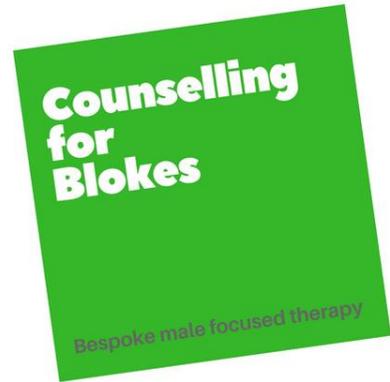


Men. We need to talk about how we are feeling



By **Chris Wallwork**

I was inspired to become a counsellor after experiencing a prolonged period of low mood, stress and anxiety. I was surprised that I felt this way because despite life throwing up significant emotional events in my past, I had never felt anything like this. It had very much crept up on me and consequently, I didn't know what to do or where to turn.

I'm sure you've noticed it too, there seems to be a taboo amongst men particularly in being able to talk about mental health. As guys we can seemingly talk about the weather, football or the new car we are buying, but we don't seem to be able to stand up and say "Hey, I'm not okay. Can you help me?"

There can be a number of reasons for this. We can initially wonder whether we actually are feeling low at all. We can attempt to justify away our feelings with an 'at least it's not as bad as Jimmy has it' (apologies if your name is Jimmy!). We can worry that our friends would take the mick out of us. We can also worry that we won't be heard at all.

We can be surrounded by good, close male friends and family members, and maybe we even desperately want to tell them how we feel. But this can be quite a hurdle to overcome as inside, the overwhelming sense of feeling weak can prevail. Do we really want to attach a big label to ourselves, saying we are the one who is 'not okay' in the friendship or family setting?

We need to be able to find the space where we can set ourselves back from comparisons with others, and see ourselves - we need to be able to own our personal processes, and take steps to (healthily) build resilience, and coping strategies in our lives. I believe that is where good, professional counselling can come in.

Men, we need to overcome these hurdles. We need to not only feel it's okay to open up to those closest to us, we also need to be comfortable hearing this from our friends. Telling someone to "man up" isn't effective therapy, but being a listening ear is a good first step.

For those who feel there is nowhere to turn in your social circles, or especially for those who are actively looking for someone to listen to them in a confidential and safe setting, may I respectfully suggest that you explore the possibility of counselling? No one likes to continually feel low, and no one like to not be heard. Counselling can help with both these factors in your life.

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