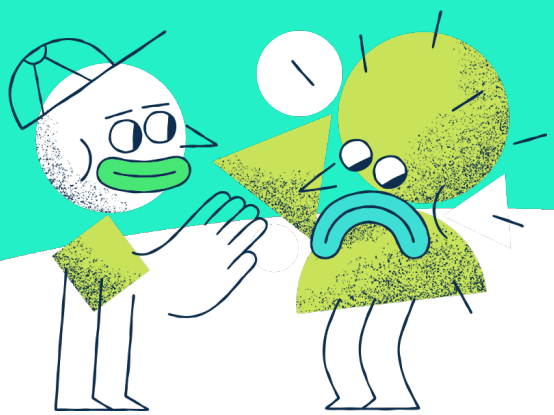
A MODERN TOOLKIT FOR MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH



THE QUIET CRISIS

Three times as many men as women die by suicide. It's one of the starkest gender gaps in health, and it's still widening.

While we've made strides in mental health awareness, men remain far less likely to seek help. We know that only 36% of referrals to NHS talking therapies are for men, even though the need is every bit as great.

Today's men are navigating rapidly evolving expectations of masculinity, intense social comparison online, and increasing disconnection in daily life.

This isn't just a men's issue, it's an everybody issue. When we improve men's mental health, we all benefit.

75% of men who die by suicide were never known to mental health services

PRESSURES ON MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH TODAY

From fading traditional roles to outdated ideas about masculinity, a number of forces are converging to leave men more exposed than ever. Understanding these pressures is the first step to challenging them.

Provider role feels outdated. Economic shifts have eroded men's traditional purpose, with little to replace it.

Friendships are disappearing. Men report feeling lonelier than any generation before them.

Fatherhood is undervalued. Cultural attitudes and a lack of paid paternity leave hold men back from hands-on parenting.

Boys fall behind at school. Working-class boys lag furthest behind girls from similar backgrounds.

Emotions stay bottled up. "Big boys don't cry" leaves little room to express real feelings.

Adversity hits harder. Boys are more affected by poverty and absent parents than girls.

SPOTTING THE SIGNS OF POOR MENTAL HEALTH IN MEN

Spotting the signs of poor mental health can be especially difficult, particularly in a society that still upholds a lot of stigma around men struggling.

People may also go to great lengths to hide a mental illness so they may not outwardly show any symptoms. We are aiming to spot these symptoms early and ask the right questions so we can connect people with the right support.

Although men and women can experience the same symptoms when it comes to poor mental health, some symptoms are more common in men than women. **Biology plays a role here;** hormone profiles influence risk-taking, stress reactivity, and emotional processing, but these are averages, not absolutes.

It's important to understand there's no single experience of being a man. Race, sexuality, class, age, disability and other factors all shape what it means to navigate masculinity, and each one of us is unique.

PHYSICAL SIGNS TO WATCH OUT FOR

- Frequent headaches or migraines
- Suffering from frequent minor illnesses
- Constant tiredness / lack of energy
- Skin conditions
- Extreme body temperature
- Insomnia / disturbed sleep
- Sudden weight gain/loss
- Lack of care over appearance
- Being run down
- Digestive problems / IBS
- Muscle tension
- Shortness of breath

BEHAVIOURAL SIGNS TO WATCH OUT FOR

- Changes in mood
- Increased emotions i.e. irritability, aggression or tearfulness
- Difficulty concentrating/forgetfulness
- Withdrawal from social interactions
- A more dishevelled or tired appearance
- Sudden anger or a short fuse
- Increased risk-taking
- Increased conflict with others
- Addictive behaviour / increased consumption of drugs or alcohol
- Loss of humour

SIGNS AT WORK

- Lateness (for someone who is usually punctual)
- Underperforming; increased errors or missing deadlines
- Increased sickness absence
- Being 'off camera' for virtual meetings
- Not contributing in team meetings
- Overworking or working excessive hours

If something feels 'off' to you about a friend or colleague's behaviour or demeanour, never doubt yourself, **there is absolutely no harm in checking in** and asking (in an appropriate setting and in an appropriate way) if they're doing okay.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MAN TODAY?

Traditional masculinity is often associated with words like alpha, strong and protector all of which stand in direct opposition to vulnerability. But vulnerability is exactly what men need to access in order to ask for help. Before a man will open up about his mental health, he needs to believe two things: that being vulnerable is okay, and that it will be met with understanding rather than judgment.

It has been found that those men who more closely identify with 'traditional' forms of masculinity are more likely to suffer from poor mental health (Sloan, Conner and Gough, 2015; Wong et al., 2017; Iwamoto et al., 2018).

How can we make it easier for men to be vulnerable and to reach out when they're struggling? We can start by being more perceptive when we notice a change in our friends and colleagues and by initiating a conversation that sends a signal to say we are open to talking about the subject and ready to support.

RYAN'S TOP TIPS FOR INITIATING A CONVERSATION

Ryan Ridgway is an experienced mental health trainer, a passionate advocate for men's mental health and the host of Mental Reset, a podcast and platform that focuses on honest mental health conversations. Here are his tips for initiating a conversation with a man who you think may be struggling with their mental health:

1

Keep it casual

Find an environment that feels casual but private. A drink, a coffee, a walk around the block, could all be environments that work.

2

Ask more than once

Asking 'how are you' is a start, but some of us need to be asked more than once. Try asking an open question like, 'how are you really doing at the moment?' or 'you don't seem yourself, how are you feeling today?'

3

Ask follow up questions

You can ask questions such as:

- How long have you felt like this?
- Do you have enough support?
- What can I do to support?

4

Really listen

If someone opens up, ensure they have your full attention and try to avoid interrupting. Remember your role is not to fix the problem or find solutions, but to be a supportive ear.

5

Signposting & further support

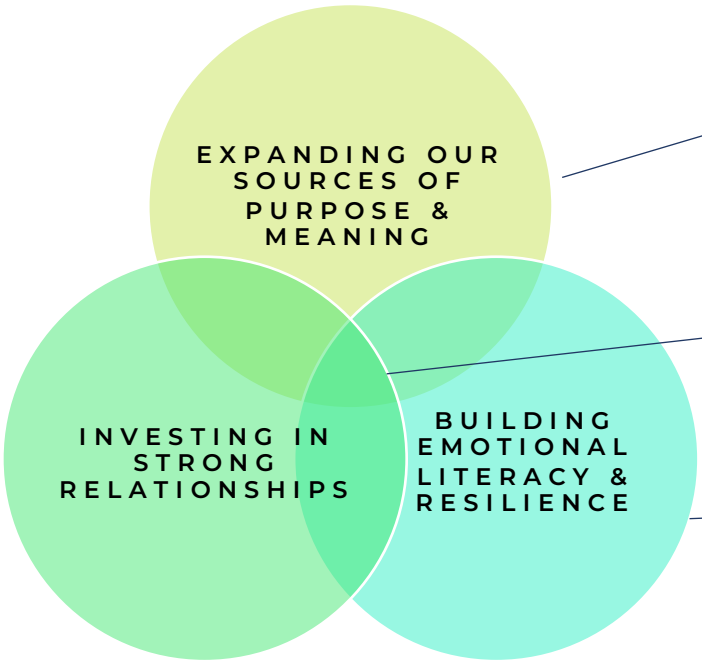
If appropriate, you can make the gentle suggestion that that person sees a doctor or professional therapist. You can also make them aware of organisations that can help.

Lastly don't forget to continue to check in with them and see how they're doing. You can offer both practical support (e.g. help with workload) and emotional support (here to chat when you need).

If you are worried someone is feeling suicidal, Mind offer some guidance on how to support this person.

RETHINKING MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH TODAY

We've covered why men's mental health is under pressure, and how to spot the signs. How do we move forward and make a real shift in the landscape of men's mental health?



When one role (often "provider") carries all of a man's sense of identity, losing or struggling in that role can feel like losing himself; **building purpose** across several areas of life makes that identity far more resilient.

Loneliness is one of the strongest predictors of poor mental and physical health, so deliberately **building close, trusted connections** is one of the most protective things a man can do.

Being able to identify, name, and talk about what we're feeling is what allows us to **process difficult emotions** in healthy ways, rather than letting them build up.

EXPANDING OUR SOURCES OF PURPOSE & MEANING

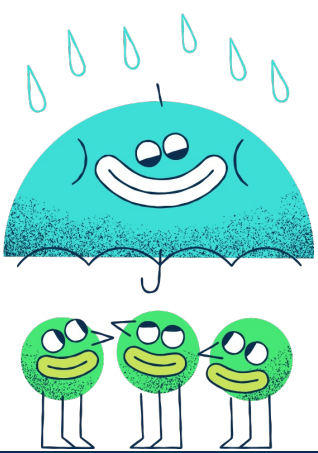
Research suggests that, on average, women tend to have higher *self-complexity* than men, meaning they derive their sense of identity and purpose from a broader range of roles, relationships, and sources.

For example, a woman might see herself as a mother, friend, professional, community member, or carer - all contributing to her sense of self. This diversity can act as a psychological buffer: when one area of life becomes challenging, others can still offer meaning and resilience.

In contrast, men are often socialised to invest more heavily in fewer identity roles, such as their career, which can leave them more vulnerable when those areas are under strain.

So it's important for men to develop more sources of purpose and meaning in their lives. These are some common areas to derive meaning from:

1. Running a household
2. Fulfilling work
3. Raising children
4. Strong friendships
5. Volunteering
6. Hobbies & creative projects
7. Caring for family members
8. Community involvement



INVESTING IN STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Humans are inherently social creatures. Our brains and bodies have evolved to thrive in connection with others; it's not just a nice-to-have, it's a fundamental part of our survival instinct. Throughout our lives meaningful social contact shapes our emotional wellbeing, our physical health, and even how we respond to stress. Here are some tips for building and maintaining better relationships:

Quality over quantity - Fewer, deeper relationships do more for your wellbeing than a wide circle of small talk, so invest your time in the people who matter most.

Build real human contact into your day - Face-to-face connection releases oxytocin and lowers stress in a way text and calls can't, so prioritise in-person time whenever you can.

Practice active listening - Really hearing someone, rather than waiting for your turn to speak, builds trust and makes people feel valued.

Show up consistently - Reliability is what turns connections into real bonds, so follow through on the small commitments, not just the big ones.

"The purpose of loneliness is like the purpose of hunger. Hunger takes care of your physical body. Loneliness takes care of your social body, which you also need to survive and prosper. We're a social species."

— John T. Cacioppo, social neuroscientist

BUILDING EMOTIONAL LITERACY & RESILIENCE

Identifying our emotions
Research also suggests that men who can't speak openly about their emotions may be less able to recognise symptoms of mental health problems in themselves, and less likely to reach out for support. Just being able to **label our emotions** helps us to process them in a healthy way. We can practice this in everyday life. Are we really just stressed? Or are we disappointed, frustrated or sad?

Talking about emotions
The next step is being able to articulate them – this is known as emotional literacy. Are you able to **express how you are feeling** to others? Are you able to seek support from others when you need it? This can feel deeply uncomfortable if it's not something we're used to doing, but we know how beneficial this is to our mental health.

Finding healthy outlets
Lastly we want to try and find **healthy coping strategies** for our emotions. If we usually try to numb emotions (using alcohol or other substances) we'll struggle to process them and this can manifest itself in poor mental health down the line. You can seek out therapy, start journaling or just talk to a friend.

Remember there is no shame in reaching out for help when you need it. Together we can all make a difference in improving men's mental health. If you, or someone close to you, needs support, please reach out. You can find a list of crisis resources **here.**
If your workplace is looking for wellbeing support, don't hesitate to **get in touch,** we'd love to help!