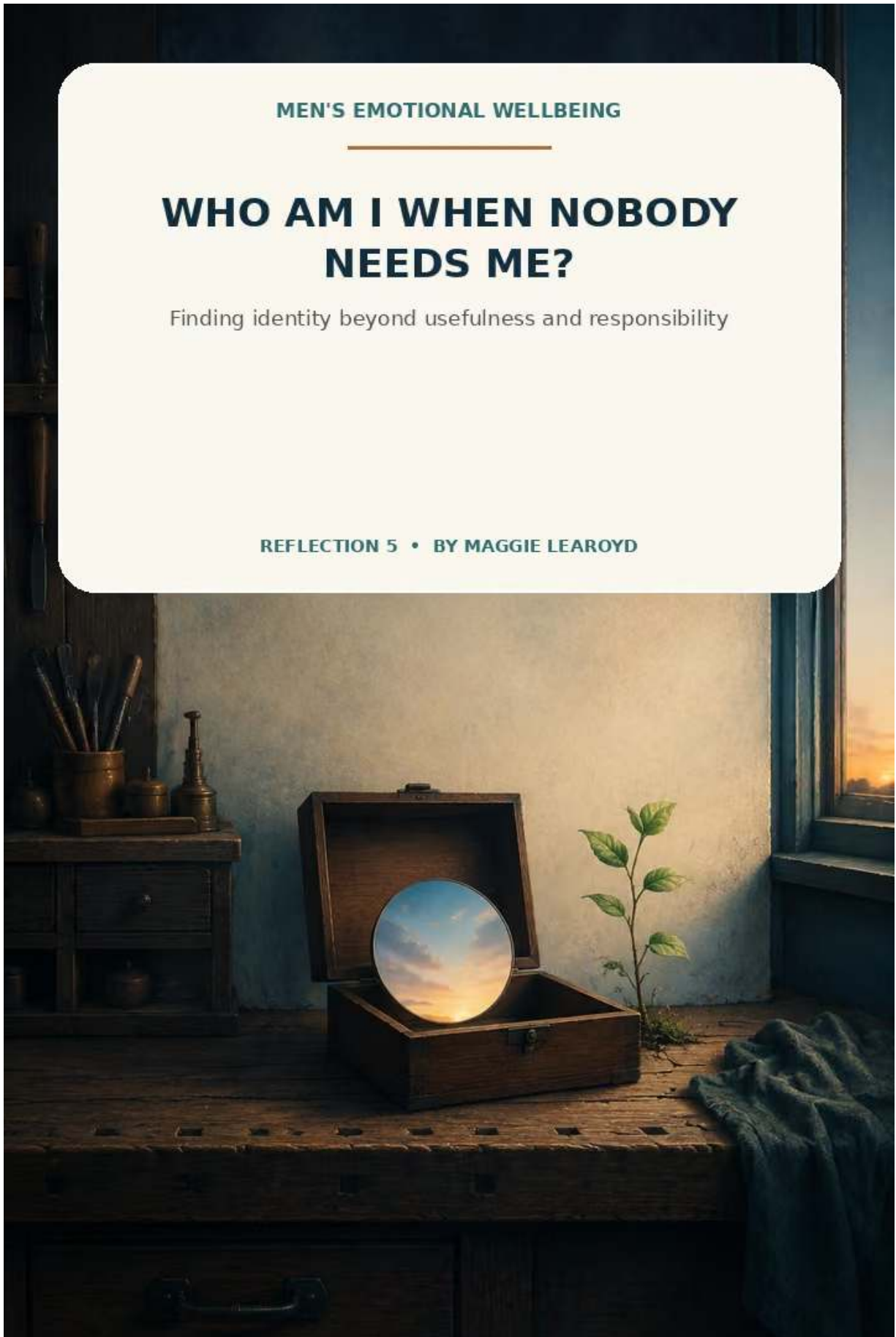


MEN'S EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

WHO AM I WHEN NOBODY NEEDS ME?

Finding identity beyond usefulness and responsibility

REFLECTION 5 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



Who Am I When Nobody Needs Me?

Finding identity beyond usefulness and responsibility

"The privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are." — Carl Jung

Identity is one of the quieter questions we carry through life. It is rarely urgent when we are young because much of adulthood is shaped by movement. We build careers, form relationships, raise families, solve problems and respond to the demands that naturally accompany each stage of life. There is purpose in this rhythm. Responsibilities arrive one after another, leaving little opportunity to pause and consider who we are beyond the roles we perform.

For many men, identity becomes closely connected to usefulness.

To be needed can feel reassuring. It offers direction and purpose. Being the person others rely upon often becomes part of how self-worth is understood. The colleague who always steps forward. The father who fixes what is broken. The partner who remains dependable during uncertainty. The son who quietly supports ageing parents. These are roles that deserve respect, yet they can also become so central that they begin to eclipse the individual beneath them.

Life, however, is never static.

Children become independent. Careers change. Retirement arrives. Relationships end or evolve. Health alters what is possible. Parents who once depended upon us are no longer here. Sometimes these transitions happen gradually; sometimes they arrive without warning. In those moments the question is no longer simply, "What do I do?" It becomes something deeper.

Who am I now?

There is no simple answer because identity is never built upon one role alone. Yet when much of life has been organised around meeting the needs of others, the absence of those roles can feel unexpectedly unsettling. It is not unusual to experience a sense of uncertainty, even when the changes themselves are positive. This is not a sign that something has gone wrong. It is often part of the process of rediscovering ourselves.

Carl Jung suggested that much of adulthood involves becoming more fully ourselves rather than merely fulfilling the expectations placed upon us. His writing reminds us that identity is not something completed in early life. It continues to develop through every transition, every relationship and every challenge we encounter. There is freedom in recognising that we remain capable of growth long after we imagine our lives have settled.

Perhaps emotional wellbeing depends, in part, upon allowing our identity to extend beyond productivity and responsibility. Interests that have been set aside can be rediscovered. Friendships can deepen. Creativity, learning, volunteering and community can become meaningful not because they prove our worth, but because they express who we are.

For some people, these transitions are easier when explored alongside others. NHS Talking Therapies provides access to evidence-based psychological support for people experiencing difficulties such as anxiety, low mood, stress or significant life changes. Therapy is not simply about managing distress. It can also provide a thoughtful space in which to explore identity, purpose and the changes that naturally occur throughout adult life.

Perhaps the question is not whether our roles will change. They almost certainly will.

The more enduring question is whether we can continue to recognise our own value when they do.

To become who we are is not to abandon responsibility. It is to discover that our worth has always been greater than the roles we have been asked to fulfil.

Further Reflection

Life asks us to play many roles, but no single role can ever contain the whole of who we are.

As responsibilities change, perhaps there is an opportunity to ask not only what comes next, but who we are becoming.

If You'd Like to Continue the Conversation

If changes in your life, work, relationships or sense of purpose have begun to affect your emotional wellbeing, NHS Talking Therapies offers free, confidential psychological support across England. Many services accept self-referrals, allowing people to seek support without first seeing their GP. Therapy can provide space to reflect on life's transitions, explore identity and develop ways of responding to change with greater understanding and self-compassion.