



Mental Health Challenges for Men

by Dr. Shane Kuhlman
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ALTON - Growing up, you hear the expressions, “rub some dirt on it” or “suck it up” when trying to express emotions through pain, sadness, or fear. For some, these expressions have been passed down from previous generations as a way to encourage men to be strong and resilient. From an early age, men are often forced to repress and express emotions very differently than women, and this can lead to emotional challenges.



Men feel the same emotions as women but have traditionally expressed only the emotions more accepted by society. Men often experience their feelings more restrictedly, which might make it challenging to unlearn and create more emotional awareness as they grow older. “Men are not often exposed to mental health or discussing emotions. So having conversations where there was no exposure before might be fearful or unfamiliar territory,” says Dr. Shane Kuhlman, Chief Psychology Officer at Centerstone’s Research Institute.

While it might feel uncomfortable for men to be mindful of their emotions, there are also significant benefits to expressing them. “Giving men the space to share feelings and care for their mental health allows for deeper connections in other areas of their life,” says Kuhlman. Mental health and emotional expression might positively impact men through better relationships with loved ones, lessen symptoms of mental distress, and increased performance at work or home.

Awareness surrounding men’s mental health is improving, but there is still a stigma in the conversation. Emotions are not tied to any gender, so it may be harmful to assume weakness in men who are more emotionally aware or expressive than others. Men are often met with many barriers when seeking mental health treatment, which only continues to echo the expressions taught at that early age. For example, some men have difficulty finding male therapists, and it is often reported that men of color especially experience challenges locating therapists who are men of color. Recognizing these challenges, there are still some ways you can help reduce the stigma for mental health treatment and encourage emotional expression:

- **Acknowledgment.** Notice the changes in loved ones and acknowledge them. Men may not know how or when they are affecting themselves or others. Try to identify problems and offer a solution through mental health care. Reassure men that vulnerability may be challenging but that you will be there for them.
- **Communication.** “Men are less likely to report symptoms of depression, but it doesn’t mean they are not experiencing it,” says Kuhlman. Allow men to have an open line of communication to express their feelings and thoughts. Check in every day and see how they feel. Try to be validating of men’s feelings and experiences through this process.
- **Treatment.** Sometimes it isn’t easy for men to speak with loved ones. One of the best tools to help men gain greater recognition of their emotional depth or find new language to match to their emotions is seeking mental health treatment. Not every treatment method or therapist will be a good fit, so encourage men to keep trying until they are comfortable.

Remember, emotions are part of life, and feeling and expressing them is not a weakness but a strength.

If you or someone you know is struggling with their mental health, Centerstone can help. Call [**1-877-HOPE123**](tel:1-877-HOPE123) (1-877-467-3123) for more information about our [**counseling services**](#).