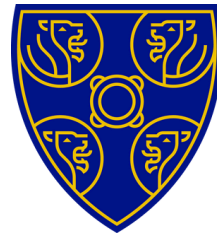


Durham School Online Safety newsletter



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November 2024

Teen boys and body image

In discussions about body image issues among teenagers, the focus often centres on girls. While it's true that some teenage girls face intense societal pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards, boys are not immune to these same forces. Social media has created an environment that increasingly affects teen boy's body image, fostering feelings of inadequacy and promoting harmful ideals of masculinity and physical appearance. As parents/carers, understanding the specific ways social media influences boys' self-image is essential to helping them to navigate these challenges.

Much like the impact of filtered and edited photos on girls' self-esteem, social media has cultivated an unrealistic standard for male bodies. Images of muscular physiques, chiselled abs, and hyper-masculine ideals flood platforms like, TikTok, and YouTube. Fitness influencers, models, and even celebrities often present a narrow version of what it means to 'look good' as a man. Unfortunately, these standards are not achievable for most teenage boys, whose bodies are still developing and going through natural stages of growth.

Social media algorithms play a crucial role in reinforcing these body image ideals. **Once a teen boy engages with fitness or body transformation content, whether through likes, comments, or views, platforms like TikTok and Instagram start recommending more of the same.** This creates a negative feedback loop where boys are constantly exposed to content promoting muscle-building workouts, restrictive diets, and even potentially harmful supplements and drugs.

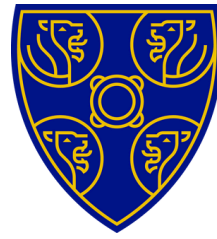
For some, these recommendations may serve as motivation to adopt healthier habits like regular exercise or balanced eating. **However, for others, it can lead to an obsession with appearance, creating unhealthy behaviours such as extreme dieting, over-exercising, or using dangerous substances like steroids to achieve the 'perfect' body.** A recent article in *Men's Health* highlighted the use of trenbolone among young males, what it called 'The viral steroid trend targeting teens: How an obscure bovine steroid became Gen Z's favourite social media muscle flex'. At the same time, research published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* found that in Canada, over 80% of adolescent boys and young men take a protein supplement, and more than 50% take creatine.

Muscle dysmorphia is a psychological condition that has been increasingly linked to social media use among teenage boys. It's characterised by an obsession with building muscle and a distorted view of one's body. Social media can exacerbate these feelings, as teen boys compare themselves to influencers and celebrities with seemingly unattainable physiques.

If you would like information on any particular aspect of online safety, please contact Harriet Thompson at h.thompson@dcsf.org.uk.



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How can parents/carers help?

- **Create a space where your son feels comfortable discussing body image issues.** Many boys might feel embarrassed to admit they are struggling with their appearance, as they may see it as a sign of weakness. Reassure them that these feelings are normal and that they are not alone.
- **Teach your son that physical health is not just about appearance.** Encourage healthy habits like regular exercise and balanced nutrition for the sake of well-being, not just aesthetics. Highlight the importance of mental and emotional health as part of an overall healthy lifestyle.
- **Talk to your son about societal expectations of masculinity and how these pressures can be harmful.** Encourage him to embrace his identity beyond physical appearance, reminding him that worth is determined by character, kindness, and resilience, not just muscles.
- **Discuss with your son who he follows online and what kind of content he engages with.** Ask if he is aware of fitness influencers' content on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube and, if so, what he has seen and what he thinks of it.
- **If your son seems overly obsessed with his appearance or is exhibiting signs of distress, anxiety, or depression related to his body image, consider seeking help from school, his GP, or a therapist or counsellor.** Early intervention can prevent these issues from escalating into more severe mental health problems.

“Social media put STERIODS ON STERIODS, because social media DRAMATICALLY ESCALATED the culture that values THE EFFECTS OF IMAGE ENHANCING DRUGS like steroids”

“People don’t recognize how common BODY-IMAGE ISSUES and PRESSURES are for boys, but NEARLY A THIRD of teenage boys are TRYING TO GAIN WEIGHT NOW.”