

ISSUE 43

Mount Kelly's Safeguarding Bulletin aims to provide parents and carers with the information needed to have informed and age-appropriate conversations with their children about potential risks and issues in the wider world and online. This week's bulletin provides information about the terms 'sigma', 'mewing' and 'looksmaxxing'.

According to Google trends, the 'sigma male' search term first appeared in early 2021 and quickly gained popularity over the next two years. In 2023, [#sigma](#) had over 46 billion views on TikTok. But what exactly does 'sigma' mean, and what do parents and carers need to know about it?

What does 'sigma' mean?

A 'sigma male' is a pseudoscientific, male archetype; like 'alpha' and 'beta'. According to Know Your Meme, a website dedicated to documenting internet phenomena, *the sigma male is successful and popular, but also silent and rebellious, a type of man who likes to 'play by his own rules'. In most analyses, they are considered 'equal' to Alphas on the hierarchy but live outside of the hierarchy by choice.*

Role models for the sigma include John Wick, Han Solo, and Patrick Bateman, the fictional investment banker-slash-psycho killer from the novel 'American Psycho'.

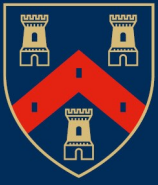
The term 'sigma' has its roots in the 'manosphere', a network of online spaces that promote extreme views on masculinity and men's rights, often accompanied by misogynistic ideas. Use of the term 'sigma' has quickly become ubiquitous amongst Generations Alpha and Z, and despite its origins in the manosphere, for many children and young people nowadays 'sigma' and related memes are just jokes and mean nothing more than that something is deemed to be 'cool'.



What are 'sigma memes'?

The sigma has become a basis for countless memes found across Reddit, X, and other platforms. Originally, sigma memes were attempts to spread the word of this new male archetype, telling the world that the person behind the post was *definitely* the cool, mysterious type – at least on social media.

The sigma meme then evolved to become ironic and satirical, taking a swipe at anyone who identifies as a sigma male and at the manosphere in general. Sigma memes often include an image of Patrick Bateman or Gus Fring from 'Breaking Bad' with an overconfident quote the characters never actually said – usually to explain how much richer/better/sexier the poster is than the person reading it.



What is 'mewing' and why are boys doing it?

Mewing is a technique that claims to reshape your jawline by consistently pressing your tongue against the roof of your mouth. Developed by orthodontist John Mew in the 1970s, it's based on the idea that modern diets and breathing habits have weakened our jaws.

While proponents believe mewing promotes jaw growth, straightens teeth, and improves facial aesthetics, there's no scientific evidence to support these claims. Despite this, mewing has exploded in popularity on social media, particularly TikTok.

What is 'looksmaxxing'?

Mewing is just one example of 'looksmaxxing', a broader term for extreme measures young men take to enhance their appearance, often driven by a desire to improve their success on dating apps. This pursuit of the 'perfect' look can have concerning consequences. Some teens resort to cosmetic surgery, steroid use, or even dangerous practices like jaw fracturing in the misguided belief that it will make them more attractive.

Should parents be concerned?

Online trends like sigma, mewing, and looksmaxxing are popular among young people, and although most of the content is created as a joke, it can, on occasion, be a gateway to the darker aspects of the manosphere, or toward extreme and dangerous measures to improve physical appearances.

What can parents do?

Parents have an important role in helping their child navigate the online world safely and confidently, steering clear of potentially dangerous influences.



- **Have open conversations** about what your child encounters online and how it makes them feel.
- **Encourage them to use social media more positively.** Healthy social media use at an appropriate age can give teens valuable opportunities for socialisation, learning, and support.
- **Monitor their online activity.** Parental control tools allow you to keep an eye on the content your child is viewing and searching for, as well as block or limit access to apps and websites.
- **Help boost their confidence and body image.** Social media's lofty ideals often pressure boys into the world of looksmaxxing and the manosphere. Read child psychologist Dr Beurkens' article [Ways to boost your child's self-esteem](#) for some useful strategies for nurturing confidence.
- **Promote positive role models.** The manosphere is home to several controversial influencers with big followings and toxic opinions. But, it's not all bad. There are plenty of positive role models online that inspire young people to be better – without the dangerous ideologies.