Talk Like a Man: Communication & Connectedness For Men in the Middle Years

November 15, 2017

Today’s Presentation

• Based on “lessons learned” by MassMen

1. Introduction
2. Background
3. Masculinities
4. Connectedness

Today’s Presenter

Franklin Cook, MM Director of Community Outreach
– Helped launch MassMen in 2015 (DPH consultant)
– Owner of Unified Community Solutions, Watertown
– 20 years of experience:
  • Began as a volunteer
  • Suicide prevention & postvention advocacy, project development, implementation, and management
  • Community dialogue, public awareness, and training
  • Leadership for peer grief support as a field of practice
– Currently:
  • Transition to SMH’s new MM Health Promotions Manager
  • MM Outreach: Four peer-support initiatives for men
  • Assisting BSAS with overdose postvention
  • TAPS and other national peer grief support initiatives

MassMen

• Massachusetts health promotion campaigns to help strengthen the mental, emotional, and relational health of men age 25 to 64:
  – Free, anonymous online screening
  – Searchable resource database for MA communities
  – Information and connections designed for men
• Collaborative, grassroots approach:
  – Department of Public Health
  – Unified Community Solutions
  – Screening for Mental Health
  – Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide Prevention
  – 10 regional suicide prevention coalitions

Continuing Increase in MA Suicides

MA Men 25-64 Die Disproportionately


Preventing Suicide in MIMY (2016)

Focus: Men 35-64 years old (U.S.A.)

- Understanding suicide among MIMY
- Program recommendations
- Review of research
- Examples of programs and resources

(SPENC, 2016)

Cultural Competence for Men

Strengthen knowledge and awareness of bio-psycho-social and cultural determinants of masculine identity and behavior.

(SPRC, 2016)

Men, Suicide and Society (2012)

Focus: Disadvantaged men in mid-life (U.K.)

- Role of relationship breakdown
- Psychological factors
- Economic factors
- Role of mid-life
- Role of masculinities

(Wyllie et al., 2012)

Men in the Middle Years (MIMY)

- MIMY: 35 to 64 years old.
  - Focus of national SP efforts
- MassMen population: “Working-age” men, 25 to 64 years old
  - 1.8 million in Massachusetts
- Concepts related to masculinity apply in various ways to men of all ages.

Influence of “Masculinities”

- Traits such as independence, competitiveness, success, aggressiveness, courage, activity, efficiency, rationality
- Not perceiving or admitting the presence of anxiety, problems, burdens
- Withstanding danger, difficulties, threats
- Invulnerability (risky or harmful habits, disregard bodily health, avoiding or delaying help-seeking)
- High valuation of power, dominance, control

Positive valence vs. Negative valence

(Adapted from Wyllie et al., 2012)
Independence & Control

INDEPENDENCE helps me establish my AUTONOMY and strengthens my SELF-SUFFICIENCY.

INDEPENDENCE negates my HELP-SEEKING and increases my ISOLATION.

Success & Competitiveness

SUCCESS & COMPETITIVENESS builds my DISCIPLINE and encourages MASTERY.

SUCCESS & COMPETITIVENESS promotes my PERFECTIONISM and sees FAILURE as a CRISIS.

Courage

COURAGE helps me CHANGE THE SITUATION and enables my SELFLESS BEHAVIOR.

COURAGE negates warnings of DANGER and causes me to misjudge my PERSONAL POWER.

Focus on Action

A FOCUS ON ACTION helps me HIGHLIGHT PRACTICAL matters and take POSITIVE STEPS.

A FOCUS ON ACTION causes me to make MISSTEPS and ignore the BIG PICTURE.

Efficiency

EFFICIENCY helps me MANAGE RESOURCES and IMPROVE PROCESSES.

EFFICIENCY causes me to DISMISS COMPLEXITY and downgrade QUALITY.

Rationality

RATIONALLY supports my making GOOD DECISIONS and enhances my COMMUNICATION.

RATIONALLY causes me to DISREGARD EMOTIONS and invites a sense of FALSE SECURITY.
Invulnerability makes difficult action possible for me and staves off emotional pain. Invulnerability lessens my access to emotions and increases the downside of failure. INVULNERABILITY makes DIFFICULT ACTION possible for me and staves off EMOTIONAL PAIN.

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Power & Dominance bolsters my confidence and strengthens my leadership. Power & Dominance harms people and property and weakens others’ perspectives.

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Emotional Control keeps my focus on the action needed and buffers my being overwhelmed. Emotional Control hampers real communication and keeps problems hidden.

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Being Stoical toward threats and loss focuses on appearances and keeps me to make misjudgments. Being Stoical toward threats and loss maintains my forward motion and makes space for privacy.

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Values Being Expressed?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Valence</th>
<th>Trait = Value</th>
<th>Negative Valence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishes autonomy</td>
<td>Independence, Control</td>
<td>Negates help-seeking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strengthens self-sufficiency</td>
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<td>Increases isolation</td>
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<td>Builds discipline</td>
<td>Success, Competitiveness</td>
<td>Promotes perfectionism</td>
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<td>Encourages mastery</td>
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<td>Sees failure as crisis</td>
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<td>Initiates change of status quo</td>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>Negates warnings of danger</td>
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<td>Enables selfless behavior</td>
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<td>Misjudges personal power</td>
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<td>Highlights practical matters</td>
<td>Focus on Action</td>
<td>Causes missteps</td>
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<td>Initiates positive steps</td>
<td>Effeciency</td>
<td>Ignores the “big picture”</td>
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<td>Manages resources</td>
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<td>Improves processes</td>
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<td>Supports good decisions</td>
<td>Rationality</td>
<td>Disregards emotions</td>
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<td>Enhances communication</td>
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<td>Makes difficult action possible</td>
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<td>Bolsters confidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keeps focus on action needed</td>
<td>Emotional Control</td>
<td>Hamps real communication</td>
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<td>Buffers being overwhelmed</td>
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<td>Keeps problems hidden</td>
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<td>Makes focus on action</td>
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Buffer Sources of Risk

| Trait                  | Negative Valence                                |
|                       |                                                |
| Independence          | Negates help-seeking                           |
|                       | Increases isolation                             |
| Success, Competitiveness | Promotes perfectionism                      |
|                       | Sees failure as crisis                          |
| Courage               | Negates warnings of danger                      |
|                       | Misjudges personal power                        |
| Focus on Action       | Causes missteps                                |
|                       | Ignores the “big picture”                       |
| Efficiency            | Dismisses complexity                            |
|                       | Downgrades quality                              |
| Rationality           | Disregards emotions                             |
|                       | Invites false security                          |
| Invalvulnerability    | Lessens access to emotions                      |
|                       | Increases downside of failure                   |
| Power, Dominance      | Harms people, property                          |
|                       | Weakens others’ perspectives                   |
| Emotional Control     | Hamps real communication                        |
|                       | Keeps problems hidden                           |
| Stoical Toward Threats, Loss | Focuses on appearances                      |
|                       | Causes misjudgments                             |

Traits’ negative nature can increase risk.
- Observe which traits actually are at issue?
- Build awareness of downside of traits?
- Build skills to buffer them?
- Communicate with traits as a frame?
### Masculinities: Three Generations

- Born 1955 and before (60 years old and older)
  - Traditional masculinity
- Born 1955-1980 (35-60 years old)
  - In transition, from traditional to modern
- Born 1981 and after (35 years old and younger)
  - Modern masculinity
- Very dynamic and complex
  - Some men see other generation POVs as primary
- Many men subscribe to a hybrid POV
- Societal norms are in transition

### Example: Masculinities as a “Frame”

- Self-care: A responsibility of being a provider and caring for your family
- Help-seeking:
  - Courageous, competent, independent, in control
  - Task requiring effective thinking, problem-solving
- Problems (& failure): Normal, universal, not a sign of weakness

### Helper’s Challenge: Cultural competency in responding purposefully to masculine traits/values

### e.g.: Men’s “Frame” for Friendship

- “Doing,” “being there,” and “being alongside” rather than self-revelation
- Emotions discussed spontaneously, not methodically
- Physical activity, recreation seen as sufficient to manage stress or worry
- Value of confidentiality and permission not to talk about problems or losses
- Mutual empathy based on “knowing who I am” rather than talking about issues
e.g.: Men’s “Frame” for Depression

- Escapist behavior (work, watching TV)
- Controlling, violent, or abusive behavior
- Uncharacteristic agitation, anger
- Risky behavior (e.g., reckless driving)
- Infidelity, unhealthy sexual behavior
- Physical symptoms that don’t respond to usual treatments (backache, frequent headaches, sleep problems, sexual dysfunction, digestive disorders)

(Mayo Clinic, 2010; Robinson, Segal, & Smith, 2012)

e.g.: Men’s “Frame” for Being Helped

- Engage men in a familiar setting
- Temper use of mental-health terminology
- Feature testimony about experiences of other men
- Suggest opportunities to help others
- Characterize men as partners with helping professionals
- Offer options for assistance other than from helping professionals

Agencies, Systems Must Respond

- The presentation above = oversimplification:
  - Focuses on traditional masculinity
  - Traits not clearly circumscribed (continuum, modulation)
  - Traits not dualistic (light/dark)
  - Offers very limited examples

- How do helpers within systems develop and strengthen cultural competency?
- Men’s psychology: Science to practice?

Major Protective Factors for MIMY

- Social connectedness to individuals, including friends and family, and to community and social institutions
- Access to effective health and behavioral health care
- Coping and problem-solving skills
- Reasons for living, meaning in life, and purpose in life

(MSPRC, 2016, p. 15)

Men: Barriers to Connectedness

- Link to masculine beliefs
  - Independence
  - Competitiveness
  - Dominance
  - Emotional Control
  - Stoical Toward Threats, Loss

(Adapted from Hall & Partners, 2014; MSPRC, 2016; Wyllie et al., 2012)
Men: Barriers to Connectedness

- Relationship dynamics affects sociability
  - Single (without a partner)
  - Relational breakdown
  - Dependence on partner for emotional support
  - Not sharing emotions with partner to be strong, to protect them
  - Poor engagement of boys with their fathers affects social adeptness as adults

(Adapted from Hall & Partners, 2014; SPRC, 2016; Wyllie et al., 2012)

Men: Barriers to Connectedness

- Financial and physical limitations can be a factor
- Changing circumstances
  - Injury or illness
  - Mental health issue
  - Unemployment
  - Family dynamics (e.g., having less time)

(Adapted from Hall & Partners, 2014; SPRC, 2016; Wyllie et al., 2012)

Men: Barriers to Connectedness

- Friendship patterns affect isolation
  - Dwindling peer relationships in midlife
  - Friendships based on a common interest or activity, and participation ceases
  - Many men do not discuss intimate personal issues with friends

(Adapted from Hall & Partners, 2014; SPRC, 2016; Wyllie et al., 2012)

Isolation Can Be Self-Perpetuating

- Social isolation causes emotional isolation
- Emotional isolation causes social isolation

Mid-Life Inherently Difficult for Men

- Consequences of long-term decisions about work and relationships come to light.
- Possibilities for making changes are limited, and most likely involves risk.
- Success: “Winners” and “losers” are known.
- Accumulation of effects of lifelong problems:
  - Mental illness
  - Alcohol abuse
  - Intermittent unemployment

(Wyllie et al., 2012)
“If ending up lonely were a race, it would start out as a fair one, with males and females evenly matched, more or less. [But] men go on to ‘win’ the loneliness race; [and] to the victor go the spoils of alcohol problems, depression, divorce, and even death” (Joiner, 2011).

Men, Disconnectedness, & Suicide
- Lack of social problem-solving, communication skills
- Social perfectionism (need to meet expectations, perceived standards being unrealistic)
- Self-criticism (negative self-appraisal, inability to enjoy one’s own successes)

(Wyllie et al., 2012)
- Decreased sense of belongingness
- Increased sense of burdensomeness

(Joiner, 2009)

Components of Effective Care
- Actionable knowledge
- Screening and assessment
- Effective referrals
- Safety and crisis planning
- Effective therapies
- Continuity and follow-up
- Patient engagement

(Adapted from SPRC, 2016)

Actionable Knowledge
- Prevalence, preventability of MIMY suicide
- Characteristics of suicide risk, mental disorders among MIMY
- Relationship between alcohol and drug use disorders, intoxication, and MIMY suicide
- Ditto for chronic disease, disability
- Characteristic patterns of help-seeking behavior and coping among MIMY

(Adapted from SPRC, 2016)

Client-Centered Referrals
- Mental health & substance abuse care
- Care for the whole person
  - Basic needs and practical assistance
  - Unmet psychological needs
  - Connectedness
- Effective referrals (applicable, direct, practical, reliable, effective, accessible, verifiable)

(Adapted from SPRC, 2016)

Continuity and Follow-Up
- Patient-centered discharge planning (see “Referrals”)
- Immediate follow-up (e.g., Caring Contacts)
- Teamwork across silos (including in safety planning)

(Adapted from SPRC, 2016)
**Patient Engagement**

- Self-care & resiliency components
- Strengths-focused (self-efficacy)
- Self-help & alternative approaches
- Renaissance of person-centered care

(Adapted from SPRC, 2016)

**Agencies, Systems Must Respond**

- How do helpers within systems develop and strengthen cultural competency?
- Men’s psychology: Science to practice?

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**REFERENCES**


