinions.

### 5. Movement and fun

The importance of developing sessions that involve physical movement and fun activities is extremely important in engaging boys and young men effectively. In our longitudinal study, boys throughout post primary school reported feeling bored and frustrated which impacted negatively on their concentration, particularly by having to remain still and taking copious notes for large parts of the day. School physical environments are strongly associated with high levels of misbehaviour and negative attitudes towards learning.

Young men use their bodies and space everywhere they are. Sometimes they use their bodies and voices to ‘take over’ the space and assert themselves or conversely, use their bodies and lack of voice to withdraw from a space. We can see this in the community, in school and in the home. Boys and young men naturally want to use their bodies and voices within a space so using activities that embrace both are more likely to help them engage in a topic of interest. Thinking outside of the box is important. Just because you might be discussing a sensitive topic doesn’t mean that you can’t have fun doing it!

6. **Evidence based (young men's own experiences, practice evidence, research evidence)**

Any specific activities being used must be informed by the best available evidence. By evidence we are talking about evidence generated by the experiences of practitioners and of young men. Practitioners already being a wealth of evidence around 'what works' in a particular situation. Additionally, young men are the experts of their own lives. Their experiences must inform the direction of travel, particularly in longer term programmes. If the design is not underpinned by the realities of young men, you will find a continual problem with recruitment and retention. In addition to practice and experiential wisdom, there have been many great practitioners, researchers and policy makers who have explored issues before. There have even been some who have looked at what works for a given topic and assessed the strength of evidence to support those findings. These can be really important to practitioners, but so few know how to access strong evidence and often rely on dogma or poorly evidenced findings. At best, using these strategies will have no impact on the target group or could even have a counterproductive impact.

Practitioners should combine what they already know with the lived experience of those they work with but should also design activities/interventions based upon the most robust evidence available.

7. **Critical friend**

Whilst we want to focus on the strengths of young men (principle 1), we do not want to pretend that young men cannot be challenged. In fact, many of the issues we face within male and female relationships (within families, romantic relationships and professional relationships) are in some part due to the endemic and often toxic male culture that is engendered as a boy develops and continues the transition into adulthood. We have found that enabling young men to critically appraise their own behaviours based upon their attitudes and beliefs has the foundation for real and sustainable behavioural change. Using the cognitive model where our beliefs are informed by our experiences and those beliefs determine our behavioral responses has proven an effective model for engaging young men in sensitive topics. But this is done through the 'gender lens'. There are many attitudes that boys and young men have that cannot be dismissed and there are behaviours of some young men that cannot ever be justified. But we should explore them and we should

challenge them whenever we see or hear them. In our experience, providing the spaces (principle 3) as well the designs (principle 4) are enough for young men challenge themselves on why they think what they do without the need for a practitioner to do so. In fact, it would be worth noting that approaches that use the 'ask, ask, tell' approach rather than the 'tell, tell, tell' approach are more effective. That is, asking a young man why they do what they do is much more effective that telling them that it's wrong.

**8. Responsibility**

Similar to principle 7, young men should be coached to take responsibility. They are free to make their own decisions and take their own action. But each has an impact. Some are positive and they should feel proud of these achievements. Others are not. Three ways in which young men can be held accountable include:

1. Developing an agreement that everyone signs at the start of a programme. This should be visible at each session and reviewed regularly
2. In order to generalise learning into real life settings, homework should be given between sessions. These could be small tasks such as recording thoughts/feelings/behaviours throughout the week. Reviewing them at subsequent sessions means young men will be accountable to the practitioner or the group at each session and increase the chances of completion.
3. Using the essence of principle 5, young men like to call a 'spade a spade'. That is to say young men tend to be direct and expect that off others. If a young man has openly disclosed something that must be challenged, the practitioner (and later in the process-the group) should hold the young man accountable for that.

**9. Generalisability to the real world**

From the inception of any programme, regardless of the anticipated duration, the practitioner should consider how the activities or interventions could be applied in real life situations. In too many situations, skills researched in the safety of the group are then forgotten when faced with the realities of the family or community. Boys and young men learn best when skills are rehearsed and then practiced in real life. Where possible, any interventions should include a process of rehearsal within the safe spaces (principle 2), practiced with the

practitioner (principle 3) then later in a real life setting (principle 9) and then reviewed and refined in the safe setting again (principle 1, 3 and 4, 6, 7 and 9).

Whilst the resource provides a fuller overview at the beginning of each section, an overview of each areas if outlined below. They provide an introduction to the areas covered and include: masculinity, violence, mental health and healthy relationships. Each of these can be explored in as standalone components with young men. However, given the intrinsic impact of normative masculinity and gender expectations on young men, it is recommended that practitioners explore this before engaging young men in the other areas outlined.

## Overview of thematic areas:

### Topic 1: Masculinity

Issues surrounding masculinity and what it means to be a man are increasingly complex, contradictory and confusing. Appreciating how masculinity affects male development and behaviour is central to working effectively with boys and young men. Practitioners should therefore take cognisance of approaches that reinforce stereotypical and restrictive expressions of masculinity. Crucially however this is no easy task as there is much in our world that continues to promote, reward and perpetuate unhealthy aspects of masculinity that can be so detrimental to young men's health and self-esteem.

Traditional (or hegemonic) perspectives on masculinity (or what it means to be a man) are widely held. Whilst presentations are culturally nuanced, key aspects of what it means to be a man cut across cultures, context and religions. These perspectives have endured for centuries and for many represent the ideal rather than the norm. Some widely accepted masculine norms include:

| **Traditional masculine norms** |
| --- |
| • A man must be straight<br>• A man must be physically fit and strong<br>• A man must have a family and also economically provide for his family<br>• A man must protect those he loves<br>• A man should not express anything that denotes weakness |

We have found through our research and practice that adhering to stereotypical male expectations can cause confusion and uncertainty amongst boys and young men. Few of these expectations are ever discussed or challenged and fewer are critically appraised. What we find then is that unchecked, these broad expectations communicated roughly as 'act like a man' through family, through the media and the community result in belief systems that accept and justify many types of problem behaviours. For example:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Attitude:** | Men are supposed to be successful |
| **Belief:** | I must succeed and if I fail I've only myself to blame |
| **Behavior:** | I will use whatever means to get what I want (and deserve) |

Or more commonly young men refer to their experience with violence and aggression and how easily that could be justified:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Attitude:** | Men are the breadwinners, the defenders |
| **Belief:** | If anyone threatens me or those I love I have a right (duty) to respond |
| **Behavior:** | I can (and should) punch that person for looking at me disrespectfully. |

### Topic 2: Violence

Gender expectations/rules/norms are a consistently strong predictor of attitudes related to higher levels of acceptance of violence. Violence is a normative activity for young men and a normal behavioural response to perceived stress. Even during early adolescence, acceptance of normative male expectations greatly predictor toleration of aggression and perpetration of violence. From an early age, boys are conditioned to behave and act a certain way that is different to girls and are socialized into a way of being male. Aggression across many cultures and contexts has long been perceived as a legitimate form of expression and this is reinforced as boys develop. Aggression is so routine that boys during our studies often failed to define some very aggressive behaviours as 'violent'. This aggression was glossed over as just a normal part of '*everyday life'*. As a result, boys and young men are not routinely engaged in processes that facilitate their critical appraisal of these behaviours or the attitudes and beliefs that sustain them.

### Topic 3: Mental Health

In our research with young men across Northern Ireland, the mental health of the population we engaged was a significant theme. This emerged in the longitudinal study and was

explored in more detail through our focus groups with young men from both rural and urban areas. Whilst specific issues differed for boys and young men, it was clear that exploration of young men's mental health was underexplored within policy and practice. In general terms, boys and young men reported having few safe spaces to discuss issues that they faced and this was exacerbated by the expectations placed on young men to resist showing weakness. The concept of public vs private egos emerged as a powerful theme. In essence, this meant that although young men were apt at presenting themselves as in control to those around them, privately they experienced many emotional and psychological challenges. There were made more difficult as they were unsure of how to make sense of, or how respond to them. Interestingly however, when the principles contained in this resource were applied, young men were very open to discussing mental health issues both in individual or group settings.

### Topic 4: Healthy Relationships

What was evident through our longitudinal study, was that young men did not develop or grow in a vacuum. They lived and grew in an evolving ecology. Young men are greatly influenced by the environment around them, just as the environment is impacted on by them. Likewise, young men greatly affect that ecology. Young men are part of families, are part of schools, communities and are part of relationships. However our research found that many young men feel a disconnection. In many cases, they feel isolated within their communities, with adults around them and detached from meaningful decision making processes.

The strength of acceptance of hegemonic masculine values have been shown in other studies to determine the nature of a romantic relationships and even predict levels of intimate partner violence. Through the gender lens, young men's attitudes and beliefs about prospective relationships can be reviewed and behavioral responses challenged. This is an important and under evaluated area of gender conscious practice. However, gender based violence is so intrinsically linked to masculine identify that it must be explored in any comprehensive work with young men.

# Theme 1: Masculinity

## The importance of this area

What does it mean to be a man? How do you become a man? Is there such a thing? As boys develop into young men and later into adulthood, these are questions that are frequently wrestled with and yet there are so few opportunities to reflect on what these questions mean-and if they even matter. For good or bad, generations passed were able to answer these questions much more easily. Traditional routes into manhood via apprenticeships, work opportunities and the establishment of a family provided a narrow, but well defined pathway into adulthood for young men. But the complexities of contemporary society have made transitioning into adulthood much more confusing for young men. Many traditional masculine norms still permeate all sections of society. We learn social cues from parents as we grow. We learn acceptable and unacceptable play. In school, we are often segregated into particular areas of perceived interest based upon our sex. With more independence during adolescence comes social mobility, peer interactions and testing of boundaries. Our behaviour reflects the expectations that we have grown accustomed to. And throughout all these stages, media and now social media, plays a massive role in shaping our expectations and forming our identities. We are all conditioned by the environment around us and yet so few of us have the opportunity to really reflect upon why we think a certain way and why we act a particular way.

Many young men grow up believing traditional but narrow and contradictory perspectives on masculinity and accept they must try to meet these social expectations.

It is increasingly recognised that effective work with young men is not only about addressing young men's needs but responding to the needs and experiences of girls and women; of families who struggle to function successfully; to the needs of communities who are challenged by many of the manifestations of male dominance and aggression; and the needs of schools who struggle to engage boys and young men in formal education.

Understanding and engaging young men is a critical area of practice and needs to be understood from multiple perspectives. Our practice, which has been continually informed

by our research, has demonstrated the value of engaging boys and young men in exercises that explore gender roles, masculinity and normative behaviours.

## Our research findings/what young men said

A mixed methods, longitudinal study engaged 378 boys and young men from across 9 schools in Northern Ireland over 5 years. The sample were a mix of rural and urban participants and there were 5 annual waves commencing at the beginning of year 8 (when the boys had first transitioned into secondary school) and completing in year 12 (when the young men had completed their G.C.S.E's and many of whom were making the decisions to leave education for vocational training or work). 4 thematic areas in relation to masculinity were established early on and persisted throughout the study. In many ways, these components reflect what we commonly refer to as 'toxic masculinity'. These included:

- Boys and young men suppress their feelings/emotions;
- Young men validate masculinity through the public world of work rather than private world of family and relationships;
- The reality of violence in young men's lives and the cognitive justification of violence and aggression in everyday life is very pronounced;
- The sense of entitlement young men had towards romantic relationships was underpinned by perceptions around what it means to be a man.

### So what?

We are all shaped by those around us. Those around help is to form an identity and that identity is the paradigm that informs our thoughts, our feelings and our behaviours. Young male identity is so intrinsically linked to normative masculinity that engaging young men without exploring gender is meaningless. Our research has consistently shown that whilst not consciously, young men's every action, both in public and in private, is determined through a gender lens. Their sense of 'self' and their perception of their place in the world is defined by reference to their view on what it means to be male. Effective work with young men may therefore need to explore and challenge these beliefs, assumptions and stereotypical expectations. Work with boys and young men in any thematic area (violence, relationships, mental health, educational attainment) should be informed and underpinned by a gender conscious approach.

## Activity 1. Heads or Hearts (developmental game)

**Complexity:** ** **Principles:** 1-9 **Type:** Group or Individual

**Aim:** To increase young men's understanding of how they develop

**Objective:** To explore how young men develop cognitive, emotionally and physically

**Methodology:**

The facilitator explains the purpose of the exercise

Step 1. The facilitators provide the participant/s with a number of statements. They are asked to separate them statements into three headings 1. Psychological 2. Emotional and 3. Physical

Step 2. Once the statement is reviewed and placed under the correct heading, the participant/s are asked to link each statement across the three headings. For example, for each statement in the category of 'psychological', there will be a corresponding statement in the 'emotional' and 'physical' headings.

The facilitator reviews with the young men how we develop a result of a range of things.

Step 3. The facilitator introduces an 'outside' influence such as a statement outlining how the media portray men.

Participants are then asked how this outside influence may impact upon each of the three headings and what the behavioral outcomes could be

**Tools required:**

Flipchart
Makers
Statements

## Heads of Hearts Statement List

1. Boys brains work hard to help the areas that govern gross motor skills grow-gross motor skills develop a lot more than in girls

2. In boys there are two parts of the brain-one for language and one for movement, emotion, space and position. Both halves talk to each other. In boys however, the left side grows slowly (and testosterone slows it even further). The parts of the brain responsible for language are not developed until the of age 14 in boys

3. Girls are able to access both parts of their brains in infancy

4. Boys work in systems and code- they like to know how and why does something works the way it does

5. Boys have 30% more muscle fibres than girls

6. Until around 6, boys have a need for nurture. Then they are programmed to also explore what it means to be a man

7. Boys are hard wired to learn from doing not talking

8. At around 13, a teenage boys' brain starts to reorganise

9. Boys find it difficult to use finer motor skills (like in school)

10. Boys find it difficult to talk about their feelings (even though they have them!). As the right side of the brain wants to make connections, the left side isn't ready, so language and expressing emotions is harder for boys than it is for girls.

11. Girls are better able to communicate what is going on around them, take perspectives and listen than boys. They can even do thing at the same time

12. Boys want to understand the world and struggle when it doesn't make sense.

13. Boys have more muscle potential than girls. Hormone surges help realise this potential. Until 3 months old, a baby boy will have as much testosterone as a 12 year old. At the age of 4, there is a sudden surge of testosterone that then settles quickly. Between 11 and 14, the testosterone level will rise by 800%

14. Under 6, boys are more likely to struggle with separation from their mum and over 6 want to seek out male role models.

15. Boys test out social interactions and see 'what works'. This can involve aggression if language issues continue
16. Boys hearing is less sensitive than girls if the skills have not been refined. In addition, boys' ear canals are physically smaller, making it harder for boys to hear.

17. At around 5 (going to school), boys are almost a full 12 months behind girls

18. Boys have poorer eye contact and low language skills. From as young as 1, girls notice facial expression and can react to non-verbal language. Boys are 4 or 5 before they start to recognise non-verbal's. Young boys communicate more effectively with little eye contact and a distraction (this does not mean they have Asperger's)

19. Women are better multi-taskers than men

20. Boys love to figure things out-sometimes that means figuring out how to wind other people up! It's no different than figuring out how the remote works; how the phone turns on; why does the sun come up; or how to make things go 'bang!'. Having a brain that likes to know what works leads to competitiveness-what works best- and who can win!

21. With the surge in hormones, boys fight. However, there is a purpose. They fight to create order. Boys feel insecure if they don't know who is in charge

22. Boys under 6 can be very attached to their mothers. Between the ages of 6-14, boys are more likely to look to male role models in the family. They like to watch other men and make sense of what it means to be a man. Aged 14 and up, boys seek out role models outside of the family home as they search for some independence. If there are no positive role models, peers become a bigger influence on them.

23. Boys find crowds difficult. If disagreement starts, boys often respond with their hands and aggression. They do not use as much eye contact and there is little negotiation. They do not feel safe because they don't know how to navigate social settings

24. At around 13, boys become dopey, disorganised and lacking energy. They also find it hard to understand requests. Parents often have to slow down what they are saying, talk in a deeper voice and strip down their words to the minimum

## Heads or Hearts Organised List

# Psychological

1. Boys brains work hard to help the areas that govern gross motor skills grow-gross motor skills develop a lot more than in girls

2. In boys there are two parts of the brain-one for language and one for movement, emotion, space and position. Both halves talk to each other. In boys however, the left side grows slowly (and testosterone slows it even further). The parts of the brain responsible for language are not developed until the of age 14 in boys

3. Girls are able to access both parts of their brains in infancy

4. Boys work in systems and code- they like to know how and why does something works the way it does

5. Boys have 30% more muscle fibres than girls

6. Until around 6, boys have a need for nurture. Then they are programmed to also explore what it means to be a man

7. Boys are hard wired to learn from doing not talking

8. At around 13, a teenage boys' brain starts to reorganise

# Physical/Emotional

1. Boys find it difficult to use finer motor skills (like in school)

2. Boys find it difficult to talk about their feelings (even though they have them!). As the right side of the brain wants to make connections, the left side isn't ready, so language and expressing emotions is harder for boys than it is for girls.

3. Girls are better able to communicate what is going on around them, take perspectives and listen than boys. They can even do thing at the same time

4. Boys want to understand the world and struggle when it doesn't make sense.

5. Boys have more muscle potential than girls. Hormone surges help realise this potential. Until 3 months old, a baby boy will have as much testosterone as a 12 year old. At the age of 4, there is a sudden surge of testosterone that then settles quickly. Between 11 and 14, the testosterone level will rise by 800%

6. Under 6, boys are more likely to struggle with separation from their mum and over 6 want to seek out male role models.

7. Boys test out social interactions and see 'what works'. This can involve aggression if language issues continue
8. Boys hearing is less sensitive than girls if the skills have not been refined. In addition, boys' ear canals are physically smaller, making it harder for boys to hear.

# Social

1. At around 5 (going to school), boys are almost a full 12 months behind girls

2. Boys have poorer eye contact and low language skills. From as young as 1, girls notice facial expression and can react to non-verbal language. Boys are 4 or 5 before they start to recognise non-verbal cues. Young boys communicate more effectively with little eye contact and a distraction (this does not mean they have Asperger's)

3. Women in general are better multi-taskers than men

4. Boys love to figure things out-sometimes that means figuring out how to wind other people up! It's no different than figuring out how the remote works; how the phone turns on; why does the sun come up; or how to make things go 'bang!'. Having a brain that likes to know what works leads to competitiveness-what works best- and who can win!

5. With the surge in hormones, boys fight. However, there is a purpose. They fight to create order. Boys feel insecure if they don't know who is in charge

6. Boys under 6 can be very attached to their mothers. Between the ages of 6-14, boys are more likely to look to male role models in the family. They like to watch other men and make sense of what it means to be a man. Aged 14 and up, boys seek out role models outside of the family home as they search for some independence. If there are no positive role models, peers become a bigger influence on them.

7. Boys find crowds difficult. If disagreement starts, boys respond with their hands and aggression. They do not use as much eye contact and there is little negotiation. They do not feel safe because they don't know how to navigate social settings

8. At around 13, boys become dopey, disorganised and lacking energy. They also find it hard to understand requests. Parents often have to slow down what they are saying, talk in a deeper voice and strip down their words to the minimum

## Activity 2. Big Body

**Complexity:** * **Principles:** 1-8 **Type:** Group or Individual

**Aim:** To explore gender stereotypes

**Objective:** To explore what it means to be a man

**Methodology:**

The facilitator provides the participant/s with two flipchart sheets. The two sheets are laid on the ground, one under the other lengthwise.

The facilitator provides the participant/s with makers and asks for a volunteer.

The volunteer is asked to lay on the ground the others trace around them using the markers.

Once completely traced, the volunteer is asked to get up

The participants are then asked to think for a few minutes what it means to be male

Once a few minutes have passed, they are asked to mark on the sheet using words or pictures things that illustrate what they believe it means to be a man.

It is important to allow young men to illustrate this in whatever way the want in the first instance. Any illustrations that should be challenged, can be during the review.

Once the participants have completed the second step in the exercise, the facilitator asks them to review what has been presented. If there is a group, one or two representatives could present to the rest of the group what they have done.

The facilitator should allow the young men to describe in as much detail the content of their illustration and use prompts/open questions to explore what they have written or drawn.

Following a presentation, the facilitator should use a range of prompts and/or open questions to appraise the evidence for or against the comments made.

For example, one illustration may be ‘money’. The question then becomes whether a man is not a man if he loses his money.

**Tools required:**

Flipchart
Markers

## Activity 3. Agree Disagree

**Complexity:** * **Principles:** 1-8 **Type:** Group or Individual

**Aim:** To increase young men's capacity to critically reflect

**Objective:** To explore what young men believe and why

**Methodology:**

The facilitator asks the participant to stand in the middle of the room

The facilitator explains that on one side of the room there is a sheet with the word 'agree' written on it. On the other, there is a sheet that has the word 'disagree' on it.

The facilitator explains that a number of statements will be read out. After each statement, the participants are to move to the side of the room they feel is most appropriate. They are assured there is no right or wrong answer and the purpose is only to explore issues. If neither side of the room fits with their belief, then they can stand in the middle of the room.

After the participant/s move to the room position, they are asked that they have moved to that point.

Others are asked why they have moved to their position.

The facilitator can use a short space (20-30 secs) to challenge their position and act as 'devil's advocate'.

Following this, the participants have the option of staying where they are or moving if they change their minds.

The rest of the statements are read and the process is repeated.

**Sample statements:**

| | |
|---|---|
| A man should be strong in front of others | It's ok to hit a woman if she's attacking you |
| If a man cries at a film that's ok | A man should provide for his family |
| If a man cries because his team loses that's ok | If a man loses his job he's not a man |
| A man should stick up for himself | A man should be fit and strong |
| A man can use violence to stick up for himself | A real man is sexually active (with women) |
| It's ok to hit a woman | A man takes risks |
| It's ok to hit a woman if she's disrespecting you | A man drives fast cars |
| It's ok to hit a woman if she's bigger than you | A man shouldn't rely on others for help |

## Activity 4. Men in the media

**Complexity:** * **Principles:** 1-8 **Type:** Group or Individual

**Aim:** To increase young men's understanding of how they are influenced

**Objective:** To explore images of men in the media

**Methodology:**

This exercise is most successful using tools that young men are familiar with. Most young men have access to a digital device such as a mobile phone and are connected to others through social media.

If the participant/s do not have access to a mobile phone, the facilitator could provide a laptop/tablet or alternatively, printed press can be used.

Step 1. Ask the participants to go into google and search for 'man' using a regular web based search and then selected 'images' tab. Ask them to review the first page for both searches.

The facilitators provide them with a flipchart and markers.

The facilitators ask them to write down or draw words or images that summarize what they see/read

Step 2. The facilitator asks the participants to log onto the social media platform of choice (twitter, Instagram, snapchat, Facebook). Ask them to repeat the search and review what the results are.

Again, the facilitators ask the participant/s to record their thoughts on what they see

Step 3. The participant/s are asked by the facilitator review their 'report' captured on flipchart. The facilitator encourages the participant/s to critically review what they found using prompt's, open questions and by playing 'devil's advocate'.

# Theme 2: Violence

## The importance of this area

Violence is a universal problem. Youth violence presents a huge challenge and cost to societies around the world. In addition to the immediate medical implications of interpersonal violence, secondary consequences (such as psychological harm) are more difficult to measure and more difficult to remedy over time. Violence amongst school-aged young people is increasingly a topic of concern for policy makers, practitioners and educators alike. Some estimates approximate that up to ¾ of girls and young women have experienced some form of violence within a relationship before the age of 17. The perpetrators are often known to the girls and young women and they are often young men. Young men are also significantly more likely to be the victim of interpersonal (non-sexual) violence. But they are also just as likely to be the perpetrator of interpersonal violence. Violence is a man's issue. What is it about men? We need an applied understanding of gender and a new lens to understand and response to aggressive behavior effectively. From a social learning and socio-ecological perspective, if we are to understand how and why some people engage with the world in an aggressive way, we must first come to understand how they understand their worlds.

## Our research findings/what young men said

It was very clear that violence was perceived as a natural part of male youth culture and accepted as just a part of 'everyday life'. In fact, during our focus groups and interviews, young men frequently under-reported violence and this was in part due to how young men conceived and defined violence. When definitions of violence were extended (beyond the most aggressive and overtly physical forms of violence), the majority of young men had direct experience of violence and for many, this was a daily occurrence. Interestingly, young men who scored higher on a measure assessing attitudes towards hegemonic masculinity were more likely to experience more frequent and more intensive forms of violence than their peers who scored lower. However in general, 70% of boys and young men thought violence acceptable under certain circumstances. Those circumstances were by no means fluid and this was evidenced by statement explored with participants during focus groups. For example, the leading question may have been "is it ok to hit someone younger than

you?" in this case, some young men may have said "no". When the next statement changed 'someone' to 'your brother/sister', the responses changed, with an increase in participants who favoured aggressive responses. In fact, young men were most likely to find hitting/ punching Brother (45%) or Friend (44%) or Gay/lesbian (41%) acceptable. Whilst 93% believed that it was wrong to hit a 'girl', the number significantly dropped with caveats (such as a girl who talks behind your back) attached. It appeared that when young men were faced with the moral code of 'do not hit a girl' but also obliged to respond to an act which was perceived to disrespect them/their family or call into question their manhood, their moral code became more fluid.

It was interesting to note that throughout the 5 years, few young men openly reported being the perpetrator of violence. Given the claims by all young men that they had experienced violence at some point, logically, perpetrators must exist! In the last year in particular the research team explored this in a lot of detail. It appeared that violence, for young men was a behavioural response that could be easily justified within the context of their gender lens. That is, with the masculine norms permeating many of young men's thoughts, feelings and behaviours, violence was not only an option but the only option. Even when young men described perpetrating acts of violence, they framed this within a commonly accepted masculine norms of 'defender'. Sometimes they were defending themselves, their own pride, their reputation and other times they were defending peers, family members and even communities from perceived attack.

## So what?

So what? What does this mean for practice and what does it mean for the practitioner? As we explored in the previous section, the meaning behind manhood is not just a concept. It doesn't just present as a thought or feeling. Gender norms that are developed during childhood and sustained into adulthood are responsible for increased acceptance of violence and aggression. This affects young men as well as those around them. Our studies have shown that young men do not routinely have the safe spaces to reflect on their own experiences of violence and more importantly, have less opportunity to develop real world skills that provide feasible alternatives to violence. The feedback from young men demonstrated that exposure to community violence increases as the young men become more socially mobile and yet few have the skills to navigate these social circles successfully.

This may be one reason why boys and young men tend to congregate in larger groups in the community. So effective violence prevention work needs to not only provide the spaces for reflection (which is a critical component) but needs to also provide the spaces for the introduction, practice and rehearsal of skills and strategies that will enable them to use alternative behaviours (see the *WALHAR* model above). The activities below are a sample of some of these reflective and skills-based exercises but this work should be sustained. An important aspect is integrating new skills into real life setting sand so effective work should set 'homework' task and review progress in subsequent sessions.

## Activity 1. Hot spots

**Complexity:** ** **Principles:** 1-9 **Type:** Group or Individual

**Aim:** To reduce community risk factors

**Objective:** To explore where young men feel safe in the community and reduce the likelihood of interpersonal violence

**Methodology:**

The facilitator asks the participant/s to take a few minutes and think about what the community means to them.

Some prompts may be: What/where is your community? Where do you socialize? Where do you go out because you want to? Where do you go because you need to?

Once the participants have been given a few minutes to think about where their community is, they are asked to represent their community graphically.

Be creative! This can be done a few different ways. For example, some of you might have access to laptops and printers. So ask them to either find the 'map' of their community and using 'cropping' techniques can print a graphic

Others may not have access to such devices so the traditional flipchart would work just as well. Either way, ask them to represent their community, the physical spaces and places of interest (to them).

Once they have been given sufficient time to draw their area, the facilitator will ask the participant/s to label where is safe and where is not safe

Once this has been completed, the facilitator will ask them to label (in a different colour), where they have either witnessed or experienced violence.

Following this, the facilitator should engage the participant/s in a conversation around their sense of safety. For instance, they may have designated somewhere as safe but what makes it safe? Are there certain conditions that also follow e.g. during the day, when with friends etc. Likewise, with experiences of violence explore how/why these incidents happened and whether the location played a part. For example, if they had used an alternative route or avoided a certain area or avoided certain people (including their own friends), would they have had the same experience?

**Tools required:**
Flipchart
Makers

# Activity 2. Yes/No

**Complexity:** * **Principles:** 1-9 **Type:** Group or Individual

**Aim:** To test attitudes and beliefs

**Objective:** To explore what young men believe about violence

**Methodology:**

The facilitator asks the participant to stand in the middle of the room

The facilitator explains that on one side of the room there is a sheet with the word 'agree' written on it. On the other, there is a sheet that has the word 'disagree' on it.

The facilitator explains that a number of statements will be read out. After each statement, the participants are to move to the side of the room they feel is most appropriate. They are assured there is no right or wrong answer and the purpose is only to explore issues. If neither side of the room fits with their belief, then they can stand in the middle of the room.

After the participant/s move to the room position, they are asked that they have moved to that point.

Others are asked why they have moved to their position.

The facilitator can use a short space (20-30 secs) to challenge their position and act as 'devil's advocate'.

Following this, the participants have the option of staying where they are or moving if they change their minds.

The rest of the statements are read and the process is repeated.

| | |
|---|---|
| Most young men are not violent | It's ok to hit a woman if she's attacking you |
| Violence only happens in the community | Violence is physical only |
| It's only bullies who are violent | Violence is just a part of life |
| It's ok for a man to use violence to protect himself | You can't be violent towards yourself |
| A man can use violence to 'stick up;' for himself | Young men have few alternative to violence |
| It's ok to hit a woman | You need to get the 'first dig' in |
| It's ok to hit a woman if she's disrespecting you | It's ok to carry a weapon to protect yourself |
| It's ok to hit a woman if she's bigger than you | Just because you carry a weapon doesn't meant it will be used |

**Tools required:**

Statements

## Activity 3. Traffic lights

**Complexity:** *** **Principles:** 1-9 **Type:** Group

**Aim:** To reduce interpersonal violence

**Objective:** To explore feasible alternatives to violent behavior

**Methodology:**

The facilitator begins by explaining the theme of the session-exploring violence and looking for alternatives.

The facilitators highlights that during the session, everyone will first be given a snippet of a story. The story is true and taken from a young man who engaged in research on male youth violence.

Everyone is given a section of the story and asked to read their snippet aloud; each person in turn; 1, 2, 3…

Ask no one to interrupt during the first telling of the story.

Once the story has been fully read, the facilitator divides the participants into two or three teams (depending on numbers).

The facilitator advises the teams that they can earn points using a traffic light system. If they correctly identify a red, amber or green area, they are awarded different points.

Red=2 Amber=1 Green=3 Combination of red and green=5

The facilitator provides the teams with red, amber and green coloured pages.

The facilitator uses the same story and reads through again to the group

The facilitators advise the teams to lift their red sheet when they see imminent danger/threat or point of intervention within the story; they are asked to lift their amber sheet if there is the potential for danger/threat; lift their green sheet if they see a possible point of intervention and have a solution; and lift both red and green if they see the threat and have a solution.

As the facilitator reads slowly, they carefully observe who is raising the coloured pages.

As pages are lifted, the story is paused and the teams are asked for their input.

Scores are awarded if the intervention points are successfully identified.

The facilitator appraises possible alternative carefully, ensuring they are actually feasible and clarifying with the young men how realistic their alternatives would be in real life or what skills/support they would need to use them. This can form the basis of later skills work.

**Tools required:**

Coloured pages
A story

**Example Story:**

***John's story – an exploration of adolescent pathways to violence (this is an extract from a real interview taking from a young man living in North Belfast).***

John grew up in a loyalist community where paramilitaries in John's words still "*run the show".*

He was 15 at the time and had been in prison on remand for two weeks. This was the second time in four months he had been in custody. Both times followed serious fights with peers. His mother usually bailed him out after a few days. She didn't this time though-she was sick of him.

He spoke of families in the area constantly being in trouble with the police and having conflict with paramilitaries as he was growing up. Paramilitaries had also hassled him for several years and had often asked him to join or get involved-but he refused. He wanted to be in the community though because the fighting at home was too much to deal with.

John knew other young men who had been the victims of paramilitary violence. "W*hy are they allowed to do things and we're not. Once they grabbed me and threw me on the ground – but a man I knew came by who was in the paramilitaries and told them to leave me alone. I think he sorted things out cause I don't get as much hassle now. You can't be seen to take any shit" he said.*

John spoke of how as a boy in primary school he would often be the victim of verbal and physical bullying particularly from older boys. "*I was very small until I was 14 and then I got tall – I think being small made me feel I couldn't stand up for myself - but that's not the way it is now".* Later on "*there was one boy who said something to me but I kicked his bollocks in". "You get a reputation – I guess people began to respect me for this - they knew I would not take anyone messing me about - no one messes me about now."*

*"Since I was about 14 everything changed. I was no longer the wee quiet boy. It's simple. Anyone messes me about and I knock their f*** in. I am not afraid of anybody. Even in here. Everyone knows not to mess me about. I don't care who it is whether it is some other boy or somebody who thinks they're a hard man - even the workers in here know I'm not afraid."*

John was very calm as he talked about his experiences of growing up. He avoided eye contact apart from occasions when he was describing a potentially violent situation. John said he liked to feel in control and that was why he often started a fight but his problem was *not knowing when to stop.*

John said he found it difficult to concentrate for long periods of time and school subjects *bored him to death.* He had been suspended many times and recalled openly fighting with teachers. He said teachers talked down to him and *got in my face so I would swear at them*

*and tell them to f*** off. In recent months he has spent less time in school, going into town with his friends or just staying in bed.*
John said that for the past few years he has frequently been in trouble with authority. As well as having conflict with teachers he spoke of constantly being stopped and harassed by the police, particularly at the weekends when he had been drinking with his mates. John spoke of becoming aggressive. Just being fed up with all the hassle in the school, in the community and in the house drove him mad.

John had been drinking from the age of 10 and began to get into trouble with the police from the age of 13. He said he did not intentionally go out to cause trouble or damage – "…*it is something that just happens".* He didn't know when to stop drinking and regularly drank cider until he was totally unaware of his behaviour. "*It's great to be drunk. You're out of your head and get into fights".*

John's first recollection of experiencing violence was as a 5 year old watching television. "*There was lots of shooting and killing".* However his parents did not stop him from watching. They were *very easy going about what I watched* which on reflection he believes was a mistake.

John recalled as a boy of ten getting involved in smashing windows and throwing bricks at people for fun. He liked the buzz of this but also believed this gave him status amongst his peers.

John's mum and stepfather believed it was the peers he hung around with that got him into trouble, but John believed it was much more complicated than that.

John said he rarely spoke to others about his feelings. He was surprised at himself actually talking openly during the interview about issues he said he avoided talking about in the past. He perceived himself as *a bit of a loner* who just *bottled things up.* John's mother was supportive to him and tried to talk to him about things. However John was more concerned about her being hurt because of his behaviour than actually wanting to change his behaviour. John believed standing up for himself was an important part of becoming a man. He also believed that it was important for a man to *show people respect, know your place, not let people tell you what to do, working and getting paid for what you do.* John said he had learned some things from his stepfather who had tried to correct him and keep him on the right path. "*My stepfather respects people. He doesn't hit girls or pick on people".* However John also seen inconsistences in his stepfather's behaviour. "*He would hit me when I was younger especially when he was drunk - but only a smack. But then one day I punched my stepdad and he has never hit me again".* Despite some inconsistencies in their relationship, John said he had respect for his stepfather, primarily because he looked after him and provided for his mum.

## Activity 4. Wanna bet

**Complexity: ***** **Principles:** 1-9 **Type:** Group

**Aim:** To increase awareness of the risks that young men take

**Objective:** To explore opportunities to 'interrupt' patterns of behavior

**Methodology:**

This exercise is facilitated in two parts

During part one, the facilitator will ask participants to think of all the risks that young men take. These are noted and transferred onto individual sheets.

Young men are then asked to consider measures that could reduce someone taking these risks.

Once young men identify possible solutions, they are ranked from the most powerful to least powerful (e.g. 1-40)

Again, these are transferred individually onto playing card sized paper, labels or card.

The second part of the activity involves appointing a 'dealer' and the players.

The dealer will take the cards identified as 'risks'.

The players will each be given 6 random cards from the 'solutions'.

This is an interesting take on a traditionally card betting game.

There are three key elements to the second part of the game: 1. The player cards which have a range of protective measures young men can use; 2. The dealer cards which have a range of risks young men face and 3. The currency used by players during the game.

The object of the game is hold the most currency at the end of the game

Each player is given five cards and fifty credits at the beginning of the game

Each card contains a possible alternative to violence such as 'walk away' but not each solution will be relevant to each risk played.

Each card is given a score so 'walk away' may have a score of 5.

Players complete by 'betting' their currency on each round

Each player joins the game by placing 5 credits on the table or 'folding' if they want to stay out of that round. The round begins with the 'dealer' placing one of their cards on the table so that the card is visible. This will be a risk young men face, for example 'you are asked for a fight'

Young men will hold in their deck the possible alternative so ‘walk away’ may be chosen. If one player chooses to play this card, they bet part or all of their currency against other players.

When either of these things happen, the round is over: only one player remains betting; all players fold.

The cards of those remaining in the round turn their cards over. Whoever has the highest card in each round takes the currency.

**Tools required:**
Playing card sized paper/card
Player and dealer cards
Currency

## EXAMPLE DEALER CARDS

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **GETTING INTO A FIGHT** | **SOMEONE OFFERS YOU DRINK** | **SOMEONE OFFERS YOU DRUGS** | **JUMPING IN FRONT OF CARS** |
| **GOING INTO AN ABANDONED BUILDING** | **DRIVING AFTER ALCOHOL** | **DRIVING WITHOUT A LICENCE** | **GETTING INTO A CAR WITH A FRIEND WHO HAS TAKEN DRUGS** |
| **LEAVING THE HOUSE WHEN EVERYONE IS IN BED** | **STAYING SOMEWHERE YOU ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE** | **LEAVING SCHOOL WITHOUT PERMISSION** | **HAVING A RELATIONSHIP WITH TWO PEOPLE AT THE SAME TIME** |
| **MEETING WITH SOMEONE YOU MET ON SOCIAL MEDIA** | **CARRYING A WEAPON IN THE COMMUNITY** | **MAKING FUN OF SOMEONE ONLINE** | **SOMEONE CALLS YOUR FAMILY NAMES** |
| **SEE SOMEONE STARING AT YOU** | **WEARING A FOOTBALL SHIRT IN THE 'WRONG' AREA** | **WALKING HOME LATE ALONE** | **YOU LEAVE HOME WITH NO MOBILE PHONE** |
| **YOU 'DOWN' A BOTTLE OF ALCOHOL IN ONE GO** | **STARE AT SOMEONE ACROSS THE ROOM** | **TAKE SOMETHING THAT DOES NOT BELONG TO YOU** | **DAMAGE SOMEONE'S PROPERTY** |

# Activity 5. Turning points

**Complexity:** ** **Principles:** 1-9 **Type:** Group or Individual

**Aim:** To reduce interpersonal violence

**Objective:** To explore opportunities to 'interrupt' patterns of behavior

**Methodology:**

Step1. The facilitators ask the participant/s to think about a time that the either witnessed or experienced violence as a victim or perpetrator

Step 2. The facilitator asks the participant/s to take a few minutes to think back on that experience

Some prompts may be: when was this? Where was it? Who was there? How were you feeling? What were you thinking? What was the other person doing/saying?

Step 3. The participants are then given a worksheet and asked to provide a step by step sequence of the incident (see below). Initially, ask them to fill in the 'what' happened boxes, e.g. this then that, then that etc. second time, ask them to complete the 'why' boxes, e.g. what was I thinking/feeling between the boxes that led to the next interaction?

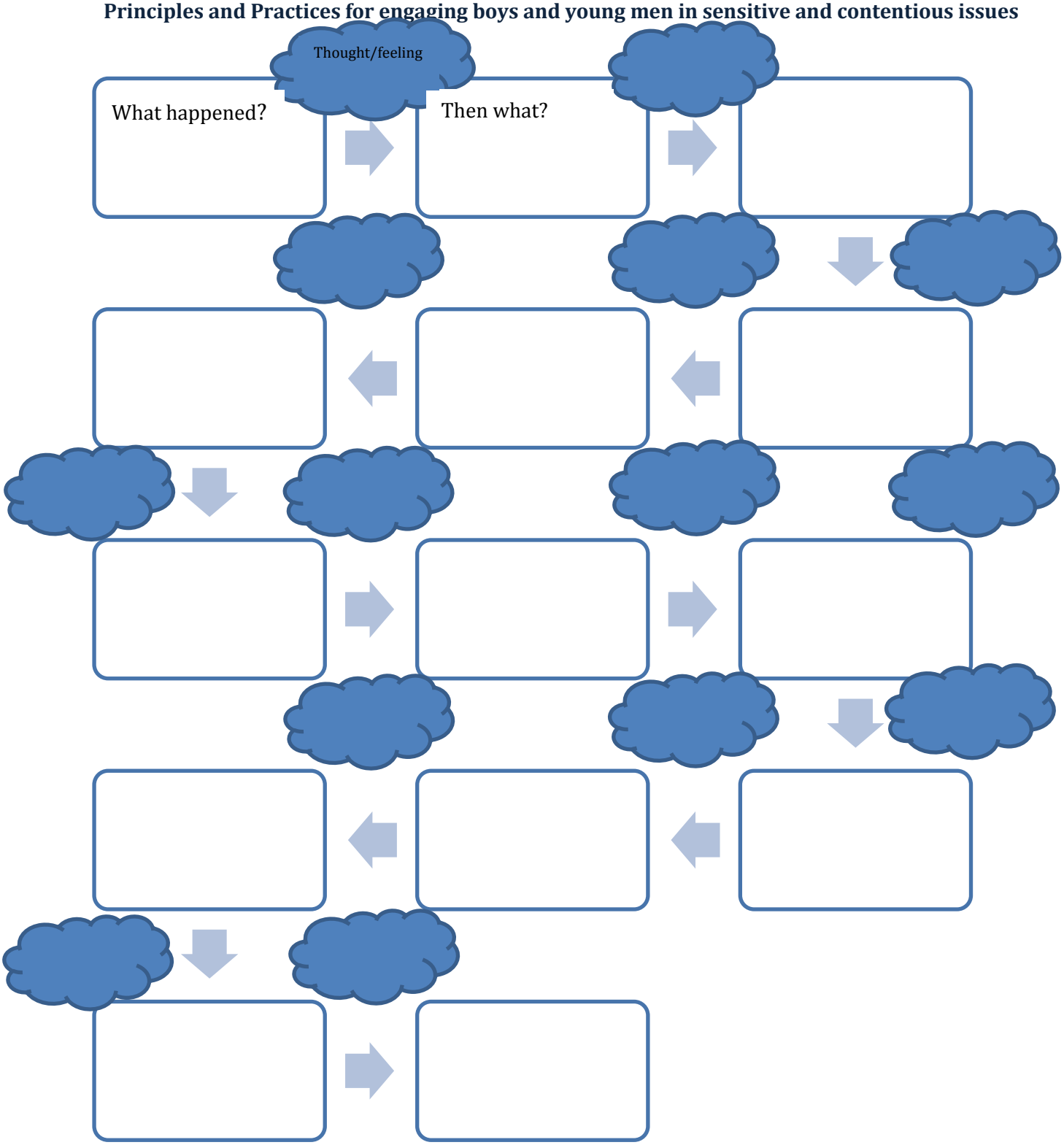
Step 4. Ask for a volunteer. Once one is chosen ask that they share their story. The group first of all reviews the entire sequence. Second time around, invite the group to identify possible interruption points between each interaction or alternative ways of thinking about what just happened. For instance, someone may decide that a different practical choice could change the sequence or by thinking about what happened in one particular box in a different way, could have changed the behavioural response in the subsequent interaction.

Step 5. Ask the participants to then review their own sequence and look for possible interruption points.

Step 6. Provide the participant/s with blank sequence sheets and ask them to complete at least one during the week. Ask them to bring to the next session and review with the group.

**Tools required:**

Sequence worksheet
Pens/markers
Flipchart


Thought/feeling
What happened?
Then what?

# Theme 3: Mental Health

## The importance of this area

Interpersonal violence, both sexual and non-sexual are the most endemic traumatic events that young people are exposed to. Epidemiological research suggests that globally, a large number of children and young people experience a range of traumatic events (maltreatment, witnessing violence, war, sexual abuse) but many of these fall within broader definition of violence. A recent study by Barron and Mitchell (2014) discovered that there were recognizable traumas in children's lives and through an audit, identified that on average, each child had experienced nine significantly traumatic events.

Additionally, an extensive body of research has documented that chronic exposure to violence can result in mental health difficulties and is often reflected in disturbances predominantly in affective and interpersonal self-regulatory capacities. Without addressing these issues, the impact of exposure to violence can impact on both clinical and non-clinical levels. Whilst the link between traumatic explore and masculinity is very under-evaluated, we do have evidence that higher acceptance of masculine norms is strongly correlated with attachment difficulties, relational deficits, poor social skills, low educational attainment and higher levels of acceptance towards aggressive behaviours. We also know that the prison population (which are mostly male) have higher incidents of trauma exposure and are overwhelmingly in custodial settings as a result of violent crimes.

Many young men who experience childhood violence are at greater risk for developing mental health disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and are also more likely to present with co-occurring psychiatric symptoms (however screening for these issues are poorly resourced).

## Our research findings/what young men said

Our research has documented over 1000 boys and young men across Northern Ireland. Some of these young men interfaced with statutory services (such as social services or justice services) but mostly, these young men were not. Through the quantitative elements of the study, we learnt that mental health is not confined that a particular area or a specific community. In fact, mental health was a key concern for young men throughout the study. The significance of this issues increased as young men got older and whilst concerns may

have changed with evolving priorities, the overwhelming evidence was the anxieties, confusions, worries and uncertainties culminated in a pressure pot for young men. When explored through a gender lens, it appeared that many of young men's concerns were exacerbated by their sense of what it meant to be a man. Concerns in this sense on many occasions became mental health issues without a context to explore them safely. After a peak in Year 9, there was an overall decrease in boys indicating that they would confide in both their parents when they were in trouble, suggesting that as boys get older they are less likely to talk to an adult about issues causing them concern. The majority of Year 12 boys (aged 16) indicated that they had at least one problem during the school year (74%). However teachers were generally not seen as someone they would go to for help. Developmentally normal anxieties were morphed into clinically diagnosable difficulties. What emerged through later interviews was the concept of public vs. private, the idea that many young men portray and image of what they believe should be portrayed and yet in private, their thoughts and feelings greatly differed. Whilst it was not fully explored, we know that these chasms can result in negative behavioural responses, but internalizing behavior (such as isolation and self-harm) and externalizing behaviour (such as verbal aggression and physical violence). This was evidenced in the fact that boys reporting low levels of self-reported misbehaviour had the highest psychological wellbeing. Conversely, boys reporting high levels of misbehaviour had the lowest levels of psychological well-being, linking certain types of behaviour with well-being. Teachers also believed that boys were more likely to get into trouble in school because of a lack of talk-based strategies for resolving conflict.

## So what?

Mental health is not an issue that affects some young men. Through the gender lens, it appears that mental health, particularly during adolescence is an important aspect of the male experience that is not routinely explored, particularly outside of clinical settings. There is no reason why young men should have to develop mental health disorders before having the opportunity to explore their anxieties or concerns with others and yet our assumptions about male identify prevent this important work from being done. As a result, young men are being underserved in youth services, schools and social services and the wider community feels the impact. Our experience has demonstrated that young men are fine to talk about the issues that affect them. Asking the questions gives them permission to. Helping boys to understand developmentally specific issues associated with mental, emotional, physical,

psychological and cognitive development will enable them to better understand what they are experiencing and reduce behavioural disturbances.

# Activity 1. Big Balloon

**Complexity:** * **Principles:** 1-8 **Type:** Group or Individual

**Aim:** To increase awareness of mental health

**Objective:** To identify factors that have an impact upon young men's mental health

**Methodology:**

This exercises can be completed with individual or small groups. If this is being completed with larger groups (5>), the facilitator should split the participants into smaller groups (3-5).

Step 1: The facilitator provides each participant with several 'post-its' or labels' and pens. They are asked to think of things that could annoy, hurt or worry someone. These could be practical things, something that another person says/does, or worries that they have about themselves.

The group is given a few minutes to write down as many things as they can with one example on each 'post-it' or label. (if this is being completed with an individual, allow a few more minutes to generate more examples)

Step 2: The facilitator asks for one volunteer from each group. That individual is provided with a balloon.

Step 3: the group are advised that in turn, each participant will place one label or 'post-it' at a time on the balloon. The volunteer is asked to blow into the balloon as each participant's places something on it. (to add competition between groups the number of breaths into the balloon can be counted during step 3)

Step 4: after some time, the balloon will eventually burst. Some important points for reflection after the exercise include:

- How many issues were identified on the balloon?
- Were the issues varied?
- What issue finally led to the balloon bursting-and was it a big or small issue?
- What does the balloon bursting metaphor tell us about how we respond to issues building up?

**Tools required:**

Post-its/labels
Pens
Balloon

## Activity 2. Doesn't add up

**Complexity:** *** **Principles:** 1-9 **Type:** Group or Individual

**Aim:** To improve young men's mental health awareness

**Objective:** To explore the link between thoughts, feelings and behaviours

**Methodology:**

The facilitator explains that the purpose of the exercise is to make sense of a behavior that no-one understand. The participants, for the remainder of the exercise are detectives using only the evidence in front of them to make sense of what is going on.

The facilitator reads out the scenario (see below) and asks the participant/s to listen carefully. After the scenario is read out, the facilitator asks for brief feedback on what they just heard.

Now the facilitator reads some background information to provide context.

The facilitator now advices the participants that there is a formula used by detectives to make sense of things that don't make sense to other people.

**The formula is $T+F=B^2$**

**T** stands for thoughts
**F** stand for feelings

The facilitators advised that thoughts that people have (based on fact or not) lead to feelings about ourselves or people around us. These thoughts and feelings combined result in a behavior. The behavior is 'squared' because usually the behavioural responses are exaggerated and reflect heightened emotions.

So if we can make sense of the thought that emerged and the feeling that resulted as a result of the thought, maybe the behavior will make sense.

With this information, the participants are provided with a worksheet (see below) and asked to note the thought/s that may have existed. Then they are asked to include the feeling.

Once completed, the facilitator asks whether the sequence now makes sense

If the participants agree that the sequence makes sense, they are then asked to think about how the thought could be 'altered' to change how the feelings and/or behaviors would be changed. For example, is there a different way of looking at the incident? Is there evidence that contradicts that thought? If that person asked someone else for their opinion, would they have a different perspective? If they had taken some space, would their thoughts have changed?

The facilitator should then make links between this example and how our responses are often based on thoughts (many of which have no evidence) and impulsivity.

For an additional step, the facilitator can ask the participants to think of a thought they have had in the last few days, something that has upset them or annoyed them.

Once they have thought of an example, they are invited to consider

Where is the evidence for this thought to be true?
Is there evidence that contradicts this thought?
Is the alternative evidence stronger?
Would my feelings and behaviors have changed if I had more perspective?
What could I do in future to test my thoughts?

**Tools required:**

Scenario
Worksheet

## Scenario 1

Sean threw a glass across the bedroom and smashed it on the wall. His mum came in and they got into a verbal argument before Sean was told to go and sit in a room downstairs and calm down

## Initial background information

Sean is 15 and has been off sick for the last few days. He has been home and had plenty of time to spend on his phone. Most of this has been on social media. This morning he came across a meme with his name on it. He looked to see who had posted the meme and it was his best friend Jack-almost two weeks ago. In the last two weeks it got 93 'likes' and several mean comments.

Sean immediately blocked Jack on all his social media platforms. A few minutes later he threw a glass across the bedroom and smashed it on the wall.

| Thought | Feeling | Behaviour |
|---|---|---|
| e.g .Jack hates me | e.g. hurt, let down | 1. Blocked Social Media |
| | | 2. Damaged property |

| Thought | Evidence for | How strong is the belief in that thought (1-100) | Evidence Against | Other possible explanations | How strong is the belief in that thought (1-100) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jack hates me | He wrote something on social media | 100 | We've been friends for years | Someone took his phone | 23 |
| | | | | | |

## Activity 3. You're an anchor

**Complexity:** *** **Principles:** 1-9 **Type:** Group

**Aim:** To increase awareness of mental health

**Objective:** To identify factors that have an impact upon young men's mental health

**Methodology:**

Step 1: The facilitator asks for 1 volunteer (or one volunteer in each small group of 3-4). The facilitator asks the volunteer to come to the front of the room. They are then advised that between the side of the room they are currently on and the other side, there is a path that they have to cross. In that path there are sheets that represent daily activities. E.g. one sheet may say 'get out of bed', then the next may say 'get dressed' etc. The volunteer is asked to cross the room as quickly as they can and this can even be timed. Once the volunteer completes the task, the group congratulate the bewildered volunteer.

Step 2. The remaining member of the small group as asked to join the volunteer. They are each given a label with things that can affect young men. For example, 'have no money' 'don't believe I have friends', 'I'm not in a relationship' 'not as good a footballer as the rest of the team' etc. This time, as the volunteer crosses the path, their teammates are asked to restrain them. The volunteer may make some progress but is unlikely to make it anywhere near the end of the path

Step 3, the facilitators asks for observations on what is happening. For example, does the metaphor resonate with the young men? Is it difficult sometimes to do some basic things? How can things get us down and how common is it?

Step 4. The volunteer is asked to cross again, this time if they can come up with potential solutions to the issue contained on the labels then that barrier is removed. For example, if one teammate restraining the volunteer has a label 'I'm not in a relationship' the volunteer may suggest an alternative thought 'I'm free to see my friends much more' and as a result, that team mate lets go.

Step 5. The facilitator may encourage further reflection on the observations. For example, whilst there are some issues we can address and 'let go of'. Sometimes there are others we need to work through and get support from other people with.

**Tools required:**

Floor sheets

## Activity 4. Pitchy toss

**Complexity:** * **Principles:** 1-8 **Type:** Group/Individual

**Aim:** To increase awareness of mental health

**Objective:** To identify factors that have an impact upon young men's mental health

**Methodology:**

Step 1: The facilitator lay's strips of paper on the floor close to the wall. On each strip of paper, statements are written. Some examples are below.

Step 2: The participant/s are asked to use a coin and throw/flick the coin from a designated areas of the room towards the edge of the wall where the strips of paper are. The object of the game is to land on and collect the strips of paper. Whoever collects the most strips by the end of the game wins.

Step 3: when a participant lands their coin on the strip of paper they must respond to the statement satisfactorily. For example, one strip may say 'It's ok for men to be emotional'. Once the participants (and others) discuss the statement satisfactorily, the facilitator advises them to collect their winning strip.

Step 4: the game continues until all strips are gone or alternatively after a period of time has lapsed.

**Tools required:**

Floor statements
A coin

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **How can setting goals help you achieve things you want to do?** | **What stresses you out?** | **What do you do when you're in a bad mood?** |
| **When was the last time you made a mistake?** | **Does social media make you feel good?** | **What makes you happy** |
| **Is depression the same thing as being sad?** | **What's your favourite way of relaxing?** | **Is it easier to chat to people online than face to face?** |
| **Are women more emotional than men?** | **What sort of things affect how your mood changes?** | **Do you mostly act on your initial reaction or think things through?** |
| **Does good or bad weather affect your moods?** | **Does talking about your feelings help or hinder you?** | **Can you relate to any TV shows or films?** |
| **Are you usually optimistic or pessimistic?** | **What happens when you get too stressed?** | **What sort of thing makes you angry?** |
| **What makes you nervous?** | **Are nerves a good thing or a bad thing?** | **Is it wrong for a man to cry?** |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Why do some men act 'hard' or 'macho'?** | **Is it easy to be the bigger man and walk away?** | **If something's worrying you, who would you talk to?** |
| **What do you think makes you vulnerable?** | **What would you do if your mate says they're depressed?** | **How would you react if someone you knew was always miserable?** |
| **Is being emotional a sign of weakness?** | **What's your favourite subject at school?** | **What's your least favourite subject at school?** |
| **What's one thing that makes you happy about your family?** | **Why might you be reluctant to talk about your problems?** | **What's one thing that's worrying you at the minute?** |
| **If something keeps worrying you, how would you deal with it?** | **Does mental health only affect older people?** | **What does resilient mean?** |

# Theme 4: Healthy Relationships

## The importance of this area

Relationships are critical to everything we do. Positive relationships enable us to function more effectively; they increase our sense of security and well-being, as well as helping us to grow. We know this from our social lives, our romantic lives and our professional lives. Boys and young men know this too. However, knowing that something is important and knowing how to positively and successfully navigate the complexities of social relationships are two different things. This is particularly the case given the confusing and contradictory expectations placed on young men. Within friendships, young men often feel obliged to mask their true thoughts and feelings. Within romantic relationships, many young men conflate affection with entitlement. Within familial relationships, struggles for power often result in behavioural challenges and poor family functioning. Of course these issues do not affect all young men nor those around them. But healthy relationships between young men and their environment is an issue. It's an issue in the home, in schools, and in communities. For many young men, the convergence between their own expectations and perceptions of what is happening within the environment can cause great difficulty. Having space to reflect upon healthy relationships enables young men to safely identify where they are causing or experiencing difficulty. It increase the opportunities for young men to function more positively within social environments and it reduces the likelihood that relationships are the conduit for harm.

## Our research findings/what young men said

Interestingly when young men spoke about relationships during our studies, their language was relatively limited. For instance, relationships were limited to romantic interactions and even within this sub-group, the reflections were primarily based upon heterosexual relationships. This spoke to the nature of masculinity and the impact it had on young men where defined (through social learning) by three aspects of their lives:

1. Sexuality
2. Physical and emotional strength

3. Independence

All three of these characteristics were consistently referred to in our interviews and focus groups with young men and whilst it was not explicit, it was clear that young men's perceptions about what these three characteristics meant to them, sometimes had a huge impact on their wellbeing and their attachment to others around them.

For example, young men were clear during our longitudinal study that being sexually attracted to and later sexually engaged with a girl, was fundamental to their identify formation. Later, as some young men described having difficulties with this expectation, they also described issues with their own mental health, relationships with family members, with peers and with girls.

## So what?

Within women's popular culture, there are spaces to consider positive and negative relationships. Whilst media representations do not always help the advancement of issues affecting women, there are nevertheless accepted mediums to engage with issues that affect them in relation to all kinds of relationships. Despite the gaps, spaces for boys and young men to reflect on what makes a positive relationship and factors associated with harming or destroying relationships are less pronounced either in the media or within social interactions. Young men described the hidden harm of wearing the masculine mask but also the opportunities with having people to trust and confide in. As practitioners, we should recognize the responsibility to create these spaces and enable boys and young men to rehearse skills that will enhance relationships and challenge them on attitudes, beliefs or behaviours that will ultimately destroy relationships.

# Activity 1: Hot date

**Complexity:** *** **Principles:1-9** **Type:** Group/Individual

**Aim:** To increase awareness of gender based violence in relationships

**Objective:** To identify behaviours of young men that contribute to relational violence

**Methodology:**

This is an options based exercises. Throughout the exercise the facilitator will provide the participant/s with a range of an outcomes as a result of an earlier decision made. There are a number of options available so the process can be repeated if it is being facilitated in a group setting.

Step 1: the facilitator reads the first statement. For example, "you ask a girl out on a date and she says no". The facilitator then asks what the participant might be thinking at that point and what they might be feeling as a result.

Step 2: depending on the response, the facilitator will choose the next statement. For example, the statement may be "you then see the same girl out at night. She is wearing a mini-skirt and keeps glancing over at you". Again, the participant is asked what they may be thinking and feeling. Again they are asked what action they may take as a result of those thoughts/feelings

Step 3: the facilitator reads aloud the next statement. For example, it may be that "you see the girl walking home and go up to her and say…." The facilitator then asks the participant to finish the story. The process is repeated with step 4.

**Example statements** –statements can be mixed up as appropriate

| Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 3 | Step 4 |
|---|---|---|---|
| You ask a someone out and they says no | You find yourself alone with them | You tell them you never liked them anyway | You post rude messages to them on social media |
| You ask a someone out and they say yes | You see them out at a party later in the week and they're wearing a short skirt looking at someone else | You grab them to get their attention and say… | You pull their hair |
| You have been dating a someone for a few months and they've told you that they love you | You're friends advised you to buy contraception but they're not interested | You follow them out of the building and they shout at them asking why they're messing you around | You try to kiss them and they try to pull away |
| Your date is asking what is wrong with you | You don't respond to them | They call you and you ignore them | You tell them that it's their fault there's something wrong with you |

Step 5: this step provides an opportunity for the participant/s to discuss what they observed. Initially they are asked about the different forms of violence that they heard.

The facilitator explains that violence in relationships can take many forms and can be:

**Physical** (pushing, shoving, hitting, smacking, holding, restraining)

**Sexual** (videoing, touching, kissing, penetrating)

**Psychological or emotional** (verbal, calling names, blaming, blackmailing)

If there is time, the facilitator has the option to get participants to label each type of violence using examples

## Activity 2: Come closer

**Complexity:** ** **Principles:** 1-9 **Type:** Group

**Aim:** To reduce gender based violence

**Objective:** To explore physical proximity in relationships

**Methodology:**

The facilitator begins the session with a short exercise

Each participant is asked to pair up and stand in front of each other

The participants are asked to observe proximity to each other. For instance, the facilitator may ask questions such as “notice how close you are to one another. Some of you are closer together and some of you are further apart”. The point is to help participants understand our comfort zones.

The participants are then asked to move closer together one step at a time in turn (i.e. participant 1 and then participant 2).

This continues one step at a time until the participants agree that they do not want to move further

Before the participant/s sit down, the facilitator should again ask them to observe what happened within their own pair and also observe how close others are

The facilitator can ask questions such as:

- How did you feel with each subsequent move?
- Could you tell that your partner was comfortable or uncomfortable?
- How did you know?
- What sort of verbal and non-verbal’s were being communicated?
- Did anyone want to take additional steps but your partner did not?
- How was that resolved? What was your response?

**Tools:**

Participants!

## Activity 3: Touch

**Complexity:** *** **Principles:** 1-9 **Type:** Group/Individual

**Aim:** To reduce gender based violence

**Objective:** To explore appropriate and inappropriate touch in relationships

**Methodology:**

Step one: The facilitator provides the participant/s with a flip chart sheet or large piece of paper and different coloured markers.

***The participant/s are asked to draw a girl in whatever way they wish (in the first instance). Be aware that participants may respond to this with bravado and humour. The facilitator should allow the exercise to be fun but also be inquisitive about the humour.***

The facilitator reviews what the participants have drawn and asks why they have represented a girl the way they have.

Step two: The participants are invited to consider that the picture is of their mother, their granny or a sister and review the picture again. They may wish to change/amend their illustration. Others may be happy to progress to the next step without any changes.

Step three: The participants are then invited to use one coloured marker to mark where a girl would be happy to be touched

The facilitator should review the markings with the young men and reflect upon how they have come to the decision and also how they would know whether or not a young woman would like/be comfortable being touched in that part of their body. Some things to consider are verbal and non-verbal cues. One particular point to explore is what 'no' means. Is this ambiguous or very clear.

Step four: The facilitator should also raise the point of uncertainty. This acronym could help them think through what is taking place

***WWW.HOW.COM***

WHAT do I want, WHAT do I need and with WHOM?
HOW have I given the other person the opportunity to be CLEAR, OPEN and not MISINTERPRETED?

Listened

The facilitator could ask "what could you do if you're not sure if a girl is happy or unhappy" The point is to develop some scripts for clarifying and it's important that young men develop scripts in their own words.

**Tools:**

Flip chart
Several different coloured markers

## Activity 4: Stand by Me

**Complexity:** ** **Principles:** 1-9 **Type:** Group/Individual

**Aim:** To reduce gender based violence

**Objective:** To identify how victims of GBV can be protected

**Methodology:**

Step one: The facilitator provides the participant/s with a flip chart sheet or large piece of paper and different coloured markers. Participants are asked to first of all think back to what gender based violence means and how it can present itself (examples can be drawn upon from previous exercises or alternatively, the facilitator should have examples prepared in order to prompt the participants). Participants are asked to individually think of a time when they have witnessed this type of incident. Some common environments are in school, in the community, in the home or online.

Step two: Participants are asked to consider what they saw (using pictures of words)

Step three: Participants are asked to think about how they responded (using pictures of words)

Step four: Participants are asked to think about the action they took. Did they engage in it? Did they ignore it? Did they intervene? Additionally, what informed these responses? For example, if no action was taken was it because they did not recognize what was happening? Was it because they felt they hadn't got the skills to be assertive? Was it because there were too many perpetrators? Whatever the reason, it is important to acknowledge the comparisons between participants.

Step five: Participants are asked to review the incident again this time considering what could SAFELY be done to intervene in some way. Some suggestions for intervention are using distractions; informing someone in authority; standing up to the perpetrator

**Tools:**

Flip chart
Several different coloured markers