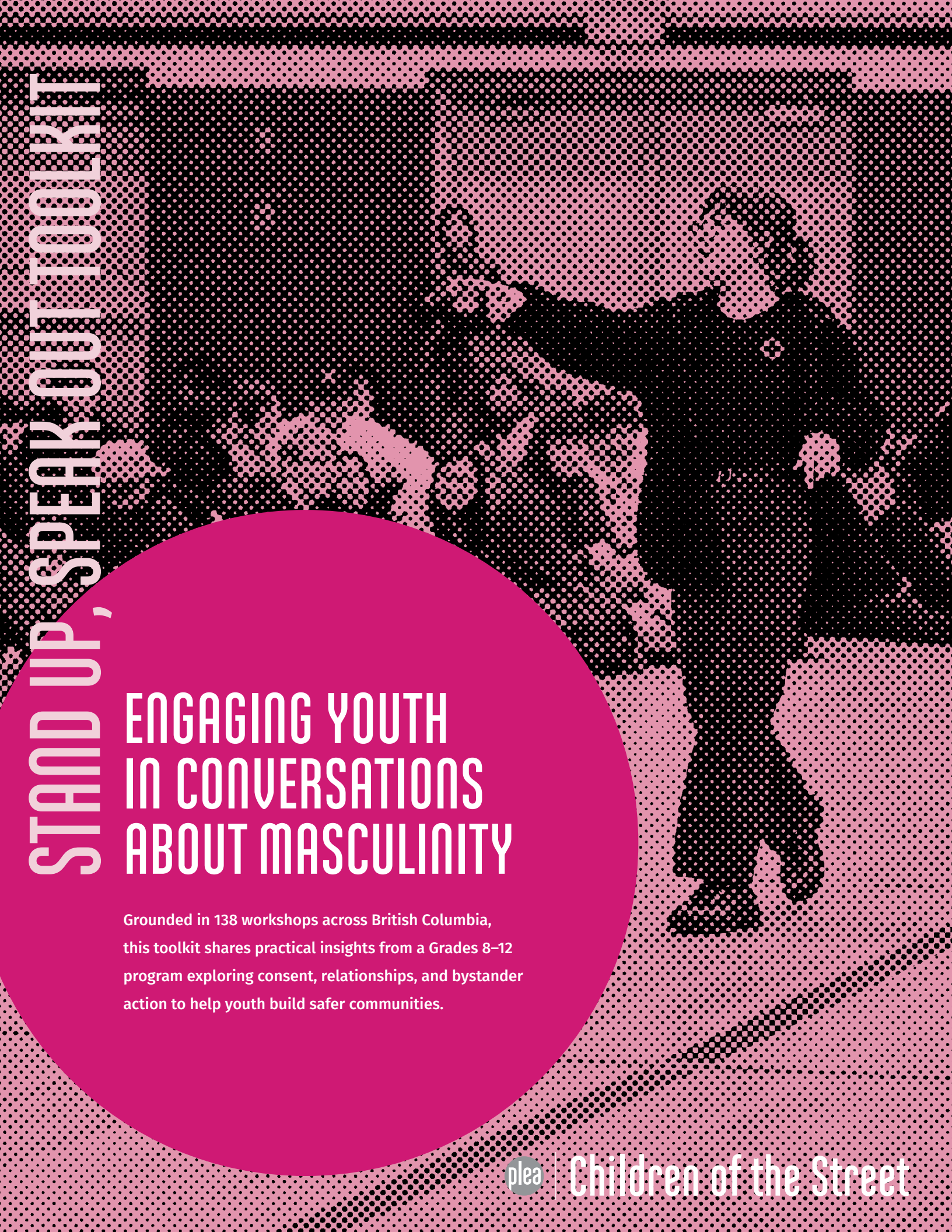
STAND UP, SPEAK OUT TOOLKIT



# ENGAGING YOUTH IN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT MASCULINITY

Grounded in 138 workshops across British Columbia, this toolkit shares practical insights from a Grades 8–12 program exploring consent, relationships, and bystander action to help youth build safer communities.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Thank you to all the community partners whose insight, knowledge, and experience helped to develop the content and inform the direction of this project.**

**Children of the Street acknowledges, with gratitude, that we live, work and learn on the unceded and ancestral shared territories of the Coast Salish Peoples.**

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# INTRODUCTION

Across communities, there is growing recognition that conversations about masculinity are essential to preventing sexual violence and promoting healthy relationships. This resource is based on the development and delivery of a youth-focused workshop, called *Stand Up, Speak Out*, designed for students in Grades 8–12 of all genders. The workshop explored masculinity, consent, relationships, and active bystander intervention. It aimed to equip youth with the knowledge and skills to challenge harmful behaviours and contribute to a safer community.

Between January 2024 to March 2026, the project delivered **138 workshops** in **30 communities** across British Columbia, reaching **5,938 youth**. The learnings shared in this document draw on direct program delivery, participant feedback, and ongoing program refinement over the course of the project.



# PROJECT OVERVIEW

The project was designed to support youth in understanding and reflecting on masculinity can influence attitudes, behaviours, and social norms, particularly in relation to sexual violence, consent, and gender dynamics. It emphasized prevention through education, skill-building, and open dialogue.

## Key Activities

- Developed an interactive, one-hour workshop for Grades 8–12 students of all genders.
- Incorporated slides, videos, interactive activities, and open discussions.
- Established and consulted with an advisory committee to guide initial workshop development.
- Hired and trained two facilitators on child sexual exploitation and trauma-informed practice.
- Conducted pilot workshops and revised content based on participant feedback.
- Created feedback forms to measure impact and allow for continuous improvement.
- Developed supporting materials, including posters, handouts, resource cards, and promotional items.
- Delivered workshops across diverse communities, including rural, remote, Indigenous, LGBTQ2S+, youth in care, and sport teams.
- Provided referral and support services to 20–30 youth* who disclosed experiences of sexual violence.

## Guiding Principles

The *Stand Up, Speak Out* workshop was grounded in the following principles:

- **Trauma-informed practice:** Prioritized safety, choice, and empowerment.
- **Youth-centered engagement**: Valued lived experience and youth voice.
- **Gender-inclusive approach:** Engaged participants of all genders.
- **Strengths-based framing:** Focused on skill-building rather than blame.
- **Cultural humility:** Respected diverse identities, backgrounds, and community contexts.

* *We don't track which workshop a disclosure comes from. This is an estimate based on who received the disclosure and when it was made.*

# CORE CURRICULUM



## Understanding Masculinity

Masculinity is not a fixed or singular concept. Rather, it is socially constructed and influenced by cultural, social, and environmental factors. Young people are often exposed to rigid expectations about how boys and men "should" feel, behave, and think. These expectations can create pressure to conform to narrow definitions of masculinity and what it means to be a "real man."

The concepts of the **Man Box** was used in the workshop to describe these pressures, which includes:

- Not expressing emotions.
- Asserting dominance.
- Being tough and aggressive.
- Avoiding vulnerability.
- Maintaining control in relationships.

While not inherently harmful, these norms can contribute to unhealthy behaviors. Promoting healthy masculinity involves expanding definitions to include empathy, emotional awareness, accountability, and respect for others.

***Using the Man Box encouraged discussions between students, their peers, and presenters about how the pressures of "being a real man" affect everyone, while also examining how these rigid concepts influence boys' perceptions of women and girls and their interactions with them.***



## Healthy and Unhealthy Masculinity

Helping youth distinguish between healthy and unhealthy behaviours was a key component of the workshop.

### *Unhealthy Masculinity*

- Controlling or possessive behaviours.
- Self-reliance and avoidance of seeking help.
- Emotional suppression.
- Pressure to conform.
- Disrespect towards others.

### *Healthy Masculinity*

- Emotional expression and self-awareness.
- Respect for boundaries and consent.
- Accountability for actions.
- Supportive peer relationships.
- Acceptance of diverse identities.

Real-life scenarios were used to help participants identify these behaviours and reflect on their own experiences, often drawing connections to peer dynamics at school or online.

A resource page on **Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships** was created and made available on our website.

## Masculinity, Relationships, and Consent

Understanding consent and healthy relationships is central to preventing sexual violence. Discussions included the age of consent and power dynamics within relationships.

The workshop emphasized that consent must be **Freely given, Reversible, Informed, Enthusiastic, and Specific.** The acronym **F.R.I.E.S** was used as an accessible way to remember these principles.

A resource page on **Consent** was also created and shared through our website.



## Sexual Violence and Prevention

Sexual violence was addressed as a critical issue deeply connected to gender norms and societal attitudes. The workshop framed sexual violence as preventable and emphasized the role of everyone in creating safer spaces.

Discussions included:

- The definition of sexual violence.
- Common misconceptions.
- The impact of violence on survivors.
- The role of bystanders in prevention.

Through discussions about rape culture, students developed a broader understanding of how normalized sexual violence was within society. They became better able to recognize microaggressions that subtly reinforce or excuse harm. By identifying how these behaviours were normalized, students were empowered to learn ways to stand up to them.



## Bystander Intervention and Skill-Building

A core component of the program focused on practical tools. The program drew on established bystander intervention approaches, such as the **5D's** and the **C.A.R.E.** model to ensure strategies were clear, memorable, and easy for young people to apply.

Participants learned how to:

- Recognize harmful or risky situations.
- Assess safety before intervening.
- Use different intervention strategies.
- Support peers in meaningful ways.

Videos were used alongside the C.A.R.E. Model to encourage conversations about different tactics participants could use to intervene in potentially dangerous situations while prioritizing their own safety.

# FACILITATING CONVERSATIONS ON MASCULINITY & SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Delivering content on sensitive topics required intention, awareness, and adaptability, particularly when working with young people who brought diverse experiences into the room. The following were our main considerations and actions taken:

## Creating a Supportive Environment

- Provided teachers and caregivers with pre-workshop resources.
- Set clear group agreements (respect, confidentiality, no judgment).
- Acknowledged that the topic may be personal or triggering and allowed participants to step out if needed.

## Using an Empathy-First Approach

- Avoided shaming or blaming language.
- Focused on systems and social pressures rather than individuals.
- Encouraged curiosity and reflection.

## Being Mindful of Language

Language choices were intentionally adjusted to reduce defensiveness and increase engagement.

- Instead of using the term “toxic masculinity” facilitators used: “Pressures on boys and men” or “The Man Box.”

## Encouraging Participation

- Asked open-ended questions.
- Used scenarios instead of lectures.
- Validated participant contributions.

## Responding to Disclosures

Facilitators were prepared for youth to share personal experiences.
Best practices included:

- Listening without interrupting.
- Thanking participants for sharing.
- Connecting them to appropriate supports.
- Reminding them that facilitators have a duty to report.
- Following established procedures and policies to ensure proper and timely follow up.





# EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

Evaluation data showed the effectiveness of the workshop in increasing knowledge, shifting attitudes, and building confidence among participants.

## Key Outcomes

- **86%** of participants reported a better understanding of sexual violence as a men’s issue.
- **76%** felt more empowered to speak out against sexual harassment and sexual assault.
- **82%** reported a better understanding of consent.
- **88%** learned ways to stand up to disrespectful behavior.
- **88%** agreed that other students would benefit from this workshop.

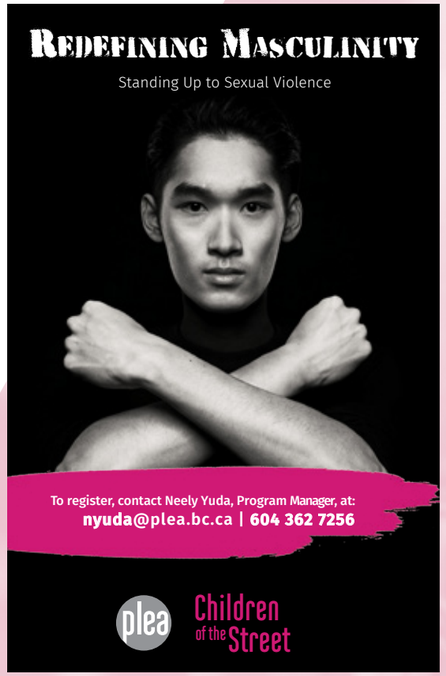
## Participant Quotes

- “I liked that I was able to learn how I could help someone in real-life situations.”
- “I learned about bystander intervention and ways to stand up to disrespectful behaviour.”
- “I learned that you don’t need all the ‘requirements’ to be a man. It’s about what’s on the inside.”
- “I learned about social norms and how to change the perspectives of people around me. I liked how interactive the presentation was.”
- “I learned how men’s mental health affects not only men themselves, but the people around them.”
- “I really loved the presentation.”
- “It felt like a safe space.”

**“It felt like a safe space.”**

## SUCCESSES (PROMISING PRACTICES)

- Low-barrier, free workshops offered in person or virtually.
- Co-facilitation by male-presenting and female-presenting facilitators encouraged open dialogue and modeled healthy collaboration.
- An empathetic approach fostered a space where students felt comfortable sharing lived experiences.
- Mixed-gender groups encouraged thoughtful discussions about gender norms and stereotypes.
- Youth-friendly language empowered participants to engage with the topic.
- Scenario-based activities provided hands-on practice.
- Presentations were tailored to unique community needs.
- Content was regularly revised based on participant feedback.
- WAGE funding enabled access to remote communities.




## LEARNINGS

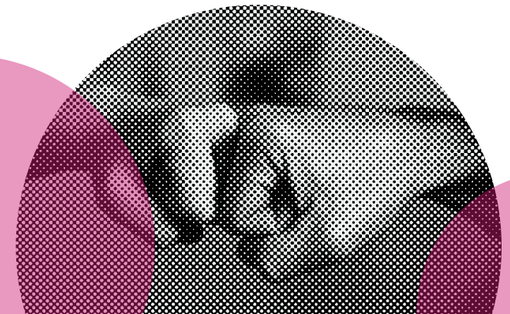
- Smaller groups (fewer than 100 participants) facilitated better conversations.
- Renaming the presentation from *Redefining Masculinity* to *Stand Up, Speak Out* created a more inclusive tone.
- Avoiding terms like “toxic masculinity” reduced defensiveness.
- Focusing on practical, real-life scenarios was more effective than theory-heavy discussions.
- Building informal connections with students and staff helped mitigate the limitations of one-time presentations.
- Despite offering honorariums, creating a advisory committee posed challenges. Although people were interested in the topic and eager to participate, coordinating schedules and securing the contributions of experts proved difficult.

## CONCLUSION

Addressing masculinity has been identified as a critical component in preventing sexual violence and promoting healthy relationships. This project demonstrated that youth were eager to engage in these conversations when they were approached in respectful, relevant, and practical ways, particularly when discussions were interactive and grounded in real-life scenarios.

Adults play a vital role in shaping these conversations. By creating spaces for reflection, skill-building, and dialogue, adults can support young people to challenge harmful norms and build safer communities.

The success of this initiative highlights the importance of continued investment in prevention-based education and the value of adapting approaches to meet the diverse needs of youth across communities.



# Children of the Street

Providing awareness, education and support to keep
children, youth and families safe from sexual exploitation

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