

Why Guys Don't Ask for Help

IDENTIFYING & ADDRESSING COMMON BARRIERS

Introduction

Cicero wrote that "a man's chief quality is courage."



Introduction

For many American males today, they are reluctant to seek assistance to meet a wide range of their needs: whether they are physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, parental, educational, social, relational, ethical, or vocational. When we add cultural expectations about each of these, it results in a wide range of variations.

Introduction

- It is important to recognize that many groups and cultures throughout the US may or may not buy into the selected observations that will be presented here.
- Please decide how relevant this research is when applied to your family and community.

Introduction

- One major reason for this tendency is that most males are taught early that there is a “boy code” that they must live by. If they fail to do so, there are clear consequences.
- Boys learn the “boy code” in sandboxes, playgrounds, schoolrooms, scouts, camps, rest rooms, churches, synagogues, temples and hangouts from peers, coaches, the media, teachers, and just about everyone else.

Introduction

The Boy Code puts boys and men into a gender straitjacket that constrains not only them but everyone else, reducing us all as human beings, and eventually making us strangers to ourselves and to one another-or, at least, not as strongly connected to one another as we long to be.



Introduction

As they grow older, this code evolves into a “guy code” with which they must comply. They are often situation- and culture-specific: high school, college, trade school, military, blue or white collar work, friends, faith-based, sports, clubs, entertainment, peers, dating expectations, etc.

Exercise One

Take two minutes to think about five or six clear messages that you heard growing up about being a “big boy” a real man or “manning up” and how that might affect how a guy should ask for help, if at all.



Introduction

This session will offer an overview of some of the contributing factors that impact how males may or may not seek assistance and will propose specific strategies that providers working with men and fathers may pursue to address these concerns



Gender Differences

Females and males approach problems with similar goals but often with different considerations. For most women, sharing and discussing a problem presents an opportunity to strengthen the relationship with the person they are speaking with. Many women tend to be more concerned with how problems are solved than merely solving the problem. The process can strengthen or weaken a relationship.

Gender Differences

Males usually approach problems in a very different manner. Solving the problem presents an chance to demonstrate their competence, their strength of resolve, and their commitment to the relationship or the issue at hand. How the problem is solved is not nearly as important as solving it quickly and effectively. Men frequently will set aside their feelings to accomplish the task.

Gender Differences

Males tend to have a "fight or flight" response to stress situations while females seem to approach these situations with a "tend and befriend" strategy. The reason for these different reactions to stress is rooted in our hormones. The hormones adrenaline and cortisol are released during stress in everyone.

Gender Differences

However, estrogen tends to enhance cortisol resulting in calming feelings whereas testosterone, which men produce in high levels during stress, reduces the effects of cortisol.



Barriers Males Often Experience

- **Difficulty admitting that there is a problem**
- **Difficulty in identifying what the problem is. He has a “blind spot”**
- **Many men’s work schedules don’t allow time during the day to seek help**

Barriers Males Often Experience

Many men struggle with **alexithymia**, a term that refers to the difficulty associated with being able to label one’s emotions. As a result, men may have difficulty understanding and articulating what’s going on for them.

Exercise Two

Take a minute to complete the Feelings Vocabulary Quiz. We will then discuss the results.

Barriers Some Males Experience

Difficulty in asking for help

Reluctance to depend upon others



I don't need your help

Barriers Some Males Experience

- **Fear of intimacy and vulnerability**
- **Tendency to, or fear of, sexualizing female helpers**
- **Homophobic fears may block ability to open up to male helpers**

Barriers Some Males Experience

- **Men can feel "one down" about going to someone else who is better equipped to help solve their problem.**
- **Men can also fall too easily into the "willpower" trap, and ignore available help that could pose a danger to their health.**

Barriers Some Males Experience

- **Strong valuation of autonomy and personal independence**
- **Reluctance to accept and process more tender or "soft" emotions**
- **Seeking help typically involves qualities men are strongly socialized against**























Barriers Some Males Experience



Traditional social service agencies and non-profit programs have a long history of creating environments that are inviting for mothers and children, but not necessarily for men or fathers. So when males walk in, they may find themselves feeling reluctant to request services or hesitant to get involved.

Barriers Some Males Experience

- **Men may feel they have to be “stronger” than others, especially women**
- **Men may think they cannot demonstrate weakness in front of women or other men**

Video Clip

- **We will now watch a 3 minute video “Media Final: How to Be a Man.”**
- **We will then discuss your reactions to the portrayals.**

Barriers Some Males Experience

Many guys recognize and often resent the genuine scarcity of quality resources available to address men’s and fathers’ assets, their strengths, not just those that focus upon their deficits (federal, state or local).

Barriers Some Males Experience

Men are encouraged to be action-oriented; they are the “doers” often channeling their energy toward achieving success. Veering away from the script through paying attention to the inside world of their sensations, thoughts and feelings is very often discouraged

Barriers Some Males Experience

Some men don't ask because they don't want accountability. If you let someone in on the issues you're walking through, all of the sudden you've let someone “in” and they're going to ask how you're doing in that area. Men that are in this place hide their issues because they've bought into the lie that they've got their secret freedom to do what they want, but deep down they wish they were free from that issue.

Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

- **Minimize efforts that ask him to open up about feelings or emotions**
- **Ask not “How do you feel?”**
- **Ask “What was that like for you?”**

Exercise Three

What are some barriers that males or fathers might encounter in requesting assistance in your community?

- Individual barriers?
- Organizational barriers?
- Societal barriers?



Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

- Normalize the man's experiences
- Offer assistance man-to-man, as possible
- Explain confidentiality, that what is shared here will stay here
- Begin by focusing on his strengths, not his weaknesses

Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

- Recognize that many males are suspect of a system that has traditionally avoided providing any services that assist men or empower fathers
- Clearly indicate up front that your role is not report him to child support enforcement, the department of corrections, immigration, child protection services, the police or probation and parole

Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

- Allow him to discuss his ideas of what it means to be a boy, a man, a father, a husband, a son, a wage earner, etc.
- Help him to recognize potential problems if he decides to “go it alone” or to fight the system
- Share limited information about yourself that is relevant to the presenting situation



Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

- Employ approaches that reflect a clear understanding of the psychology of men and of paternal instincts. If you are not familiar with these, seek that information
- Help him view problem solving through a win-win approach, rather than the more traditional win-lose approach that many men typically employ

Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

Sit beside him, or at 90 degree angle, not face-to-face, when speaking with him.

If you have a task at hand to accomplish, the should-to-shoulder approach is more comfortable for men to employ. Spread out the work or project on a table and discuss it together.

Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

When men are receiving information, especially in a group setting, they often prefer to process the information by responding through a debate approach, rather than a dialogue approach. They may want to banter back and forth to see how it might apply to their specific situation.



Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

When talking with a man, tell him why you are having this conversation. Men often need to know the bottom line up front. Then he can get a sense of what you want from the discussion.

For example, “I would like 20 minutes of your time next session to talk to you about your plans for your child’s educational future.” This helps him get an idea of what to expect from the situation.

Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

Help-seeking should be presented as a legitimate obligation for men to ensure their physical and mental health, reflecting traditional paternal roles to protect, to provide, and to guide.



Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

- Interventions should also promote masculinity as an attribute of help-seeking, to augment the likelihood of social acceptability.
- “Real men ask for help so they are able to support their family in time of need”

Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

Men are problem solvers by nature and by socialization. It is not that men ignore emotions as much as it is that once emotions have served their real purpose, to identify a problem, then any further indulgence in them is a distraction from solving that problem. And the point is that for most men, this works.

Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

We will now watch a one minute video “It’s Not About the Nail” and briefly discuss your reactions to the content.



Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

- Direct feedback to assist him in healthy problem solving and decision-making
- Help generate action-oriented steps and ideas
- Allow him time to shape the generated suggestions to meet his personal needs at the time

Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

- Recognize that he will need time to figure out what he is feeling. Men often require more time to get in touch with their true emotional state of being
- Indicate that it takes guts to seek and accept help and courage to deal with the system, especially if he has not benefitted from elements of it.

Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

Men tend to view their female partners and friends as the primary source of help, rather than receiving assistance directly from professionals and service providers. So find ways to work with providers to gather needed information and materials to present to him that will help address his situations.



Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

- Employ approaches that focus upon logical approaches and specific behaviors within his control
- Avoid using language that perpetuates stereotyping by gender or culture. Name a few

Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

- Remember, women typically connect with other women through direct conversation and by offering emotional support for the issue at hand
- Men typically connect with other men while accomplishing mutual tasks: engaging in hobbies, sports, games, outdoor activities, tinkering or watching the same. This allows them to open up more comfortably with others, especially men

Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

Males' brains are wired differently than females'. Men tend to compartmentalize their world. They organize their world view into distinct separate boxes. As a result, they have their spouse box, their dad box, work box, hobby box, buddy box, money box, alone time box and many other boxes. Guys have a tough time moving from box to box swiftly or smoothly. If they are in one box and someone wants to connect with them in another box, it will take him a little time to do so.

Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

- Females brains tend to have every part of their lives connected to all the other parts of their lives. They don't compartmentalize the world into boxes like men do. So they multitask more easily and attach feelings to events and memories.
- If you are a female staff trying to connect to a male client or father, remember that his processing of events, memories and thinking often employs a different approach than you do.

Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

Men generally don't take suggestions and just follow them as presented. When men are provided with advice or suggestions to solve a big problem, their approach is typically to take that information and shape it and mold it to specifically fit their own individual situation. They need to see the "practicality" of that information and be able to personalize it.

Strategies to Promote Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

- When marketing your services for men, you might use terms like "consultations" rather than "assistance" and emphasize self-help and achievement. Guys tend to respond more openly to this approach.
- And emphasize your focus as skill building--like parenting skills, communication techniques or anger management skills--rather than personal development.

Conclusion

- Men often want to apply concrete steps to identify a difficult problem, then pursue the opportunity to resolve it themselves
- Factors that allow men to request help include: a safe environment, using their preferred problem solving approach, time constraints, group expectations or peer pressure, skill level and implied permission to do so

Conclusion

If you employ a range of these strategies, respecting men's challenges and their preferred learning styles and problem solving approaches, you will increase his and your chances of achieving success



Wrapping Up



- **If the world were a logical place, men would ride side saddle. ~Rita Mae Brown**
- **If it can't be fixed by duct tape or WD-40, it's a female problem. ~Jason Love**
- **“It is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail.” ~ Abraham Maslow**

Wrapping Up



- **You don't drown by falling in the water; you drown by staying there.”~ Edwin Louis Cole**
- **"Problems are only opportunities in work clothes.“ ~Henri Kaiser**
- **“We will be known forever by the tracks we leave.” ~Dakota saying**

Wrapping Up



- **"If we don't let our boys cry tears, they will cry bullets.“~ Dr. William S. Pollack**
- **“If you don't believe in anything, believe in the Guy Code.”**
- **“It takes only two words to apologize guy to guy and they're not, 'I'm sorry.' It's, 'We good?’”**

Wrapping Up

“I thought that at birth American men are allowed just as many tears as American women, but because we are forbidden to shed them, we die long before women do, with our hearts exploding or our blood pressure rising or our livers eaten away by alcohol, because that lake of grief inside us has no outlet. We men die because our faces were not watered enough.” ~Pat Conroy, Beach Music, Doubleday

WE NEED TO TEACH OUR DAUGHTERS TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN:

a man who flatters her and
a man who complements her,
a man who spends money on her
and a man who invests in her
a man who views her as property
and a man who views her property
a man who lusts after her
and a man who loves her,
a man who believes he’s a gift to
women, and a man who believes
she’s a gift to him.
And then we need to teach our
sons to be that kind of man.



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