

BREAKING THE SILENCE: MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

REDEFINING STRENGTH

Making room for courage, honesty and connection

RESOURCE 3 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



Redefining Strength

Making room for courage, honesty and connection

"Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen." — Brené Brown

For generations, strength has often been described in physical terms.

It has been associated with endurance, self-reliance and the ability to keep going regardless of what life demands. Many men have grown up believing that being strong means remaining calm under pressure, providing for others and carrying responsibility without complaint. These qualities have value.

Determination, resilience and reliability are characteristics that deserve respect.

The difficulty begins when strength is understood as never showing vulnerability.

When emotional expression becomes confused with weakness, many men find themselves carrying grief, anxiety, fear or sadness in silence. They continue to meet expectations, fulfil responsibilities and support the people around them, while quietly believing that their own emotional needs should remain hidden.

Over time, this can become exhausting.

Strength was never meant to mean carrying every burden alone.

Real strength is far more balanced than many of us have been taught to believe.

It is the father who comforts his child while also allowing his child to see that adults experience emotions too.

It is the partner who says, "I'm finding this difficult," rather than pretending everything is fine.

It is the colleague who asks for support before stress becomes overwhelming.

It is the friend who checks in on someone else because they know what it feels like to struggle alone.

These moments require courage.

Not because emotions are dangerous, but because honesty asks us to step beyond the protective roles we sometimes create for ourselves.

Many men become experts at wearing emotional armour.

They learn to solve problems quickly, remain busy, focus on work or distract themselves whenever difficult emotions begin to surface. These strategies often develop for understandable reasons. At different times in life they may even have been necessary. Yet armour designed to protect us can also make it harder for others to know us.

If nobody sees when we are struggling, nobody knows when we need support.

Strength is not measured by how successfully we hide our emotions.

It is measured by how we respond to them.

Responding well does not mean being overwhelmed by every feeling. It means recognising emotions as important sources of information rather than signs of failure. Anxiety may tell us something feels uncertain. Sadness may reflect loss. Anger can sometimes signal that a boundary has been crossed. Ignoring these emotions rarely makes them disappear. Understanding them often helps us make wiser decisions.

Another important part of strength is knowing our limits.

There are seasons in life when responsibilities increase. Work becomes demanding. Family members need support. Financial pressures grow. Health concerns arise. During these times it can feel tempting to believe that asking for help would somehow mean we have failed.

The opposite is often true.

Recognising when we need support demonstrates self-awareness rather than weakness.

It shows that we value our wellbeing enough to protect it before reaching breaking point.

Strength also includes kindness.

Not only towards others, but towards ourselves.

Many men speak to themselves in ways they would never speak to a close friend. They criticise themselves for struggling, compare themselves with unrealistic expectations or believe they should simply "try harder." Self-compassion is not about lowering standards or avoiding responsibility. It is about recognising that every human being experiences periods of challenge and that we deserve the same understanding we so readily offer other people.

As conversations around men's mental health continue to evolve, our understanding of strength is changing too.

Increasingly, strength is being recognised not as emotional silence but as emotional maturity.

The ability to communicate honestly.

To listen with empathy.

To apologise when necessary.

To seek support when appropriate.

To remain dependable while also accepting that nobody can carry every responsibility forever.

Perhaps the strongest men are not those who never struggle.

Perhaps they are the ones who understand that being human includes moments of uncertainty, vulnerability and growth.

Because strength is not the absence of emotion.

It is the confidence to experience emotion without allowing shame to define it.

Take a Moment to Reflect

You may find these questions helpful as you reflect on your own understanding of strength:

What did the word "strong" mean when you were growing up?

Has your understanding of strength changed over time?

Do you find it easier to support others than to ask for support yourself?

What would a healthier definition of strength look like in your own life?

There are no perfect answers. Reflection simply creates space for new ways of thinking.

If You'd Like Further Support

If this article has encouraged you to think differently about strength and emotional wellbeing, the following organisations may be helpful.

Movember

Supporting men's mental health through awareness, education and practical resources that encourage earlier conversations and help-seeking.

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)

Offering confidential support and practical advice for anyone experiencing emotional distress or struggling with life's challenges.

ANDYSMANCLUB

Providing peer-support groups where men can talk openly, listen to others and discover that asking for support is a sign of courage, not weakness.

Samaritans

Available day and night for anyone who needs someone to listen without judgement.

NHS Talking Therapies

Professional psychological support for people experiencing anxiety, depression, stress and other emotional difficulties.

A Closing Reflection

Strength has never been about pretending that nothing hurts.

It has never been about carrying every burden in silence.

True strength is found in honesty.

In kindness.

In resilience that includes rest.

In courage that includes vulnerability.

And in recognising that the strongest foundations are not built by standing alone, but by knowing when to stand alongside others—and when to allow them to stand alongside us.