

Tool kit

Men experiencing difficult times

A self-help resource to help men experiencing difficult times

Lifeline's tool kit for men experiencing difficult times will provide some practical information about:

Understanding some common causes of difficult times for men

Recognising the signs of stress and strain

Developing some strategies for what men can do to get through tough times

Where to go for help

Everyone goes through rough patches in life and we all experience stress and strain during tough times.

However, sometimes problems don't go away on their own and we might not be able to solve them by ourselves. This can have a serious impact on our work, our relationships with family and friends and our physical and mental health.

Although we all go through difficult times in life, often men and women experience these situations differently. As a man, sometimes it is difficult to talk about our emotions. We often expect ourselves and others to just 'get on with it'. However, there are things you can do to get through tough times and you don't have to go through it alone. The most important thing to realise is that difficult times will pass and you can get through it.



What are some common causes of difficult times for men?

There are many issues and circumstances that can cause stress. Everyone deals with situations differently and what affects one person may not affect another.

Some of the common causes of tough times, particularly for men, include:

- Financial problems (e.g. debt, difficulty paying bills)
- Problems at work (e.g. job stress, job insecurity, difficulties with boss/co-workers)
- Unemployment, including redundancy
- Relationship problems (including difficulties with your partner/spouse, children, friends, parents, colleagues)
- Relationship breakdowns (e.g. through separation or divorce)
- Separation from children/family (due to relationship breakdown, work commitments, etc.) or child custody/visitation issues
- Physical health problems (e.g. illness, injury, chronic pain)
- Mental health problems (e.g. depression, anxiety)
- Environmental events or natural disasters (e.g. drought, flood, bushfires, cyclone)
- Death of loved ones
- Excessive alcohol or drug use
- Excessive gambling
- Bullying or harassment (e.g. at school or work)
- Dealing with sexuality issues (e.g. “coming out”, discrimination because of sexual preference or gender identity)
- Homelessness or housing difficulties
- Trauma or abuse (e.g. witnessing violence or warfare, physical, verbal or sexual abuse)
- Criminal or legal issues
- Significant change in circumstances (e.g. moving house or city/town, migration to/from Australia, becoming a parent, retiring from work).

Often, a number of these events happen at the same time, which may make the situation more stressful and overwhelming.

What are some common signs of stress and strain?

Different people show stress and strain in different ways. You may notice the physical symptoms of stress before you recognise your emotional feelings about a situation.

Sometimes, you might not even realise that you are stressed or becoming overwhelmed by your situation.

Some common signs of stress or strain may include:

- Physical symptoms, such as headaches, muscle aches/tension, weight loss or gain
- Feeling angry or aggressive
- Always feeling tired, lacking energy or motivation
- Increased nervousness, agitation, restlessness or fidgeting
- Often feeling down or depressed
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs or increased gambling
- Withdrawing from friends and family, becoming distant
- Having difficulty concentrating at work or school
- Having difficulty sleeping or sleeping all the time
- Feeling helpless or out of control
- Losing interest in activities that you usually enjoy
- Feeling hopeless, guilty, like you’re a “failure” or a burden to others
- Thoughts of harming yourself or others
- Feeling like nothing you do will fix the situation

All of these are common reactions to difficult circumstances. But, over time, they can have a negative impact on your health and may lead to physical or mental health problems (e.g. heart disease, ulcers, depression, anxiety).

Even though a situation may seem impossible to fix, there are a number of positive ways to cope with difficult circumstances that can help you get through it and find solutions.

What you can do to get through tough times?

There are lots of things you can do to deal with difficult circumstances and find solutions to your problems.

Here are some practical tips on how to get through tough times:

1 Recognise when you aren't coping

Men sometimes find it difficult to realise that they are stressed and that they might need some help to get through tough times. Being aware of how you react to stress can help you to recognise when you might need to take time out to relax or get help from others. Try and pay attention to your body, how you're feeling and any changes in your physical health, behaviour and emotions. If you're feeling overwhelmed or out of control, it's time to do something about it. Also, listen to concerns from family or friends about your wellbeing or behaviour.

2 Talk about it

Although it might be hard, talking about your problems with someone you trust (e.g. partner, friend, colleague, parent) can really help. Having someone listen to your problems can help to relieve stress, give you some perspective and allows you to let off steam and release negative emotions. You might even find that the person you talk to has gone through a similar situation and may have ways of coping that you haven't thought of.

If you don't feel comfortable talking to anyone you know, there are plenty of other people who can help. Telephone helplines (like Lifeline), your GP, counsellors and other health professionals can listen to your situation and help you to find strategies to manage the situation.

3 Take care of yourself

Stress and tension can have a negative impact on your health. During difficult times, it's important to look after yourself by eating healthily, exercising regularly, doing activities that you enjoy and finding time to relax. Exercise is particularly important, as it relieves tension and aggression, helps you to sleep better, can connect you with friends and keeps you fit and healthy. Don't forget to take time out to relax and do things that you enjoy. This can help to clear your head – read a book, listen to music, watch a movie, catch up with mates or go for a walk.

4 Reduce use of alcohol and drugs, including caffeine and nicotine

Some men use alcohol or drugs to try and escape their problems or to try and relax. However, alcohol and drugs can impair your judgment, leading to poor decisions and other risky behaviour. They can have a damaging effect on your relationships with your family and friends and your work. They can also have a serious impact on your physical health and can lead to aggression, agitation and mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety or psychosis. Even caffeine and nicotine can cause you to become agitated or anxious, so it's best to limit your intake as much as possible.

5 Avoid excessive gambling or other high-risk activities

Excessive gambling and other risky activities (e.g. dangerous driving, unsafe sex, self-harm, criminal activity) can make your problems worse and can put both you and others in danger. Gambling, high-risk investments and other risky financial activities (e.g. pyramid schemes) often have very low chances of success and may worsen your financial situation or result in increased debt. Engaging in high-risk activities can also cause conflict in your personal relationships or create problems at work/school.

6 Have a health check-up

A visit to your GP for a general health check up is a good idea during difficult times, even if you're not feeling 'sick'. Tell your doctor if you have been experiencing any physical ailments, such as headaches, aches and pains, difficulties sleeping or significant weight loss/gain. Also let them know if you've been experiencing any ongoing negative emotions, such as feeling anxious, panicky or depressed. Explain your situation – often your doctor can provide good advice and can also refer you to other services or people who can help.

7 Be proactive

Sometimes, if you're feeling out of control or hopeless, it can help to be proactive and come up with some practical ways to manage your situation. You might want to build your skills through a workshop or course, develop a plan of action or visit your local library or use the internet to find more information about your particular situation. For example, if you are experiencing financial difficulties, you might consider attending a workshop in budgeting, creating a family budget or talking to your bank or financial adviser about ways to better manage your finances. Stay positive and focus on what you can do, rather than what is out of your control.

8 Stay connected

It is important to stay in touch with family and friends, particularly during tough times. Catching up with mates and loved ones, in person, over the phone or via email or social networking sites, makes you feel valued and helps you from feeling isolated and alone. Getting involved in your community can also help you to stay connected – you could join a local club or group, try a new hobby or even consider volunteering to help others. Helping others is a great way to take your mind off things, get some perspective, meet new people and give something back to your community.





