



**Supporting the men
in your life**

Helping the men in your life

How do you help a man in your life who you suspect or know is struggling with their mental health?

Mental health struggles affect not only the person struggling but also the people closest to them. They can impact a person's work, education, and community. This only increases self-blame and low self-esteem. Mental health struggles in men are so stigmatised that many men are worried about:

- People not listening
- Their struggles not being acknowledged
- Burdening other people with personal issues
- Being judged
- Facing repercussions
- Being seen as weak
- Being seen as unstable and dangerous.

Research has found that some men are willing to open up about their mental health struggles but are waiting for the right time, condition, and person to talk to. This is not to say that they will not unconsciously give you hints such as:

- I have been so tired/unmotivated lately.
- I am so stressed.
- I am struggling to think straight.
- Withdrawing from their social lives.
- Drinking more than usual.
- Losing interest in hobbies.

Making it easier for a man to open up

Men are likely to be more open about their mental health if they are taking part in a shared activity that is not linked to mental health. These activities may also bring purpose into a man's life. Some call this 'health by stealth,' and activities may include:

- Fishing
- Hunting
- Golfing
- DIY
- Bowling
- Exploring heritage sites
- Walking in nature
- Taking a long drive through countryside
- Repairing a car

It is important that the person struggling is comfortable and can take part in the activity otherwise this may cause unease and even lower self-esteem and guilt for not enjoying themselves.

Being acknowledged

Being acknowledged refers to being accepted and recognised for who you are and what you are experiencing. It can look like people validating your emotions, experiences, and feelings; appreciating your efforts; having your identity affirmed by others; others showing empathy and sympathy towards the challenges you face; and feeling that others care are supportive of your emotions.

Health by stealth

Men are more open to engaging in mental health conversations if they are already absorbed in an activity. Men have found that it is less stressful as it takes other participants' focus away from the individual speaking and provides a common interest to help develop a support network.



Tips for talking to men about their mental health

- ✓ Have a positive attitude about men and boys.
- ✓ Start by understanding the obstacles with which they are currently dealing.
- ✓ Respect the traits that form their male identity.
- ✓ Consider doing a shared activity together.
- ✓ Make sure the setting is right (you do not want to be in a crowded bar where you cannot hear each other, or people can eavesdrop!)
- ✓ Show complete support and acceptance of their situation.
- ✓ Ensure that any action plans have clear objectives. (You may not need an action plan. Some people just need someone to listen to them.)

DO NOT say things like...

- ✗ Oh, it could be worse.
- ✗ Chin up, you will get over it soon.
- ✗ Everyone goes through that, it is fine.
- ✗ That's it? (Sometimes it may seem like a small issue but for some people, it is their biggest struggle.)

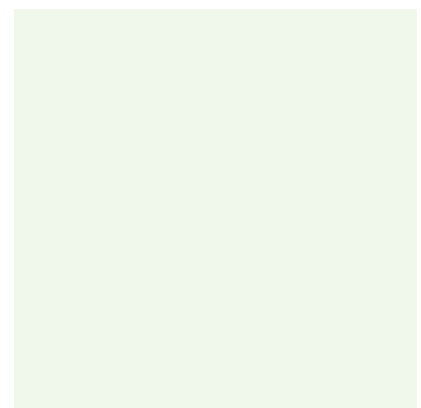
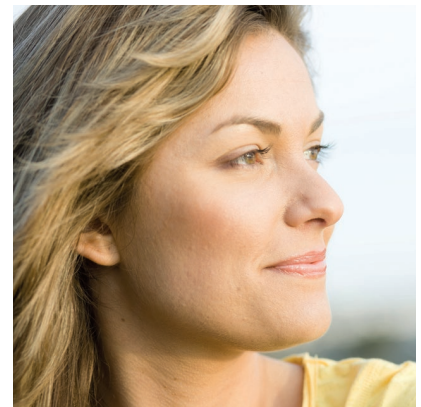
DO say things like...

- ✓ I am struggling to understand, could you explain it a bit more for me?
- ✓ Thank you for being so open with me. It can't have been easy.
- ✓ Is there anything else on your mind?
- ✓ I appreciate you being so open with me, is there anything I can do to help?

Remember that talking to people who are struggling can be tough and draining. Remember to take care of yourself! Do not over-extend yourself! Only do what is in your capabilities and capacity.

ACTIVITY: Bilateral tapping

Bilateral tapping refers to the process of alternately stimulating the left and right sides of your brain. This type of movement has been found to have a calming effect on the brain and body as it stimulates the body's rest response, helps you think clearly, allows the brain to communicate between each side better and increases levels of serotonin and dopamine which are important for mental wellbeing. Bilateral activities include running, walking, tapping your left then right knee, listening to music that alternates from one ear to the next, drumming, tapping your feet in alternating movements, eye movements while following a tennis match and tapping. A popular bilateral example is the 'Butterfly Hug' which is when you place your left hand on your right shoulder and right hand on your left shoulder and tap each shoulder in alternate movements. You can do this for as long as you need.



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