

# What does it mean to be a young man, a man?

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It's a big question that a lot of men are thinking about now. For generations, there was a clear playbook on masculinity: be strong, stoic, a sturdy provider, and keep your feelings in check, whether or not those expectations were good for men in a relationship. The messages weren't great for loving well. They were straightforward and firm. Vulnerability was and is not acceptable.

However, in the last several years, that message has been rewritten and men are now stuck at a crossroads, unsure of where to go for respect, connection, and even self-worth. All of the messages from the media, politicians, and parents around their masculinity are mixed up and often even contradictory.

Lately, the talk about "toxic masculinity" has left a lot of young men and men confused. The messaging seems to blame and shame boys and men. They are told to be more masculine, stoic, and strong; they may even get the message that showing empathy and compassion is a sign of weakness. Be strong and not intimidating, confident and not arrogant, and you can lead but don't dominate – unless, of course, you really need to. So many mixed messages are leaving many young men and men feeling confused, irritated, and tired.

The old rules, old generational messaging are changing, and masculinity hasn't vanished – it is being redefined. For many young men and men, the most difficult part isn't letting go of the old ideas, and figuring out what the new version of masculinity is supposed to look like.

Traditionally, masculinity has been about what men do: working hard, providing, solving problems, and protecting. Those were the expectations, earned affirmations. Society has shifted recently, and it hasn't been subtle. Topics such as mental health, emotional connection, consent, equality, and mutual empowerment have gained focus. This is a good thing as the old ideas of masculine oppression weren't healthy for anyone – especially for young men and boys. Sorting out these new cultural messages is a difficult task. Young men and men are struggling with figuring out who they are supposed to be. The expectation to show emotion while still being authoritative may be confusing – especially when the messages seem to change depending upon the relationship and no one ever taught them the necessary skills for empathy, compassion, and kind boundaries.

Additionally, there is a lot of messaging blaming masculinity as a problem that needs compassion. Many young men and men hear that being masculine is inherently toxic, so they end up feeling that they need to apologize just for being men. That kind of messaging can trigger defensiveness and shame instead of growth. Of course, some expressions of masculinity are destructive, and qualities such as strength, assertiveness, and passion are also very valuable in the right context.

Where does this leave young men, all men? They are caught in a confusing oppression, trying not to be pigeon-holed into a stereotype and genuinely wanting to be good partners, lovers, friends, dads, and people. It's about time we redefine what it means to be a man, to define "MaleHeart".

The truth is, there is no one-size-fits-all answer. It's neither about being a tough man or a workaholic or being an overly emotional dude. Men don't have to be more or less masculine – they just need the freedom to define what masculinity, "MaleHeart" means for themselves. It's an internal journey.

Modern masculinity is about being real, authentic and showing up physically and emotionally for those around you. This may mean being emotional, patient, and taking care of your own mental fitness instead of pushing everything down and being silent, defensive, or aggressive. It's about recognizing that maleness may look different based on different men's backgrounds, their culture, race, and life experiences.

Instead of viewing this confusion as a failure, see it as a chance to find your own unique sense of being a man. The men who are really finding focus aren't trying to be perfect; they are taking the time to reflect on what truly matters and how men want to show up in their collaborative relationships. Redefining maleness is less about getting it right, being perfect, and more about building an authentic version of "MaleHeart" that feels genuine and sustainable. It is a process that involves making mistakes, being vulnerable and growing along the way, most likely with a small group of compassionate male friends, which may lead to better relationships, stronger mental fitness, and a more confident, compassionate self.

Ultimately, real strength is not about pretending emotions aren't present; it is about facing them, giving them a voice, and knowing how to be compassionate to them without being controlled by them. That is a skill, empathy for yourself and for others, that can be developed over time. Masculinity is evolving and like all growth it can be messy – and that's where real transformation happens. The balance of hopes and dreams, self empowerment, the ability to love and be loved, and having a purpose.