



Last day of Movember –men's health and wellbeing

We both have sons. Sons are very different from daughters! Girls seem to find it easier to tell us how they are feeling. They do this with their friends at school, university or at work; over the internet, on their phones or in person. Our sons do not! Despite best efforts to bring emotions into everyday language we still worry about the influences they come across which are macho, discouraging the acknowledgment of any type of struggle or expression of feelings.

Movember has been helping change the face of men's health by drawing attention to the figures that show that boys and men don't tend to seek help. Emotional difficulties are frequently bottled up and swallowed down and then often explode in the forms of anger, defiance and aggression. Somatic complaints are also common. Boys are also more likely to self-medicate with alcohol and drugs. No wonder detection rates of depression by GP's and even families are so low. The other area of concern is the increasing prevalence of body image disorders and dysmorphophobia. In these cases internal emotional difficulties are being externalised. Emotional language is needed to be able to express feelings. What happens if this language isn't available or adults in the system don't spot the behaviour changes? What if not being able to cope is seen as a weakness?

The number of girls who called ChildLine was 19,054 as opposed to only 5,208 boys. Similarly, self-harming was a significant issue, with 12,643 girls calling in, but only 856 boys. This discrepancy in reporting is marked. The ONS figures for Feb 2013 show an increasing suicide rate, where, worryingly, 78% of suicides in the UK were male. Suicide is the commonest cause of death under the age of 35 in men.

What can we do to help?

Boys and girls are different. Men and women are different. We amend our interaction styles accordingly all the time often without thinking. So this is really no different. It's just paying a bit more attention and holding these differences in mind.

Emotional awareness and having an emotional language makes us more resilient. Male role models are particularly helpful for boys. Seeing men around them express emotion, manage emotions and still be acceptable and successful would be a powerful start.

In families and schools use emotional language ordinarily and encourage the naming of feelings; these can make a real difference. We can ensure that mental health is firmly on the curriculum in school, and that emotional literacy is covered within PSHE.

As parents try avoiding direct eye contact and head-on conversations Car journeys are ideal opportunities!

When they have told you how they feel, positively comment and encourage.

And finally keep connected with them as much as possible as isolation is another risk factor.

We are passionate about mental health prevention and promotion in schools. We have recently been working in a boys' school in Birmingham talking to the boys about coping with stress and anxiety, how to look after themselves and when to ask for help. We have also met with parents. The boys were very enthusiastic and the parents were relieved to have some practical suggestions. If we could be of any help to your school, please contact us. We'd be happy to help.

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