

“I DON’T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT”; ADDICTION, DEPRESSION, AND THE LOSS OF THE RELATIONAL IN MEN’S LIVES

A THERAPY GROUP FOR MEN OFFERED BY THE NASHVILLE MEN’S INSTITUTE

...for many depressed men, recovery is linked to opposing the force of disconnection, and reentering the world of the relational—often kicking and screaming. A man cannot recover from...depression and remain simultaneously numb at the same time; he cannot be related and walled off simultaneously; he cannot be intimate with others before establishing intimate terms with his own heart.

(I Don’t Want To Talk About It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression, by Terrence Real. New York: Scribners, 1997, pp. 158-159.)

In Terrence Real’s words, depression in men is likely to be “mild, elusive, and chronic.” (p. 33) Frequently it is not us who are in conscious distress so much as the people with whom we live. Ill at ease in voicing our feelings, especially such unmanly ones as hurt and sadness and longing, instead we are prone to manifest such behaviors as irritability, dominance, drinking, and emotional unavailability, thus pushing away those whom we love and need.

Only recently have we begun to understand the ways in which the male role socialization process in our culture is inherently traumatic. The definition of manhood involves “standing up” to discomfort and pain. A man in our society, Real explains, is “more likely to react to depression by redoubling his efforts at work than by sitting still long enough to feel his own feelings.” (p. 35)

Linguist Deborah Tannen, who analyzed women’s “rapport talk” versus men’s “report talk,” found that a vital component of conversation among women was what she called “trouble talk,” which invites the listener to opening up about one’s own difficulties. For us as men, however, our cultivation of a stance of invulnerability, and our shame around exposing weakness, together conspire to cut us off from the healing force of felt community with others.

Healing our depression and isolation involves learning the skills of reconnection. This group experience will offer us the opportunity as men to explore our shared dilemmas of how to connect to our own felt experience, and how to share our feelings with other men, instead of turning to “mood buffers and self-esteem enhancers” like work, alcohol, and other addictions.

TIME: Wednesdays, 6:00 to 7:15 p.m.

COST: \$60 per session

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