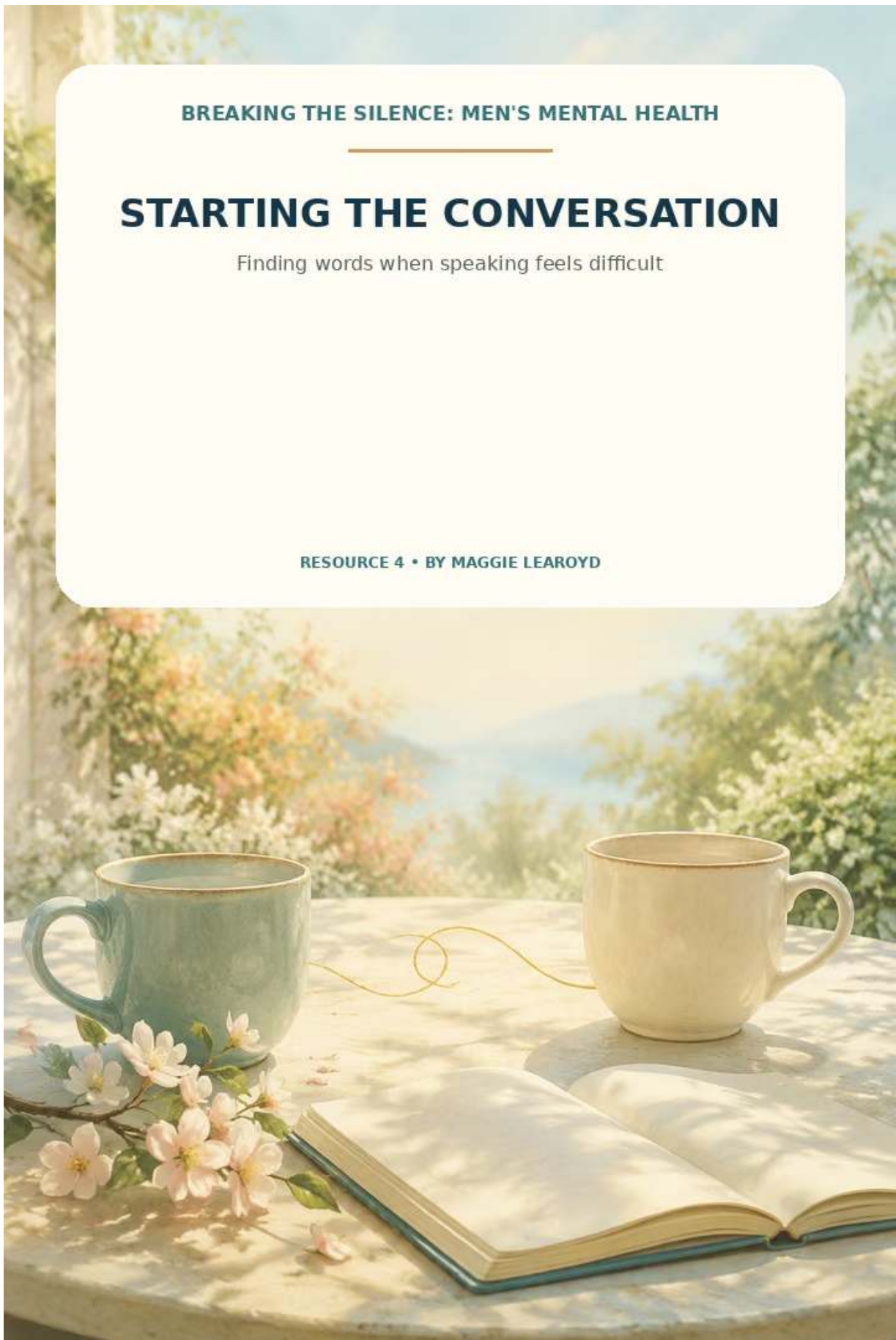


BREAKING THE SILENCE: MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Finding words when speaking feels difficult

RESOURCE 4 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



Starting the Conversation

Finding words when speaking feels difficult

"When we listen with curiosity rather than judgement, we create space for healing."

For many men, the hardest part of talking about mental health is not the conversation itself.

It is starting it.

The words can feel difficult to find. Thoughts become tangled. There may be uncertainty about how another person will respond or concern about saying too much, not saying enough or becoming emotional. Some men worry they will be judged. Others fear becoming a burden or changing how people see them.

These concerns are understandable.

Opening up asks us to move beyond familiar ways of coping.

If silence has been part of life for many years, beginning to speak honestly about our emotional wellbeing can feel unfamiliar, even uncomfortable. Like any new skill, it often takes time, patience and practice.

The encouraging news is that meaningful conversations rarely begin with perfect words.

They begin with honesty.

Many people imagine they need to explain everything that has happened before asking for support. In reality, one simple sentence is often enough to begin.

"I've been struggling recently."

"Things have felt harder than usual."

"Can we talk for a few minutes?"

"I don't need you to fix anything. I just need someone to listen."

These are not dramatic statements.

They are invitations.

Invitations for someone we trust to understand a little more about what life has been like.

Choosing who to speak to is equally important.

Not every conversation needs to happen with the first person we meet. Emotional safety matters. We are more likely to feel supported when we speak with someone who listens without rushing to offer solutions, dismiss our feelings or compare our experiences with their own.

Sometimes that person is a partner.

Sometimes it is a close friend.

Sometimes it is a sibling, colleague or neighbour.

Sometimes it is a GP, counsellor or therapist.

The right person is often someone who makes us feel heard rather than hurried.

Listening is one of the greatest gifts we can offer another person.

When someone trusts us enough to share that they are struggling, our role is not to have all the answers.

Most people are not looking for immediate solutions.

They are looking for understanding.

Simple responses such as,

"I'm really glad you told me."

"That sounds incredibly difficult."

"I'm here with you."

can be far more powerful than trying to fix every problem.

Supportive conversations are built on presence, not perfection.

There may also be times when the first conversation does not go as hoped.

Perhaps the other person feels unsure what to say.

Perhaps they minimise the situation because they are uncomfortable discussing emotions.

Perhaps they simply do not understand.

While disappointing, this does not mean reaching out was a mistake.

Sometimes it means we need to choose a different person or a different form of support.

No single individual can meet every emotional need we have.

That is why support networks matter.

One trusted friend.

A supportive partner.

A community group.

A peer-support meeting.

A therapist.

A GP.

Each person offers something different, and together they create a network that helps us carry life's challenges more effectively.

It is also worth remembering that conversations do not only happen when life reaches crisis point.

Checking in regularly with friends, asking genuine questions and creating space for everyday conversations about emotional wellbeing helps normalise these discussions long before they become urgent.

Perhaps one of the greatest ways we can reduce stigma is by making conversations about mental health as ordinary as conversations about physical health.

We ask people how their back is healing after an injury.

We ask whether they are recovering from an illness.

Perhaps we can also begin asking,

"How have you really been lately?"

and be willing to stay long enough to hear the answer.

Every culture changes through conversations.

Families change through conversations.

Friendships deepen through conversations.

Lives are sometimes changed by a single conversation that happens at exactly the right moment.

The conversation does not need to be perfect.

It simply needs to begin.

Take a Moment to Reflect

As you finish reading, you may wish to consider:

Who is the first person you would speak to if life became overwhelming?

Is there someone you have been meaning to check in with?

What makes you feel listened to when you are talking about something difficult?

Could one conversation this week make a positive difference to you or someone else?

Even small conversations have the potential to strengthen trust and remind people that they are not alone.

If You'd Like Further Support

If starting a conversation about your mental health feels difficult, these organisations offer opportunities to connect, talk and receive support.

ANDYSMANCLUB

Weekly peer-support groups where men can speak openly in a safe, welcoming environment and discover that many others have experienced similar challenges.

MenWalkTalk

Bringing men together through organised walks that encourage natural conversation, friendship and improved mental wellbeing.

Samaritans

Available 24 hours a day for anyone who needs someone to listen without judgement. You do not have to be in crisis to make contact.

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)

Providing confidential support, practical advice and information for anyone struggling with life or their mental health.

NHS Talking Therapies

Professional psychological support for anxiety, depression, stress and other common mental health difficulties.

A Closing Reflection

No conversation has ever changed because someone found the perfect words.

Conversations change because someone chose honesty over silence.

They begin with courage.

They grow through listening.

They deepen through trust.

And sometimes, the few simple words,

"I'm not okay."

become the beginning of hope, healing and a reminder that no one should ever have to face life's struggles alone.