

MEN'S EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

WHEN STRENGTH BECOMES SILENCE

Rethinking what it means to be strong

REFLECTION 1 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



When Strength Becomes Silence

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"The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change." — Carl Rogers

There are few qualities more admired than quiet reliability. Across generations, many men have come to understand themselves through the roles they fulfil rather than the emotions they experience. To be dependable, to work hard, to provide, to protect and to persevere have often been regarded as marks of good character. These are values that deserve respect. They speak of commitment, loyalty and a willingness to shoulder responsibility for others.

Yet the qualities we admire can sometimes shape us in unexpected ways.

When strength becomes closely associated with endurance, it can quietly leave little space for vulnerability. Emotional pain is not necessarily denied, but it may be set aside, postponed or carried in private. Difficult days become something to get through rather than something to speak about. Weariness becomes familiar. The words "I'm fine" begin to function less as a description and more as a habit.

None of this happens overnight. Ideas about masculinity are rarely taught in formal lessons. They emerge gradually through families, friendships, workplaces and the wider culture. A boy notices which emotions are welcomed and which are dismissed. He learns, often without anyone intending to teach him, that confidence is admired, uncertainty is uncomfortable and tears are more easily accepted in some people than in others. By adulthood these messages can become woven into identity so completely that they feel like common sense rather than learned expectations.

This is not true for every man, nor is it unique to men. Human experience is always more varied than any stereotype allows. Nevertheless, many men describe a tension between wanting to remain dependable and longing for somewhere they can set down the emotional weight they carry. They are not asking to abandon responsibility. They are asking, sometimes silently, whether responsibility has to mean carrying everything alone.

Carl Rogers wrote that acceptance is the beginning of change. It is a deceptively simple idea. When people believe they will be judged for their struggles, they often hide them. When they believe they will be met with understanding, they are more likely to acknowledge what has been difficult. Emotional wellbeing is not strengthened through denial. It grows through honest recognition of our inner lives and through relationships in which we can be known without fear of losing respect.

Perhaps this invites a different understanding of strength. Instead of seeing it as the ability to endure indefinitely, we might understand it as the capacity to remain connected—to our values, to the people we love and to our own emotional experience—even when life becomes demanding. In that sense, speaking honestly is not the opposite of strength. It may be one of its most authentic expressions.

There will be readers for whom these reflections feel unfamiliar, and others for whom they describe something long recognised but rarely named. Neither response is more valid than the other. The purpose of reflection is not to persuade, but to create space for curiosity. Sometimes that curiosity begins with a simple question: How have my own beliefs about strength shaped the way I live?

For those who recognise something of themselves in these pages, it may be reassuring to know that conversations about emotional wellbeing no longer have to take place in isolation. ANDYSMANCLUB was established on the belief that "It's Okay To Talk." Their free peer-support groups, held across the UK every Monday evening, provide a welcoming space where men can meet others, listen, speak if they wish and

discover that many of the thoughts they believed they carried alone are shared by others. There is no expectation to explain everything. Sometimes the first step is simply turning up.

Perhaps the measure of strength has never been how much a person can carry in silence. Perhaps it has always been found in the courage to remain fully human, allowing ourselves to be seen not only in our competence, but also in our uncertainty, our weariness and our hope.

Further Reflection

Some essays offer answers. This one simply leaves a question.

If strength were no longer measured by silence, what might become possible?

If You'd Like to Continue the Conversation

ANDYSMANCLUB is a UK charity offering free peer-support groups for men aged 18 and over. Groups meet every Monday evening in communities across the UK and provide a confidential, non-judgemental environment where men can share as much or as little as they feel comfortable with. Many attend for the first time simply to listen. More information, including local groups, can be found on their website.