Safeguarding Scenario 24 - Girls just want to control boys

🚨 “Girls just want to control boys. That's what they say online.”

Over the past few weeks, staff have noticed a change in the language and behaviour of Jack, a Year 6 pupil, who has previously been friendly, sociable and generally respectful towards others.

Jack has recently started making negative comments about girls during lessons and breaktimes. He has told other boys that girls are "always trying to get boys into trouble" and has begun excluding girls from group activities, suggesting that "boys are better leaders anyway".



During a PSHE lesson about healthy friendships and respectful relationships, Jack challenges the teacher, saying: "Why do we always have to be nice to girls? They think they're better than us. Men should be in charge because that's how it's supposed to be."

When the teacher asks Jack where he has heard these ideas, he explains: "I watch this guy online. He's really successful and tells boys how to be strong and not let girls control them. My older brother watches him too. He says boys who listen to girls are weak."

A few days later, a teaching assistant overhears Jack and two other boys laughing about a video they have shared in a group chat. The video appears to encourage boys to humiliate girls who challenge them.

One of the girls in Jack's class has recently become reluctant to join group activities and tells a member of staff: "Jack keeps saying girls are stupid and that we should know our place. Everyone laughs when he says it. I don't want to be in his group anymore."

When challenged, Jack responds: "It's just a joke. Everyone says it online. You're making a big deal out of nothing."

Would your team know what to do?



Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026 reinforces the importance of recognising and responding to child-on-child abuse, including sexual harassment, bullying, online harm and prejudice-based abuse.

Online misogyny and the influence of the 'manosphere' are increasingly relevant to safeguarding, particularly where harmful online messages begin to influence children's attitudes, relationships and behaviour towards others.

The manosphere describes a range of online communities and influencers discussing masculinity, male identity and relationships. Although not all such content is harmful, some promotes misogyny, hostility towards women and girls, male superiority and unhealthy expectations about relationships.

Children may encounter these messages through social media, gaming platforms, video-sharing sites and content recommended by algorithms. Importantly, exposure to misogynistic content does not automatically mean that a child holds extremist beliefs or presents a safeguarding risk.

However, when harmful messages begin to influence a child's behaviour, particularly where other children experience intimidation, humiliation, discrimination or harassment, schools must recognise and respond appropriately.

🔍 The Safeguarding Question

"What is influencing Jack's attitudes and behaviour, how is this affecting other children, and what support and intervention are needed to prevent further harm?"



❌ DON'T DISMISS MISOGYNISTIC LANGUAGE AS HARMLESS BANTER

It would be inappropriate for staff to assume that Jack's comments are simply a phase, an attempt to impress his friends or harmless repetition of something he has watched online.

Staff should not dismiss the concerns as:

- "Boys will be boys."
- "He's only ten. He doesn't understand what he's saying."
- "It's just something he's picked up from social media."
- "He's only trying to get a reaction."
- "The girls need to learn to ignore him."
- "It's just banter. He doesn't really mean it."
- "There's no safeguarding concern because he hasn't physically hurt anyone."

KCSIE 2026 reinforces the importance of a safeguarding culture in which harmful behaviour, including child-on-child abuse and prejudice-based harm, is recognised, challenged and addressed. The absence of physical violence does not mean that behaviour is harmless.

Repeated derogatory comments, humiliation, intimidation and discriminatory behaviour can affect children's emotional wellbeing, confidence, sense of belonging and feelings of safety.

Schools should be particularly alert when harmful language becomes normalised within friendship groups or when children begin to withdraw from activities because they feel uncomfortable, intimidated or excluded.

✅ RECOGNISE AND CHALLENGE HARMFUL ATTITUDES

Staff should respond promptly and proportionately to Jack's comments, making clear that disrespectful or discriminatory language is unacceptable.

However, challenging the behaviour should not involve humiliating Jack or labelling him as a misogynist.

A calm response might include: “Jack, I understand that you have heard these views online, but saying that girls are less important or should be controlled is not acceptable. Everyone deserves to be treated with respect. I would like to understand more about what you have been watching and why you think these messages are true."

Staff should:

- Challenge sexist and derogatory language consistently.
- Explain why comments that undermine or humiliate others are harmful.
- Avoid public confrontation that may increase defensiveness or reinforce peer-group approval.
- Encourage Jack to reflect on the messages he has encountered.
- Reinforce expectations about equality, dignity and respectful relationships.
- Consider whether additional support or preventative education is needed.

The aim is not simply to stop Jack repeating particular phrases, but to help him understand why these attitudes are harmful and develop healthier ways of thinking about relationships and masculinity.

🔍 DEMONSTRATE PROFESSIONAL CURIOSITY: WHAT IS INFLUENCING JACK?

Jack's comments suggest that online content may be influencing his understanding of gender, relationships and how boys are expected to behave. However, staff should avoid assuming that he fully understands or agrees with everything he has watched.

Professional curiosity means exploring the wider circumstances and recognising that children may be influenced by a combination of online experiences, friendships, family relationships and their own emotional needs.

Questions for consideration include:

- What online influencers, videos or communities is Jack accessing?
- How frequently is he viewing or sharing this content?
- What does Jack find appealing about the messages?
- Does he understand the meaning and potential impact of the language he is using?
- Is he experiencing pressure from friends or older children to adopt particular attitudes?
- Has he experienced rejection, bullying, loneliness or difficulties with friendships?
- Is he receiving messages suggesting that boys should suppress emotions or demonstrate dominance?
- Are other pupils being encouraged to share or repeat similar content?
- Have staff noticed changes in Jack's emotional wellbeing, relationships or behaviour?
- Are there any SEND, communication or additional needs that should inform how staff engage with him?
- Staff should not assume that Jack's older brother is responsible for his behaviour simply because Jack has mentioned watching the same influencer.

Equally, schools should avoid automatically associating misogynistic language with radicalisation.

Misogynistic attitudes may form part of wider harmful ideologies, but exposure to such content alone does not establish that a child is being radicalised. Any concerns about possible radicalisation should be considered in context and discussed with the DSL in accordance with the school's safeguarding and Prevent procedures.

🚨 CONSIDER THE IMPACT ON OTHER CHILDREN

An important aspect of this scenario is the impact Jack's behaviour is having on the girls in his class. One pupil has already reported feeling uncomfortable and has begun avoiding group activities.

This suggests that Jack's behaviour is not simply an issue of inappropriate language. It may be affecting other children's emotional wellbeing, participation and sense of safety.

KCSIE 2026 expects schools to recognise that child-on-child abuse can take different forms and that children may experience harm through repeated discriminatory comments, bullying, intimidation and sexual harassment.

The DSL should consider:

- Whether Jack's behaviour amounts to bullying, prejudice-based abuse or another form of child-on-child abuse.
- Whether any pupils have experienced repeated humiliation, intimidation or harassment.
- Whether the shared video contains harmful, threatening or sexually inappropriate content.
- Whether girls are being deliberately excluded or targeted.
- Whether similar incidents have been reported previously.
- Whether other boys are being influenced or pressured to participate.
- Whether affected pupils feel safe and know whom they can approach for support.
- Whether any immediate protective measures are necessary.

The response must consider the needs of both the children experiencing harm and Jack, whose behaviour may indicate that he also requires support.

Schools should not place responsibility on girls to ignore, tolerate or manage misogynistic behaviour.

✅ LISTEN TO THE CHILDREN AFFECTED

The girl who has reported Jack's comments should be listened to carefully and reassured that she has done the right thing by speaking to an adult.

A member of staff might respond: “Thank you for telling me. You should not have to feel uncomfortable or upset because of the way someone is speaking to you. Everyone has the right to feel safe and respected at school. I am going to share what you have told me with the people who can help."

Staff should establish how the behaviour has affected her without asking leading questions or requiring her to repeat her account unnecessarily.

Consider whether other pupils have experienced similar behaviour and whether the wider peer group has begun to accept derogatory language as normal. The child's voice should inform the school's response, including what would help her feel safe and confident participating in school activities.

✅ SHARE SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS WITH THE DSL

KCSIE 2026 makes clear that staff must act on safeguarding concerns and follow their school's child protection procedures.

The teaching assistant should share the concerns about Jack's behaviour, the online video and the girl's account with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or deputy without delay.

The DSL should consider:

- The nature, seriousness, frequency and impact of the behaviour.
- Whether this represents an isolated incident or an emerging pattern.
- Whether there is evidence of child-on-child abuse.
- Whether other pupils are at risk of harm.
- Whether Jack may be vulnerable to harmful online influences.
- Whether there are concerns about coercion, exploitation or radicalisation requiring further assessment.
- What support is needed for the children affected.
- What intervention, education or support may help Jack understand and change his behaviour.
- Whether parents and carers should be involved.
- Whether advice or support from external agencies is necessary.

Not every incident of inappropriate language requires a referral to children's social care or specialist services. However, the response should be proportionate to the circumstances, informed by the risks identified and reviewed if concerns continue or escalate.

Where there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, the school should make a referral to children's social care.

🔐 WORK WITH PARENTS AND CARERS

Parents and carers can play an important role in helping children understand online influences and develop respectful attitudes towards others. The DSL should consider how best to involve Jack's parents or carers, taking account of any safeguarding risks and the child's circumstances.

Conversations should focus on understanding what Jack has encountered online and working together to address the behaviour, rather than blaming his family or making assumptions about their beliefs. Parents may be unaware of the content their child is viewing or how algorithms can recommend increasingly provocative material.

Schools could provide guidance about:

- Recognising harmful online influencers and misogynistic content.
- Discussing masculinity, equality and respectful relationships.
- Exploring social media and gaming platforms together.
- Encouraging children to question online claims and stereotypes.
- Supporting boys to express emotions and seek help.
- Establishing appropriate online boundaries and parental controls.

The parents and carers of children experiencing harm should also be involved appropriately, with consideration given to confidentiality, safety and the wishes of the children concerned.

📝 RECORD ACCURATELY

Staff should record the concerns promptly in accordance with the school's safeguarding procedures.

Records should include:

- Jack's comments, using his exact words wherever possible.
- The date, time and context of the incidents.
- The language or behaviour observed by staff.
- Information Jack shared about online influencers and videos.
- Details of the reported group-chat content, without unnecessarily copying or circulating harmful material.
- The girl's account and the impact on her wellbeing and participation.
- Any other relevant incidents or concerns.
- Immediate actions taken and support provided.
- When and with whom concerns were shared.
- The DSL's decisions, rationale, actions and timescales.
- Follow-up discussions, parental involvement and outcomes.



Avoid unsupported conclusions such as "Jack is being radicalised" or "Jack is a misogynist".
Instead, record what was observed, what children said and the concerns arising from those facts.

Safeguarding records should tell the child's story, explain decisions and demonstrate the difference made by the school's actions.

🔍 LOOK AT THE WHOLE PICTURE

When the DSL reviews previous safeguarding and behaviour records, several earlier incidents become apparent:

- Jack has made repeated comments suggesting that boys are superior to girls.
- Two girls have reported feeling uncomfortable during group activities.
- A member of staff previously challenged Jack for describing another boy as "weak" because he became upset.
- Jack has increasingly sought approval from a small group of boys who repeat similar online phrases.
- A lunchtime supervisor recorded an incident in which girls were deliberately excluded from a football game.
- Jack has recently become defensive when adults challenge his views about relationships.
- Another pupil has reported that similar videos are being shared within a group chat outside school.

Individually, some of these incidents may have appeared relatively minor. However, considered together, they suggest an emerging pattern of harmful attitudes and behaviour that is beginning to influence relationships and the experiences of other children.

The DSL recognises the importance of addressing the concerns before the behaviour becomes further embedded or escalates.

The response should include appropriate support for affected pupils, targeted work with Jack, consideration of the wider peer group and ongoing monitoring to establish whether interventions are making a difference.

✅ STRENGTHEN PREVENTATIVE EDUCATION AND THE WHOLE-SCHOOL SAFEGUARDING CULTURE

Responding to Jack's behaviour should not be limited to an individual conversation or sanction.

Schools should consider whether the concerns highlight a need to strengthen wider preventative education and safeguarding arrangements.

This may include:

- Reviewing age-appropriate RSHE and PSHE provision covering respectful relationships, equality, stereotypes and consent.
- Helping pupils recognise when online content promotes harmful attitudes or misinformation.
- Exploring how influencers and algorithms can shape opinions and behaviour.
- Promoting positive messages about masculinity, emotional expression and healthy friendships.
- Ensuring staff consistently challenge misogynistic language and prejudice-based behaviour.
- Using pupil voice to understand whether children feel safe and respected.
- Reinforcing how pupils can report bullying, harassment or concerns about online experiences.
- Monitoring whether interventions improve behaviour, relationships and pupils' feelings of safety.

The aim is to create a culture in which all children feel respected, included and confident that adults will respond when concerns arise.

🔍 The Safeguarding Question

Later, another member of staff comments:

“He’s only in Year 6. He's probably just copying something he's seen on YouTube. Surely this isn't really a safeguarding issue?"



This assumption risks overlooking both the potential impact on other children and Jack's own vulnerability to harmful online influences. Primary-aged children may encounter misogynistic messages before they fully understand the attitudes and behaviours being promoted.

Although not every inappropriate comment constitutes child-on-child abuse, repeated discriminatory language, intimidation and humiliation must be taken seriously, particularly when other children are beginning to feel unsafe, excluded or distressed.

KCSIE 2026 reinforces the importance of recognising child-on-child abuse, responding to prejudice-based harm and maintaining a safeguarding culture in which concerns are not minimised. The responsibility of staff is not to label Jack or assume he is being radicalised. It is to recognise the behaviour, understand the wider context, consider the impact on others and ensure that appropriate action is taken.

Sometimes the most important question isn't: "Is Jack just repeating something he has seen online?"

It is: "What is influencing Jack's behaviour, who may be experiencing harm, and what do we need to do to ensure that all children feel safe, respected and supported?"

Notice the signs. Challenge harmful attitudes. Stay professionally curious. Listen to children. Record. Share concerns. Assess the risk. Act. Review the impact.