

**MEN'S
HEALTH
WEEK**

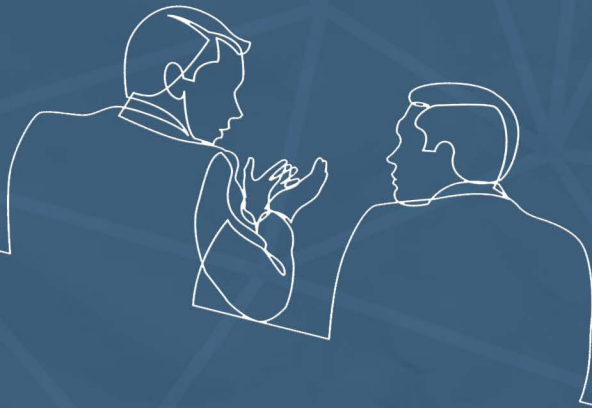
MEN'S HEALTH FORUM 

**Creating safe spaces
for men to talk**

MEN'S HEALTH WEEK

14-20 JUNE 2021

(pack)



@sanctus



What is Men's Health Week?

On the 14th-20th June the world celebrates Men's Health Week. This is a time to bring awareness to health issues that affect men disproportionately and focuses on getting men to become aware of problems they may have or could develop, and gain the courage to do something about it.


This year the theme is understandably focused on COVID-19.

Everybody's mental health has been challenged by the lockdowns and insecurities of the last year, and we've still got some ways to go. As we emerge from what we hope will be the worst of the pandemic, questions, concerns and anxieties remain.

In this pack, we'll be looking specifically at ways that men can create safe spaces to talk about mental health; both their own and that of others.

Understanding Toxic Masculinity

MEN'S
HEALTH
WEEK

MEN'S HEALTH FORUM 

Whether it's through a desire to look strong, the pressure to 'man up' or simply not being able to find the words to describe how they feel, many men are still choosing to remain silent and not seek help.

Traditionally men find it hard to be open. But is this narrative true or is it what we've just built?

Where do we start?

Know when to end the banter, the egging each other on, the fake bravado. We all like a bit of that from time to time, but it's also easy to spot when someone's not in the mood or they want to be serious. If you notice something is different about your friend, or your jokes aren't going down so well, ask how they are doing – and Ask Twice!

- Agnieszka, Sanctus Head Coach



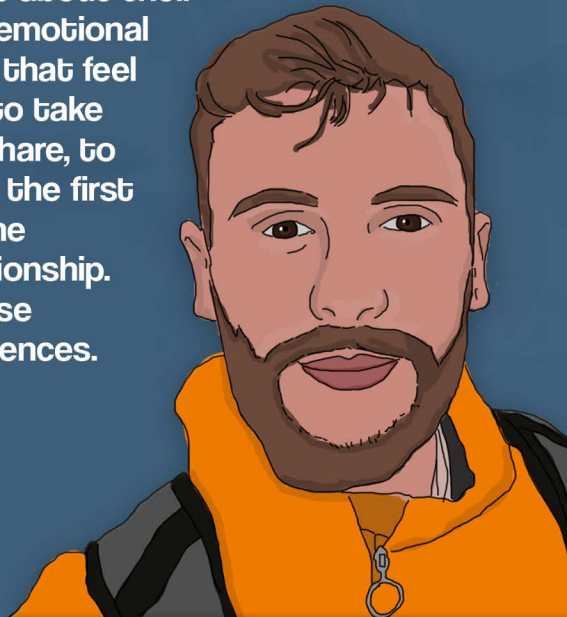
But men can talk?

I become frustrated at the story we seem to tell ourselves that men can't talk about how they feel or that men are unable to. I find the narrative a little defeatist, "men just can't talk about how they feel"

I also know it's untrue because I, a man, have grown to feel much more able to openly talk about how I feel, and before that, become aware of how I feel in the first place. I, too, have been in many spaces where I have seen men learn or become aware of their feelings, and find the words to express how they feel. I've seen it countless times so the narrative that men "just can't" I know to be false.

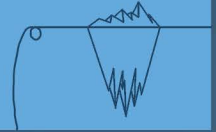
In order for more men to begin opening up about their mental health and begin to explore their emotional side, we must create more environments that feel safe enough for men to be able to start to take those risks, to learn a new language, to share, to say something. That something could be the first time someone says "I feel stressed" or the first time someone reflects on their relationship. We have to create enough safety for those awkward, clunky, misplaced, jumbled sentences.

- James, Sanctus Co-Founder



What to look for in men who are struggling

Men often channel their pain as anger and aggression -
Google 'Anger Iceberg'.



**Excessive use of alcohol or using drugs
to self-soothe and self-medicate.**

Reckless behaviour or taking unnecessary risks, a fake
kind of bravado can cover up insecurity and feeling out of place.



Poor sleep, changes in appetite, unkempt look.

Changes in daily habits or routines that negatively impact
their social or work life that don't appear to raise concerns
of the individual in question.



What to look for in men who are struggling

Withdrawing from social activities, appearing numb or feeling flat and uninterested in activities that used to bring them enjoyment.



Complaining of physical symptoms without a clear cause.

Dropping comments about things appearing hopeless or pointless, expressing thoughts that the world would be better off without them.



Always being the soul of the party and never ever appearing to be struggling or having a concern. The pressure to be 'the happy one' can become a trap or a role difficult to get out of.

A major change in circumstances e.g. loss of job, breakdown of marriage, retirement, failed exams.




Why can't men talk about their mental health? Or why don't men talk about how they feel? I bristle a little when I get the question, because I become frustrated at the story we seem to tell ourselves that men can't talk about how they feel or that men are unable to. Men are no less able to feel their feelings, feel emotions or express how they feel than anyone else. I believe men have less safe spaces to do so. It's not men we need to "fix" it's the environment we create for men.

No matter who you are or how you identify, talking about mental health requires you to feel safe to do so. Men are not less able to talk about their mental health. Men don't feel safe too. That's my view.

- James Routledge



**MEN'S
HEALTH
WEEK**

MEN'S HEALTH FORUM 

How to talk to men about their mental health

Find the right space - opening up about mental health is no mean feat, especially when it's for the very first time. We recommend finding environments that are more relaxed.

Make sure you're the right person they need to talk to - it may be counterintuitive but trust and connection requires boundaries. Sharing is not always caring. Decide if you're the right person to help with what someone is coming to you about.

Notice 'toxic' masculinity - know when to end the banter, the egging each other on, the fake bravado. We all like a bit of that from time to time, but it's also easy to spot when someone's not in the mood or they want to be serious.

Ask twice - and a third, fourth or fifth time if you need to. If your intuition is telling you that someone you care about is struggling, don't give up just because they brush you off with 'I'm fine'.

Stop asking men about their 'feeeeeelings' and ask about the meaning - What does it mean to you to lose this contract? What did this do to you to have messed up this interview? Where does it leave you to lose your children?

How to talk to men about their mental health

Share your experience - lots of men brush off questions about their mental health because it's a difficult and uncomfortable subject that they're probably not used to talking about. So instead of probing someone with questions, try sharing an experience of your own that they might be able to relate to.

Accept you might not have all the answers - when talking to a male loved one about their challenges, there will almost certainly be things you don't understand or know how to address properly - and that's okay. Sometimes, one of the best things you can do for someone you care about is encourage them to seek professional help.

If your husband, partner or a friend is struggling with suicidal thoughts - don't panic and don't comfort straight away, hear him out, why they want to do it, how they want to do it, when they want to do it. Those who talk about doing it, are less likely to go through with it. Suicide is a taboo, it thrives on secrecy silence and judgement. Listen first, then seek professional help through a GP, Samaritans or another charity that helps with men's issues like CALM.

And finally, when men start talking, let them talk - there's a perception that men don't talk about their problems or feelings but the reality is that men will talk to those who listen to them. Let men vent about the crisis of meaning, wounded identity or about feeling like a coward without trying to make it better for them.

“When men start talking, let them talk! There’s a perception that men don’t talk about their problems or feelings but the reality is that men will talk to those who listen to them.

Well-wishing spouses or girlfriends can sometimes find it hard to see a man in struggle, it’s counter-cultural, the truth is we are sometimes dismayed or shocked by vulnerability in men.

Many of us rush to men’s defence e.g. ‘You’re not a failure!’ and stop the conversation in its tracks. Let men vent about the crisis of meaning, wounded identity or about feeling like a coward without trying to make it better for them.”

Agnieszka Walczuk
Sanctus Head Coach



Examples of safe spaces

Walking

Walking side-by-side can be a great way to talk. The formal, interview-style feeling of sitting across from someone at a table can be daunting and intimidating. By walking side-by-side, that feeling can be removed.

Gaming

Chatting to a friend over a microphone while playing a game can present a relaxed way to have a conversation. As it can be quite distracting, it's probably not best to have serious conversations here, but it can be a good place to start.

Over an activity

Similar to the above, doing an activity together in-person helps give you both something else to focus on while having a conversation. For example, maybe it's going to the gym or playing a sport together.

Journaling

If you don't feel ready to physically talk to someone, then starting to get your thoughts down on paper can help. Of course, this isn't a conversation with another human being, but it's often a stepping stone in becoming more aware of how you're feeling and articulating this to someone else.

Where to look for external support if you need it:

Sanctus Directory

Sanctus.

Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)

Calm

The Lions Barber Collective



Movember


MOVEMBER®

Samaritans

SAMARITANS

“Our country needs to turn our attention to **mental health**, I realised everyone is having a difficult time. People are at a low point and it’s going to get worse if we don’t address it.”

- Joe Wicks

Joe Wicks



**MEN'S
HEALTH
WEEK**

MEN'S HEALTH FORUM

@sanctus