



# Community Matters

Community Counselling & Resource Centre's Voice for Public Education and Advocacy

## Managing Change Effectively: An 8 Week Program for Men

This increasingly popular program has been offered through CCRC for the last 3 years now, and like most of our programs, follows a format which is described as "psycho-educational," meaning that there is a mix of education with group support. The group addresses a different topic each week, including themes such as: stress management, relationships, grief and loss, managing anger, parenting, and dealing with life transitions such as job loss or divorce. In an atmosphere that includes mutual sharing, men give and receive peer support and discover that they are not alone in their struggles.

## The Socialization of Men/The Man Box

**Historically**, male roles have tended to encourage the qualities that are associated with the "manly/macho" qualities of men. Men who would be "good soldiers" in combat roles, sports heroes, or good workers in jobs requiring strength and endurance are encouraged to "man up" to the task. Feelings of vulnerability, inadequacy, and fear don't fit in and men who exhibit them are "wusses, wimps," or worse. In a sense, male manliness is the calling card and the "code" of men. The seduction/conquest of women, wielding power, and competing with other men are its badges. Society needed men to be "tough" in order to fight its wars and work effectively in the mines, fields and forests.

**Now, times have changed**, and there are role models other than the macho man, but men still carry within themselves many of the old messages. Activist Tony Porter has defined this as *The Man Box*. He cites the following messages that keep men in a box:

- Don't cry or openly express emotions, with the exception of anger
- Do not show weakness or fear

- Demonstrate power/control, especially over women
- Aggression, dominance, protector
- Do not be "like a woman"
- Heterosexual
- Do not be "like a gay man"
- Tough, athletic, strength, courage
- Makes decisions, does not need help
- Views women as property/objects

**Much of our work** with men at CCRC involves helping them get out of the Man Box. Emotional health for all genders involves the full expression and acknowledgement of human emotion. It emphasizes relational values over competition, and cooperation over dominance. "Strength" can then be seen as not merely physical, but involving self-discipline and self-mastery. This work benefits men and women alike as men find their way to being whole human beings and let go of a "code" that separates them from the full measure of their humanity. At CCRC we are seeing an increasing proportion of men, as men break their isolation and seek assistance during times of increased stress.

## Services for Men

In the Counselling Program at CCRC we are seeing an increasing proportion of men who are initiating a request for service. Men are seen primarily individually for issues such as depression, anxiety, grief, anger management, trauma, marital separation, and stress. Further, men are involved in relationship counselling with their spouses or partners, which makes up about a fourth of our work. Men are also involved in family counselling, which is usually about parenting, or extended family relationships. Finally, men are also served through our Managing Change Effectively group, which is described in more detail above.



## The Male Batterer

**The research** on male perpetrators of spousal violence overwhelmingly demonstrates that this subset of men suffer from 1) insecurity about themselves/lack of confidence and 2) a deficit in problem solving and communication skills. They also lack impulse control, particularly in relation to anger.

Men who abuse try to control situations through intimidation, as they lack the skills and confidence to engage in relationships in a mature way. This research guides counselors in their efforts to help these men find better ways of dealing with their problems and their emotions.

Men are helped to find ways of improving their self esteem, and their negotiation skills, and gain strategies for dealing with negative emotions before they result in aggressive behavior.

## Male Role Models

If it **“takes a village to raise a child”**, it takes mature men to help young men develop into adults who are comfortable with themselves and their masculinity. As boys grow up they require the presence of older men to model mature, positive masculinity and to help them feel that they will be adequate as men. This does not have to be a father, but can be someone the boy admires and who validates him, like an uncle, coach or teacher.

Robert Bly, arguably the father of the modern “men’s movement,” points out that since the Industrial Revolution, fathers often leave the home early, go to some unknown place the children cannot even imagine, then return home after they are in bed. He says that, “During the nineteenth century, grandfathers and uncles lived in the house, and older men mingled a great deal.

Through hunting parties, in work that men did together in farms and cottages, and through local sports, older men spent much time with younger men and brought knowledge of male spirit and soul to them.”

Bly speaks of male initiation in this way: “Now, standing next to the father, as they repair arrowheads, or repair plows, or wash pistons in gasoline, or care for birthing animals, the son’s body has the chance to retune. Slowly, over months or years, that son’s body-strings begin to resonate to the harsh, sometimes demanding, testily humorous, irreverent, impatient, opinionated, forward-driving, silence-loving older masculine body.”

Family therapist Frank Pitman discusses, in his book *Man Enough*, the problems that result when boys do not receive the “blessing” of older men, and consequently do not feel “man enough.” He says that their insecurity expresses itself in their becoming philanderers, competitors, and/or controllers, as they desperately try to assert a distorted version of masculinity. Bly says that when you look at young men in gangs, you are looking at youths who have no older men around them at all. “Gang members try desperately to learn courage, family loyalty and discipline from each other.”

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