



Workshop Handout

Copyright Lyra Health, Inc.

Men's Mental Health

How we define “masculinity” or “manhood” can impact our well-being at work and at home.

Many factors shape what is considered masculine, like geography, family, ethnic identity, and other identities you hold. Culture can play an especially large part in shaping our views. Leading gender researcher, Dr. Bem, has even said gender expectations can be thought of as the “default options” that society gives us.

Although there is not one definition of masculinity or manhood that applies across cultures, in many cultures, masculinity can involve expectations that you:

- Hold back from showing certain emotions
- Rely on yourself and don't reach out to others for help or support

If you notice these “default” options can sometimes harm your mental health or relationships, consider going beyond the default in those moments to help enhance your well-being and social connections.

If your definition of masculinity or manhood is different from this, the following skills can still be useful in exploring concepts related to health and well-being.¹

¹Note: In some territories and regions of the world expression of facets of identity that don't fit the mold of your culture's expectations for masculinity, manhood, or “what it means to be a man” can be unsafe or potentially even illegal, so it's important to always prioritize safety, over authenticity and expression if this is the case where you live.

Going beyond the default with emotions

If you're used to holding back or restricting your emotions, you can practice approaching them by building emotional awareness and skills to cope with them. All men have emotions, even if they don't express them.

Building awareness is important because your emotions serve an important purpose. According to Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, emotions:

- Tell you what you care about
- Communicate to others
- Help you solve problems and take action



Some emotions help keep you safe:

Table 1: Emotions that keep you safe

Emotion	Urges us to
Fear	escape danger
Anger	protect ourselves against attackers
Disgust	keep contamination away
Shame	hide things that might lead to rejection

Some emotions motivate you:

Table 2: Emotions that motivate you

Emotion	Urges us to
Envy	work for what we want
Jealousy	protect what's important
Love	experience closeness and connection
Guilt	make things right
Sadness	look inward to figure out what's important

To build awareness and identify your emotions: Get curious

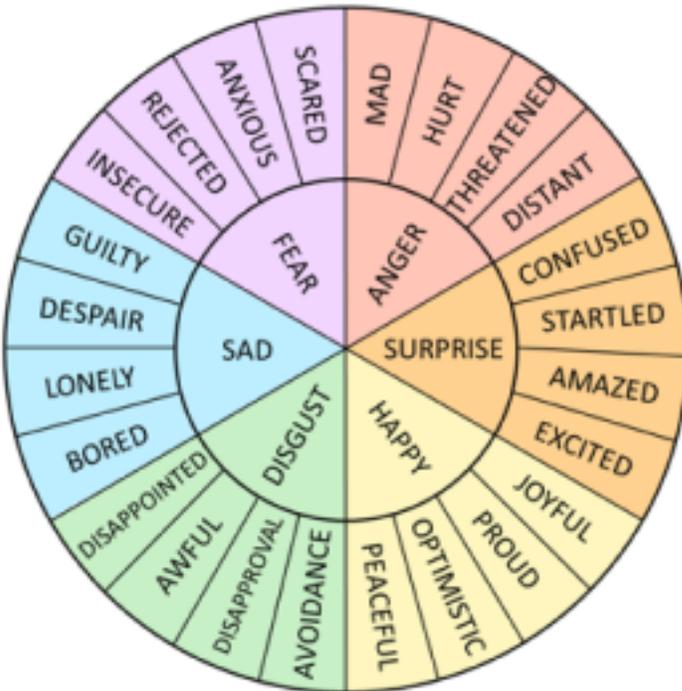
Get curious by:

1. Looking inside at your body sensations
2. Looking outside for explanations of those sensations
3. Noticing your thoughts
4. Labeling what your urges are or what you immediately feel like doing

For example: You notice your body feels heavy. You look outward to see your partner looking upset. At first, you might label this emotion “sadness” or “frustration.” But you also notice thoughts like, “I wish I hadn’t said that hurtful thing last night” and an urge to say sorry. These observations can help you identify the emotion you’re experiencing as guilt.

Having a reference to help you label the emotions you are experiencing can also help. Use the feelings wheel to help you get more granular with how you are feeling.

Feelings Wheel



To cope with the emotions you identify: Get courageous, act opposite, and take care of yourself

Get courageous

It takes a lot of courage to come face-to-face with difficult emotions, but what we resist persists, and acknowledging your emotions in this way can help them feel less overwhelming and pass quicker.

To get courageous:

1. Acknowledge the circumstances that are causing you to feel this way
2. Validate your emotions—it is OK to feel how you are feeling
3. Feel your feelings—observe body sensations and emotions
4. Observe without trying to change anything—be curious, non-judgmental, and open to what you are experiencing

Act Opposite

What if your emotion doesn't make sense for the situation? Or, it feels too strong to be helpful? Or, what if acting on your emotion's urges would potentially harm you or your goals? If any of those are true, consider using opposite action, a skill drawn from Dialectical Behavioral Therapy.

To act opposite, do the opposite of what the emotion is telling you to do.



Table 3: Opposite actions of emotions

Emotion	Typical urge	Opposite action
Irritation and anger	Critique or attack	Seek calm, empathy, to understand
Anxiety and fear	Avoid	Move closer
Sadness and grief	Withdraw	Reach out
Depressed	Stay in bed	Get active

Take care of yourself

When you take care of your fundamental needs, your mental health tends to be better and it's usually easier to lean into more helpful coping skills than our default response.

To take care of yourself:

- Set boundaries—Preserve your energy for the things that matter most
- Take breaks—Pauses can help restore energy
- Exercise—Caring for your body can help care for your mind
- Nutrition—Regularly fueling your body with foods that nourish you and drinking water can keep energy up and support your mental health.
- Sleep—Aim for 7-8 hours per night
- Connect with others—Social support boosts your well-being

Going beyond the default with your behaviors

If you usually hesitate to ask for help, preferring to rely only on yourself, going beyond the default means reaching out to others for social and/or professional support.

Going beyond the default in your behaviors means overcoming barriers that keep you from seeking support, helping others help you, taking small steps, and knowing when professional support can be helpful.

Overcoming barriers

Society often tells us that we should be “strong” and rely only on ourselves. But these messages are unhelpful barriers, getting in the way of your mental health and relationships with others. By labeling these barriers, and making a plan for how to react when they pop up, you can feel more prepared to reach for support.

Table 4: Common barrier and reality

Common barrier	Reality
“I’m embarrassed”	“I’m not alone” “Others have felt down/made mistakes/felt embarrassed”
“I can take care of myself”	“I can be self-reliant and still accept and benefit from support”



	"It's impossible to be an expert in everything"
"I don't want to be a burden"	"People often want to help" "People often feel good when they help"

Help others help you

Reaching out for social support can feel hard, but consider helping others help you. Identifying what kind of support you need before asking can make it easier for others to give you what you need.

To help others help you, ask yourself:

- What do I need?
- What would help me feel better?
- What would help me understand better?
- What would help me take the next step?

Once you've assessed what you need, be specific with your ask. Often, but not always, what we need is: Someone to listen, offer perspective, advice, connection, or teach us a skill. Consider if one of those is what you really need from the conversation.

Take small steps

Taking small steps can also make it easier to reach out for social support.

To take small steps:

- Choose a low-stakes situation or practice with someone you know you can trust
- Build up to bigger asks over time
 - For example: Start by asking for a small favor and build gradually to sharing feelings and asking for support

Reaching out for professional support

When your emotions or behaviors have strayed from your "baseline," your usual coping strategies are not working, and/or you are having trouble making life changes on your own, you might consider professional support from Lyra. Signs you may benefit from support may be cognitive or emotional (e.g., decreased motivation, anxiety, depression), behavioral (e.g., increased use of substances), event-specific (e.g., death of a loved one), or relational (e.g., family problems).

Lyra is here to support you. To sign up or learn more, visit care.lyrahealth.com