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The impact of the ‘manosphere’ is increasingly being felt in families, in our community, and across the country.

Earlier this month, Stuff reported that Director-General of Security Andrew Hampton had raised concerns about New Zealand’s young men when speaking to Parliament’s intelligence and security committee. He said his agency was increasingly monitoring teenage boys and young men due to fears of extremism and the potential for acts of violence. He was quoted as saying, “At a very pragmatic level I am keen for parents to take a stronger interest in what their kids are looking at online”.

Locally, in the wake of the Netflix drama series ‘Adolescence’, Kāhu Youth Trustee Denise Quinlan suggested inviting Dr Kris Taylor from the University of Auckland, to Wānaka to share his research on masculinity, gender norms and online cultures.

At the same time, we were hearing from parents, teachers and youth workers who wanted to better understand the manosphere and its potential influence on young people. In response, PATH Wānaka Ara Ki Wānaka partnered with the college and Kāhu Youth Trust to host a presentation by Dr Taylor in Wānaka last week.

Dr Taylor helped us understand the world views young men encounter online and how influencers such as Andrew Tate, Jordan Peterson, Sneako, and the creators of Fresh & Fit can shape thinking. While some operate on mainstream platforms, others promote unregulated spaces where conspiracy theories circulate and followers are encouraged to pay for advice on relationships, success and money. YouTube remains one of the most widely used platforms for this content.

These messages often tap into common adolescent anxieties — appearance, relationships, success and belonging. The challenge is that manosphere content can mix positive advice about discipline or mental health with harmful messages about gender and power, making it difficult for young people to separate healthy ideas from unhealthy ones.

So how should we respond?

Dr Taylor’s advice echoes that of Andrew Hampton: take an interest in your child’s digital world. Lead with curiosity rather than criticism.

By remaining curious rather than dismissive, parents and caregivers keep communication open and make it more likely that young people will seek guidance when they encounter something confusing or troubling.

Young people are still forming their views and often want to have these conversations with trusted adults. Our job is to create space for those discussions, listen carefully, and help them test ideas rather than shutting them down. At a time when the online world can feel loud and confusing, the steady presence of engaged parents, teachers and community members matters more than ever. If we stay curious, supportive and hopeful, we can help our young people navigate these influences with confidence and know they are not doing it alone.