
Thrive

Men's Mental Health: Q&A

with UMBRELLA CEO - DR DOUGAL SUTHERLAND

Mental health is a topic that many men find difficult to talk about. We often struggle to find words to support others going through a rough time, especially at work. Last year, we did a webinar on men's mental health and collected questions from the audience. Our CEO and clinical psychologist Dougal Sutherland answers all of them in this article. We hope it will clarify the basics and provide tips on how to better support men at work and at home.

Q1: How do you suggest we can support someone and let them know that we are there for them – especially when we notice a change (for example, that they have been going to the gym a lot more than usual)?

A: The easiest thing to do is simply describe to the person what you have observed and open the door for discussion. Don't try and "diagnose" or label their behaviour, just notice it and describe it to them.

Q2: What things would you like to see managers and other leaders do in the workplace to promote good mental health in their teams, so that it isn't just seen as an individual issue?

A: Firstly, leaders need to develop good relationships with their people so they're aware of how employees are doing. Secondly, leaders should model looking after their own wellbeing so others can follow suit. Thirdly, and most importantly, leaders should be monitoring workflows and demands on their people, and adjusting this as needed, rather than just asking people to cope with more work.

Q3: How can we support someone to recognise the need for more formal mental health support, and help them to take this up?

A: This is always difficult, but the best thing is simply to describe to the person what you have observed about them that has made you worried and leave the door open for discussion. It may take several tries at this before it has an effect. Try to avoid offering solutions to them, just express your concern and offer help.

Q4: What are your top tips for selling the concept of "wellbeing" to men?

A: Find a term that works for the group you're talking to. "Wellbeing" might not be the best word so find something that sticks. Then find levers to help motivate men (e.g., keep in good mental shape for the sake of your family). This will be different for different groups.

Q5: The ageing workforce and changes in brain function raise concerns around early signs of dementia. Do you have suggestions for ways to support a partner or colleague we are concerned about who is displaying changes in character?

A: Again, this is difficult, but the best thing is simply to describe to the person what you have observed about them that has made you worried and leave the door open for discussion. You may need to gently point out what you're noticing more than once. Avoid trying to diagnose or label their difficulties, and don't tell them what to do - just express your concern and offer help.

Q6: What help can you offer for a young male who has been diagnosed with schizophrenia to motivate them to exercise, as part of their recovery/treatment?

A: The best way to motivate a change in behaviour for any of us is to tap into our internal motivation. Why would they want to do this? Do they even think it's a good idea? What are the barriers they have to doing this? Take time to understand their perspective and avoid pressuring them into it.

Q7: I'm interested in your work with getting people who are working long days to include activity into their lives - can you expand on how people can do this?

A: It's largely about prioritising and making room in your diary for activity to occur. It's useful to remember that we all work better if we've done some physical exercise/activity, and this might be a good motivating factor for people to schedule activity into their daily diary.

Q8: So much male social activity seems alcohol focused. Social connections are important, but booze is toxic. Any tips on navigating this?

A: Offer alternatives where alcohol isn't available. Work with key influencers and leaders in a group or community to help lead this change.

Q9: How do you create a culture of sharing/release with men to talk among themselves - essentially helping to normalise mental health conversations?

A: Finding a common language that men feel comfortable using is helpful. And remembering that men often have discussions when they are doing things together, rather than sitting down face-to-face for a chat. It will involve someone being brave by starting and continuing to have these discussions.

Read more on this topic: [What being masculine really means for men's mental health in New Zealand](#)

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