



# Men's mental health: a guide for managers

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# Introduction

Mental health affects everyone, and it's important to access mental health support when you need it. But men can be reluctant to seek help for both their physical and mental health problems – or even acknowledge when there may be a problem. Research shows that there are some specific challenges related to male mental health.

In this guide, we'll explore why men's mental health needs more attention. We'll also share some tips on ways managers can encourage more men in the workplace to talk about their feelings and get the best support.

**In England, men are three times more likely to die by suicide than women.<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Latest suicide data. Samaritans. Samaritans.org, accessed March 2024.

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“It’s easy to overlook physical issues such as low libido when considering men’s mental health – but these health concerns can really affect a man’s mental wellbeing too.”

**Fatmata Kamara,**  
Bupa mental health nurse



## Which mental health issues affect men?

There isn't a specific form of depression or anxiety affecting men. Everyone can experience mental health conditions such as:

- anxiety disorders
- obsessive compulsive disorders (OCD)
- depression
- personality disorders

But men can respond to their mental health issues differently – for example by being less likely to tell someone how they feel. There are many reasons for this, including societal expectations about their role as a man, and pressures around their ability to ‘cope’<sup>3</sup>. For example, there may be a tendency for some men to downplay their symptoms through a fear of being thought to be ‘weak’.

Men are also statistically more likely to engage in harmful behaviours such as drug-taking or drinking in order to cope, which can worsen mental health difficulties<sup>3</sup>.

Research shows that men often search for online information about<sup>8</sup>:

- drug/alcohol addiction
- porn addiction
- gambling

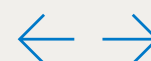
These findings highlight the importance of considering other factors that may be contributing to poor mental health.

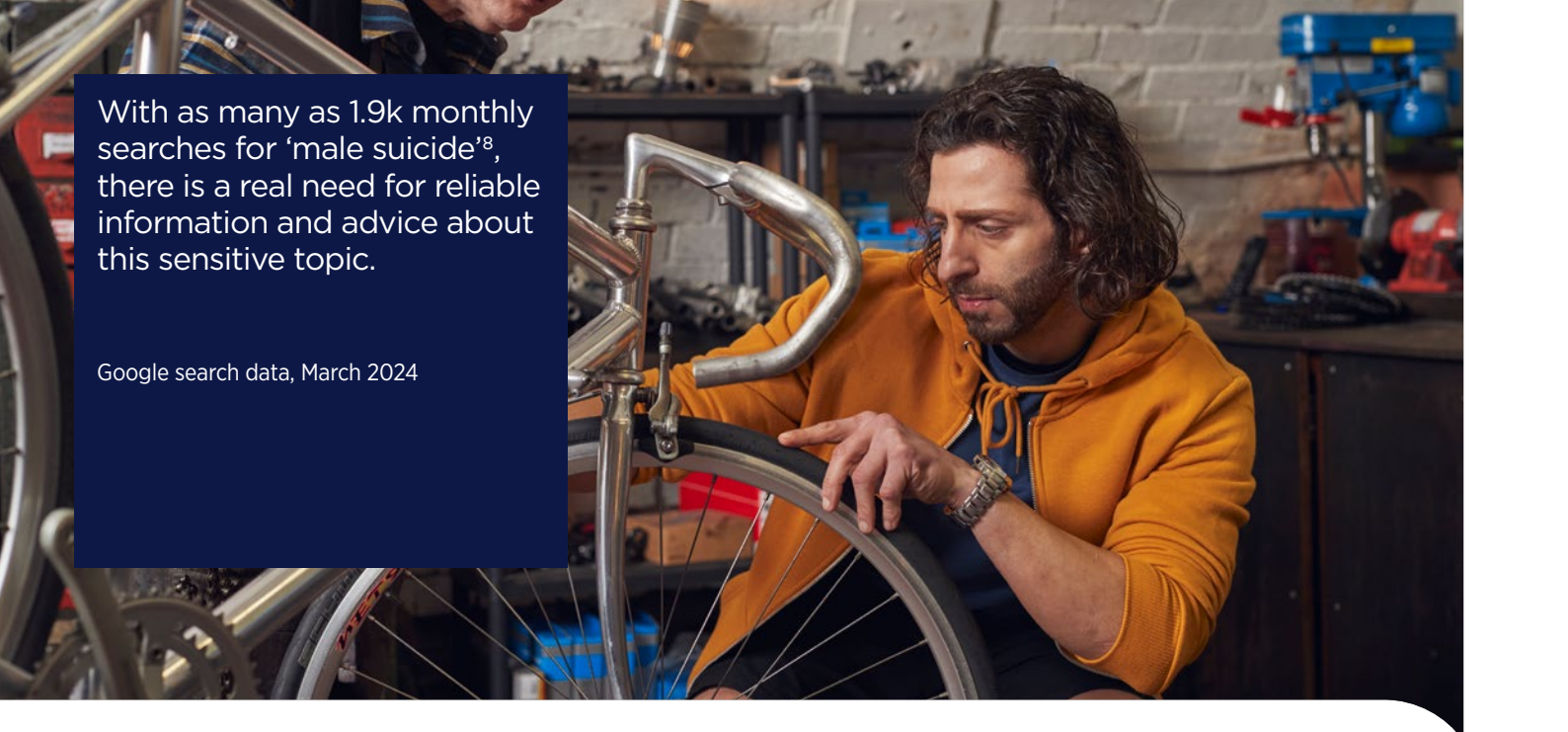
Similarly, research has identified a range of concerns relating to the ‘middle aged man’ that may cause stress and anxiety.

These include<sup>8</sup>:

- issues with sexual function, such as poor libido or erectile dysfunction
- hair loss/balding
- physical health issues such as heart attacks or prostate cancer

This reinforces the need to take a holistic approach when considering men’s mental health, that includes their physical, sexual and general health and wellbeing.





With as many as 1.9k monthly searches for 'male suicide'<sup>8</sup>, there is a real need for reliable information and advice about this sensitive topic.

Google search data, March 2024

## Why are men at higher risk of suicide?

Unfortunately, male suicide remains a prevalent issue. Suicide is such a complex, multi factorial issue – and isn't purely linked to gender differences. However, there may be some specific factors affecting men that may raise their risk of suicide.

These include<sup>1</sup>:

- society expecting men to be 'strong' and to not admit to feeling sad or anxious
- stigma around accessing mental health services
- struggles with communicating feelings
- alcohol and drug abuse
- financial pressures

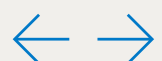
To support and improve men's mental health, we need to destigmatise conversations around mental wellbeing and promote open, honest communication about feelings and struggles.

As an employer and line manager you can be part of this change, by being available, and open to discussing men's mental health concerns at work. Normalising and encouraging these conversations is the first step to supporting your employees. It can also improve attitudes and behaviours towards mental health for the whole workplace – which can only be beneficial.

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“In my role as a mental health nurse, I can't stress enough the importance of giving men space to speak up – this can often be the first step in tackling mental health issues head on.”

**Fatmata Kamara,**  
Bupa mental health nurse





## How can you support men's mental health at work?

Knowing what the signs and symptoms of poor mental health look like is an important step in the right direction. You might notice a male employee is<sup>4,5</sup>:

- talking a lot less in meetings
- looking very tired
- becoming irritable or annoyed
- talking quickly or changing topics a lot
- behaving very differently

This may lead you to prompt a conversation during a 1-2-1. Remaining open, relaxed, and willing to listen can help your employee to speak up about how they are feeling<sup>7</sup>.

You can also remind them that all conversations are confidential and that you are there to help<sup>7</sup>.





## How to have helpful conversations about mental health<sup>7</sup>:

It might be daunting to consider talking to an employee about their mental health. But there are some ways you can equip yourself to start these conversations. The key thing is to try and make your employee feel relaxed and comfortable, as they are likely to be nervous about discussing their difficulties. Try to remain informal, with relaxed body language, and choose somewhere quiet and private to have your conversation. You could also:

- let them speak without interrupting them
- practice active listening – summarising what they've said to show you've heard them
- use open questions, such as how, why, when to encourage discussions
- finish the conversation with a clear action plan as to how you'll proceed

# There are other ways you can support your male employees. The following are some examples<sup>7</sup>:

- Being flexible around the attendance of health and wellbeing appointments. This can help your male employees to feel able to seek the relevant support – without being afraid it will affect their performance adversely.
- Promoting a healthy workplace by encouraging exercise, good sleep, and tech free times. Where possible, try to arrange walking meetings, or encourage employees to take active breaks during the day. Share relevant and inspiring health content around sleep optimisation, and the benefits of exercise for mental health. You can also support your employees by promoting boundaries around tech use out of work hours.
- Signposting your employees to relevant resources or support so they know it's there if they need it. This could include highlighting talking therapies such as counselling and cognitive behavioural therapies. Understand your limits – you're not expected to have all the answers, or to offer counselling to staff. But knowing where to direct your employees for appropriate support and advice is really important.
- Making reasonable adjustments. These depend on the associated costs and practicalities, but could include flexible working hours, or phased returns after absences. Making adjustments such as these are just as valuable for mental health as they are for physical health issues.
- Seeking opportunities to invest in education and training that deepens your understanding of poor mental health, which can result in earlier interventions and better outcomes.

## You could create a wellness action plan

Your employee makes a personal document, with or without your input. They will outline a range of tools to refer to if things become difficult, as well as identifying triggers that could flare up symptoms of anxiety or stress. You can use this document to start meaningful conversations around the management of mental health issues.



# What resources are available for men's mental health?

You can signpost your male employees to a range of helpful resources.

Here are some ideas:

## **Mind UK**

Mind offer lots of useful free online information, including support, tips and advice for managing common mental health conditions. There is also a special report on men's mental health and a list of specific resources and help for men's wellbeing.

[Home - Mind](#)

## **Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)**

CALM offer matter-of-fact, down-to-earth advice on mental health. They promote dialogues around suicidal feelings and have a helpline for 1-2-1 support. [Homepage | Campaign Against Living Miserably \(CALM\) \(thecalmzone.net\)](#)

## **Seeking Men's Mental Health Support (SHOUT)**

SHOUT offer confidential support via text, as well as a range of information designed to raise awareness about men's mental health. Anyone can access 24/7 support by texting 'SHOUT' to 85258. [Men's mental health support | Shout 85258 \(giveusashout.org\)](#)

## **Samaritans**

If you feel your employee is experiencing severe and acute mental health difficulties that may involve suicidal thoughts – the Samaritans are trained to deal with these types of mental health emergencies<sup>6</sup> and can provide mental health first aid. They can also arrange for appropriate emergency responses if necessary. Anyone can call the Samaritans 24/7 on: 116 123. They also have a chat function and email option<sup>6</sup>.



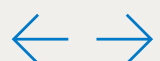


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