



ARC Mental Health Information Series

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Toxic Masculinity

The term toxic masculinity is often used to describe the negative aspects of exaggerated masculine traits. Toxic masculinity refers not to men's innate traits, but to the cultural construction of manhood that is imposed upon men. Stereotypical aspects of traditional masculinity such as social dominance, misogyny and homophobia can be considered "toxic" due in part to their promotion of violence, including sexual assault and domestic violence.



Harmful effects of toxic masculinity

1. Toxic masculinity dictates that the only emotion men can express is anger, which can hinder men from getting in touch with other things they're feeling. Suppressing mental health issues, such as depression, trauma, and anxiety can worsen symptoms and precipitate isolation, loss of jobs or friends, and even cause a man to contemplate suicide.
2. Toxic masculinity opposes seeking treatment even when injured or emotionally struggling. Ignoring pain while pushing oneself to work or exercise can cause more physical damage. This can lead a man to use and abuse substances such as alcohol or pain medication instead of seeking formal medical treatment.
3. Toxic masculinity values violence as the best way for men to prove their strength and power, and it discourages them from releasing their feelings in other ways. This may explain why men are more likely to be the perpetrators of domestic violence, gun violence and sexual assault as a way to show their dominance.
4. Controlling and entitlement behaviours are perhaps the most discussed toxic traits. Social programming mandates that men should exert dominance over their romantic, work and social life by suppressing anyone not embracing the masculine programming, and demanding unearned loyalty and respect. The resulting domestic and social conflict, including potential bullying toward marginalized groups, can lead to serious personal, occupational and legal consequences.



Common examples

- A boy in school being bullied for being "too feminine" because he doesn't act in traditionally masculine ways.
- A father telling his son to "toughen up" or that "men don't cry".
- A man who is afraid to be emotionally vulnerable with his partner for fear of seeming "weak".
- The violence against trans women that occurs every year by men who are threatened by a perceived violation of gender norms.
- A man who is struggling with his mental health but refuses to see a therapist because he fears being ridiculed and feels he should "man up" or "power through it".

Ways to reduce the impacts of toxic masculinity on your life

- Question your current understanding of masculinity.
- Educate parents on the negative consequences of physical punishment and humiliation techniques on children.
- Challenge those who value your opinion when they say statements that are misogynistic or toxic.
- Be intentional about recognizing how your understanding of masculinity shows up in everyday life, and have conversations about the origins of your beliefs and how they connect to larger issues in society.
- Seek help for your personal or relational difficulties in order to better understand and communicate.

Resources available

Canadian Men's Health Foundation – Inspiring Men To Live Healthier
www.menshealthfoundation.ca

AMI-Quebec – www.amiquebec.org, (514) 486-1448

Friends for mental health – www.asmfmh.org, (514) 636-6885

Relief – www.relief.ca, (514) 529-3081

Psychosocial support available at your local CLSC and through your primary care physician.

CLSC St-Hubert (450) 443-7400

CLSC Richelieu (450) 658-7561

CLSC Brossard (450) 445-4452

811 Info-Sante, press 9 for English

CLSC St-Jean-sur-Richelieu (450) 358-2572



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