

Well-Being Tip

June 2025



Men's Mental Health: Cultivating a Community Where It's Okay to Feel

Nearly one in ten men experience anxiety or depression, but less than half of men receive mental health treatment to address these conditions ([Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2025](#)). Within a predominantly heteronormative and patriarchal culture, boys and men are often socialized to be stoic and hyper-independent. Due to stigma, the prevailing (and harmful) societal belief in the United States is that it is not “manly” for men to express their emotions or ask for support from others. Boys and men are often told, whether covertly or overtly, to “toughen up” and are thereby tacitly discouraged from seeking mental health support. Men often don't receive the support and resources they need to recover from mental illness. Transgender men may face mental health challenges, too, as they often experience stressors during childhood that can make it more likely for them to develop mental health conditions like anxiety and depression later in life. The collective stress of stigmatization and discrimination faced by transgender people can also lead to increased rates of anxiety and depression ([Fernández-Rouco et al., 2019](#)).

A lack of social connection among younger men in the United States can make matters worse. A recent Gallup poll revealed that some 25% of young men reported feeling lonely in the previous day ([Vigers, 2025](#)). When men don't talk with supportive others about their mental and emotional distress, depression worsens ([Wagner & Reifegerste, 2024](#)). Taken together, this can have tragic consequences. Men die by suicide at a rate that is four times higher than women ([Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2025](#)). We can all take steps to create emotionally safe spaces within our relationships and peer groups for people of all gender identities to emote and ask for support. Here are some actions to consider.

- Check in with the men in your life. You might consider taking some time to check in with your friends, father figures, partners, or brothers. Choose a time when you can offer your

full attention and have the time to really listen to what they have to say. Ask them how they are *really* doing.

- Practice empathetic listening. If someone trusts you enough to speak openly about their inner world, do your best to practice empathetic listening. Empathetic listening goes beyond active listening. Rather than simply listening to understand, when we listen empathetically, we try to truly understand the emotion and experience underneath the speaker's words. Turning to face the speaker, putting away distractions like cellphones or laptops, and making eye contact with them all help to communicate genuine interest in understanding their experience.
- Validate, validate, validate. All people, regardless of their gender identity, experience a range of emotions, including joy, sadness, anger, worry, and pride. Men may need an extra reminder that it is okay for them to feel all their emotions. Validating the emotional experience of others, by letting them know it's okay to access and express their emotions, can help to challenge harmful stigma that has encouraged men and boys to bury their pain.
- Remember that depression might look different in men. Most people are familiar with persistent sadness, loss of interest, and changes in sleep and appetite as some of the common symptoms of depression. Research has shown, however, that symptoms of depression may present a little differently among men. For example, sometimes men experiencing depression may engage in reckless behavior or risky substance use, be more irritable or angry than usual, experience physical pain, or have a lower than usual sex drive ([Rice et al., 2013](#)).
- Destigmatize seeking mental health support. Remind others that seeking mental health care is a sign of strength, not weakness. Most folks would not think twice about seeking medical attention for a bone fracture. Seeking mental health care during a stressful period or to address mental health conditions is no different.
- Speak out against harmful gender stereotypes. If you hear someone shaming a man, either in front of him or behind his back, for expressing his emotions, you might consider intervening. You could provide some education about how shaming men for expressing emotions only adds to stigma and worsens mental health outcomes for men. Everyone can do their part to foster a community where it is safe for people of all genders to open up and share about their emotions and experiences.

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