

BREAKING THE SILENCE: MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

HOW WE CAN SUPPORT MEN BETTER

Creating conditions in which asking for help feels safe

RESOURCE 5 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



How We Can Support Men Better

Creating conditions in which asking for help feels safe

"People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." — Often attributed to Theodore Roosevelt

When we talk about men's mental health, the conversation often focuses on one question:

"Why don't men ask for help?"

It is an important question, but perhaps it is not the only one we should be asking.

We might also ask:

How can we create environments where asking for help feels safe?

Mental health is never the responsibility of one person alone.

While every individual has an important role in looking after their own wellbeing, families, friendships, workplaces and communities all influence whether someone feels able to speak openly or whether they continue carrying their struggles in silence.

Support begins long before someone says, "I'm struggling."

It begins with the way we respond to everyday conversations.

When people feel listened to without interruption, respected without judgement and accepted without conditions, trust gradually develops. These ordinary interactions become the foundation upon which more difficult conversations can eventually take place.

Many men do not expect others to solve their problems.

More often, they hope they will not be criticised for having them.

One of the greatest gifts we can offer another person is emotional safety.

Emotional safety is the experience of knowing that our thoughts and feelings will be treated with respect, even when they are difficult to hear. It allows people to express uncertainty without fear of ridicule, sadness without embarrassment and vulnerability without feeling that they have somehow failed.

Creating this kind of environment does not require specialist training.

It begins with simple human qualities.

Patience.

Curiosity.

Kindness.

Reliability.

Listening.

Sometimes the most supportive response is also the simplest.

"Thank you for telling me."

"That sounds really difficult."

"How can I support you?"

These responses communicate acceptance rather than judgement. They reassure the other person that they do not need to defend or justify how they feel.

Listening is often more valuable than advice.

Many of us instinctively search for solutions when someone shares a problem. While practical advice can sometimes be helpful, emotional support is different. Before people are ready to think about solutions, they often need to feel understood.

Listening without rushing to fix communicates something powerful:

"You don't have to face this alone."

Support also means noticing changes.

A friend who becomes unusually quiet.

A colleague who seems increasingly withdrawn.

A partner who no longer enjoys activities they once loved.

A father who appears exhausted despite insisting everything is fine.

These changes do not always indicate a mental health difficulty, but they may be invitations to gently ask how someone has been.

A simple,

"I've noticed you don't seem yourself lately. How are you?"

can sometimes become the conversation that changes everything.

Workplaces also have an important role.

For many men, work is a significant part of identity. It provides purpose, routine and financial security, but it can also become a place where emotional struggles remain hidden. Organisations that encourage open conversations about wellbeing, provide supportive leadership and reduce stigma around seeking help create healthier environments for everyone, not just men.

Families shape emotional wellbeing too.

Children learn about emotions not only through what they are told but through what they observe. When fathers, grandfathers, uncles and other role models demonstrate that it is acceptable to talk about feelings, apologise, ask for help and show compassion, they quietly challenge stereotypes that may have existed for generations.

Supporting someone else does not mean carrying every responsibility for their wellbeing.

Healthy support also recognises limits.

Sometimes the most caring thing we can do is encourage someone to seek professional help while continuing to stand alongside them. Walking beside someone is different from trying to carry their journey for them.

Every conversation that replaces judgement with understanding helps to reduce stigma.

Every act of kindness makes emotional honesty feel a little safer.

Every person who chooses to listen rather than dismiss contributes to changing the culture surrounding men's mental health.

Perhaps that is how lasting change begins.

Not through one campaign.

Not through one awareness day.

But through ordinary people choosing to create relationships where honesty is welcomed and vulnerability is met with compassion.

Take a Moment to Reflect

You may wish to consider:

How do people usually respond when someone shares something difficult with you?

Do the people in your life know that they can talk to you without fear of judgement?

Is there someone you have noticed seems quieter or more withdrawn recently?

What small change could you make that would help others feel emotionally safer around you?

Sometimes creating change begins with changing the way we listen.

If You'd Like Further Support

If you would like to learn more about supporting men's mental health or find services for yourself or someone you care about, the following organisations may help.

Men's Sheds

Creating welcoming community spaces where friendships, shared activities and mutual support help reduce loneliness and improve wellbeing.

Mind

Providing information about mental health, practical guidance and local support services for individuals, families and communities.

Hub of Hope

Helping people locate local mental health services, charities, peer-support groups and crisis support across the UK.

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)

Offering confidential support, resources and advice for anyone affected by mental health difficulties.

Samaritans

Providing a safe, confidential space for anyone who needs someone to listen without judgement.

A Closing Reflection

Supporting someone's mental health is rarely about finding the perfect advice.

It is about creating the kind of relationship where honesty feels safe.

Where silence no longer feels like the only option.

Where kindness speaks louder than judgement.

Every time we choose to listen with compassion, we help build a culture where men no longer have to hide behind the expectation of coping alone.

And perhaps that is one of the greatest ways we can all help break the silence.