

RAISING
FUTURE-
READY

KIDS >>>

Instilling Healthy Masculinity in Our Sons

A parent's e-guide

*Based on the issues raised in
the Netflix series Adolescence*

P  R E N T E D



**"A world of floundering men
is unlikely to be a world
of flourishing women."**

- Richard Reeves

Introduction

Adolescence is a gripping crime drama that follows the story of 13-year-old Jamie Miller, who is accused of murdering his classmate, Katie. The series is known for its intense, real-time storytelling and explores themes of youth violence, family dynamics, masculinity and the manosphere.

This movie presents a unique opportunity to explore the issues of identity and masculinity, especially with our sons.

It encourages us to reflect on how societal expectations and personal experiences powerfully shape young men's identities, core beliefs, and behaviours.

Some of the key themes of this movie:

- **Violence and crime:** The series contains scenes of violence, including the murder of a teenage girl. Parents should be aware of the graphic and disturbing nature of these scenes and the psychological impact they may have on younger viewers.
- **Unhealthy portrayals of masculinity:** Jamie's father wished his son would fit into the typical mould of boys – athletic, popular and well-liked. Unfortunately, this was not the case. When Jamie was unable to perform to such standards at football, Eddie looked away at the pivotal moment when Jamie needed his support and affirmation. While he tried hard to be a present father, he was emotionally unavailable to his son.



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- **Social media interactions:** The investigation into Jamie and Katie's relationship includes their social media interactions. It highlights the impact of digital communication in modern relationships and the dangers it can bring.
- **Family dynamics:** The series portrays the strain on Jamie's family as they deal with the accusations and the subsequent investigation. This can be a conversation starter about family support and resilience in difficult times.
- **Mental health:** The show delves into Jamie's psychological state and his interactions with a court-appointed psychologist. This can be a point of discussion about mental health issues and the importance of seeking help.

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Who this e-guide is for

Parents of teen boys who want to instil healthy masculinity from young in their sons.

How to use this e-guide

If you have not watched Adolescence, do watch it by yourself or with your spouse before deciding whether your teenager should watch it.

While it may not be age-appropriate or beneficial for your child to watch the series, it presents a golden opportunity to look at some of these issues honestly and have open conversations with them about it.

You can use this guide to talk about scenes from the movie and discuss the key themes that emerge:

- Identity and purpose
- Strength
- Love and support
- Honesty and integrity
- Bullying and belonging



Identity and purpose

*"Who am I?
Am I a man?"*

Movie scene

Jamie's interactions with his peers in school reveal the pressures boys face to conform to distorted masculine norms (such as bullying and sharing nude pictures of girls).

The series depicts how these pressures can lead to harmful behaviours and a distorted sense of identity.

Throughout the series, Jamie's actions reflect a deeper search for purpose and identity. His journey underscores the need for boys to find healthy ways to define their masculinity and understand their place in the world.

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Key things to note

- Masculinity is caught from a boy's father or father figure.
- Young boys need the consistent presence and affirmation from his father or father figure. A young boy needs to know that he is enough.
- When boys experience shame through difficult experiences such as bullying, failed romantic attempts or being called a failure by authority figures, their sense of manhood can be challenged.
- The father figure plays a crucial role in these moments. With love and support from his father figure, the boy can confidently stand on his identity as a man and bounce back. Without a strong identity, the boy will find it hard to be confident.



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What we can do and say

1. Affirm your son

Regularly affirm your son's worth and capabilities. Celebrate his achievements, no matter how small.

“I believe in you. You are capable and strong. Your efforts matter, and I'm proud of you.”

2. Support identity formation

Help your son explore his interests and passions. Encourage him to pursue activities that make him feel fulfilled and confident.

“Find what makes you happy and pursue it. Your interests and hobbies are important parts of who you are.”



Strength (physical and character)

*"Do I have
what it takes?"*

Movie scene

Jamie's relationship with his father, Eddie, is crucial. Eddie's attempts to guide Jamie highlight the importance of positive male role models in shaping a boy's masculinity.

However, the movie reveals that while Eddie was never aggressive with any of his family members, he too struggled to express and cope with difficult emotions. This has implications on how Jamie deals with his own emotions.

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Key things to note

- Men are called to uplift and protect others, especially the weak and vulnerable.
- Boys learn respect for women from the men in their lives. When role-modelled well, they use their strength to support the women around them, starting with their mother and sister.
- Boys need to be taught by a father figure how to appropriately channel their strength to build up those around them.
- Boys learn how to channel their strength healthily through a variety of activities: rough-and-tumble play, sports, serving their family, serving the poor and vulnerable, among others.

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- The definition of a “strong man” should go beyond physical strength and include traits such as a good character, kindness, thoughtfulness, and other pro-social attitudes.

What we can do and say

1. Model respectful behaviour

- Demonstrate respect in your interactions with others. Show your son how to treat people with kindness and dignity.

“

*Respecting others is important.
Treat everyone with kindness
and consideration, just as you
would want to be treated.*

”

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2. Model strength under control

- Dads should engage in rough-and-tumble play with your son. Young boys learn the limits of their strength, and self-regulation through their interactions with their fathers.
- Model strength under control, not strength to control.

“

I'm feeling upset and angry, but I am choosing not to shout; I'm here when you are ready to talk, I won't force you; I should not have spoken in that tone, I am sorry.

”

3. Play a team sport

- Enrol your son in a team sport such as basketball, cricket, rugby or soccer. Team sports teaches boys to work with other boys to fulfil a common goal, under the guidance of a coach.

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4. Learn to serve

- Provide opportunities for your son to serve the women in his life, as well as the weak and vulnerable, starting at home. (E.g., carrying heavy groceries for mum, administering first aid for his younger sister, taking out the trash, volunteering for a cause locally, going on humanitarian and crisis-relief trips).

“

A man's role is to protect and to provide for those who need help.

Women are to be treated with respect and dignity. We use our strength to serve and love them.

How can you channel your strength to build others up?

”



Love and Support

"Am I loved and supported by my family?"



Movie scene

Jamie's difficulty in expressing his emotions is a central theme. He often suppresses his feelings, reflecting the societal expectation that boys should be stoic and unemotional.

There was a pivotal moment in Jamie's growing up years when he was performing poorly on the football pitch. He was scared and embarrassed, facing jeers from both his teammates and other dads from the sidelines.

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He looked to his father for support and comfort but his father, also embarrassed, was unable to meet Jamie's gaze, and hid his face from his son. This communicates to Jamie that he is only lovable and worthy of support when he meets societal expectations.

In episode 1, after witnessing the video evidence of the murder, his father turns away from Jamie, leaving Jamie very alone and fearful in that difficult moment.

Key things to note

- Boys have an innate desire to be loved and supported by those around them, especially his family.
- When boys do not sense that secure love, it can lead to bitterness, loneliness and unresolved hurt – the root of many unhealthy behaviours.



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What we can do and say

1. Encourage healthy emotional expression

- Teach your son that it is okay to express emotions and be vulnerable. Share your own experiences and feelings to normalise emotional expression.

“

*It's strong to show your emotions.
It's okay to cry, be angry, or feel sad.
Sharing your feelings helps
you understand and manage
them better.*

”



Honesty and integrity

“Will people accept me if I tell the truth?”

Movie scene

Throughout the series, Jamie's interactions with his peers and family reveal his struggle with honesty.

His eventual confession about his involvement in the crime is a pivotal moment that showcases the importance of coming clean and facing the consequences of one's actions.

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Key things to note

- Small, daily acts of honesty help build trust within the family.
- Young children may feel the pressure to hide something they did wrong. Let them know it always pays to be honest about our mistakes. The important thing is to live in accordance with one's values and principles, even when it is difficult.
- When a child admits his mistake, exercise sensitivity and thank him for it before addressing the issue. Chiding him for his mistake will push him away and make him less likely to tell the truth in future.
- When trust is broken, it has to be restored. Trust is restored by saying “I’m sorry” and admitting our mistakes and blind spots too, even as parents.

What we can do and say

1. Build a culture of honesty at home

- Boys learn honesty from healthy family dynamics, e.g., when mum and dad share openly with honesty and trust, and family members take each other at their word.

“

Have there been times when you told me something truthful and I didn't believe you? I'm sorry I did that. Can we talk about it?

Were there instances you felt you needed to hide something from us? Can we talk about it?

”

- Play a game that requires trust to be broken, e.g., Avalon, Among Us. Use it as a teaching point to convey that this is not what you will do as a family in real life.

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- Watch a movie that explores the theme of trust, e.g., “The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe”, and talk with your child about moments when trust is broken, such as when Edmund lies to his siblings about Narnia.

2. Give the benefit of the doubt

- Practise “I believe you” moments in conversations. When your son expresses hurt, frustration, or fear (even if it doesn’t make sense to you), say: “I may not fully understand, but I believe you.”



Bullying and belonging

"Do I belong?"

Movie scene

Jamie experiences bullying in school, which exacerbated his feelings of inadequacy and isolation.

That Katie also rejected and bullied Jamie by sending him emojis on social media implying that he was an incel (involuntary celibate) was likely a key factor that pushed him to kill her.

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Key things to note

- Boys crave the acceptance of their friends, especially during their teens. When they are bullied or alienated, it can be a painful and scary experience. It can also breed feelings of worthlessness.
- Social media can amplify bullying by providing a platform for public humiliation and constant reminders of one's social status.
- The impact of bullying on a boy's sense of belonging and identity is multifaceted and complex.
- Having a strong support system, including family, trusted friends, and mentors, can help mitigate this by providing a sense of belonging and validation.



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What we can do and say

1. Provide emotional support

- Create a safe space for your son to express his thoughts and feelings without fear of judgment. Be an active listener and show empathy.

“

It's okay to feel upset, hurt, or confused. I'm sorry you had to go through that. I am here to listen and support you.

”

2. Provide consistent presence

- Be consistently present in your son's life. Show up for important events, spend quality time together, and be available when he needs you.

“

I'm here for you. Whether you need support or just someone to talk to, you can count on me.

”



*“Our job as parents
is not to make a
particular kind of
child. Instead, our
job is to provide a
protected space of
love, safety and
stability in which
children of many
unpredictable kinds
can flourish.”*

– Alison Gopnik

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A note for single mothers

It truly takes a village to raise a child, but perhaps this is even more true for single parents. Surround yourself with supportive friends, family, and community members who can offer advice and assistance. Consider joining parenting groups or intentionally building relationships with trusted male adults who can be a positive role model for your son.



“Providing children with responsibility around the house makes them feel like an essential part of the family, and giving them more responsibility as they grow could offer some protection against later feelings of uselessness.”

– Jonathan Haidt



Questions for reflection

1. Role models

Who are the male role models in your son's life, and what qualities do they exhibit?

How can you ensure these role models promote positive and respectful behaviour towards women?

2. Emotional expression

How do you encourage your son to express his emotions?

How can you model healthy emotional expression and vulnerability?

3. Respectful relationships

What conversations have you had with your son about respecting boundaries in relationships?

How can you reinforce the importance of mutual respect and honour?

How can we teach our sons to manage their disappointment and shame at being rejected in love or in friendship?

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*True masculinity is not
a shallow checklist
of toughness or
dominance, but one
that is strong enough
to be gentle and brave
enough to lead
with kindness.*

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Other resources

Articles:

1. 5 ways to build a strong family while balancing work and studies
2. The preschool parenting playbook
3. Should I allow my child privacy on devices?
4. 10 strategies to help our children navigate a BANI world
5. Is the Internet parenting my child?
6. Bullying – is punishment the way to go?

Podcasts:

1. When my child has difficulty regulating emotions
2. How do I support my child who is getting bullied
3. Positive discipline: Why is it useful and how do I apply it?
4. Raising digitally-savvy kids: Thinking critically and developing resilience
5. How to talk with C.A.R.E so our kids feel heard
6. Giving and serving together as a family

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