

## TRANSCRIPT

*Man up or open up?*

### **Narrator:**

Man up or open up? Why do men find it so hard to talk about their mental health? Men's relationship with their mental health is often a complicated one. Despite 1 in 8 men in the UK having experienced some form of common mental health problem, men still seem to find it hard to open up about their mental well-being and seek help or support.

In fact, only 36% of referrals to NHS talking therapies are made for men, a figure that's even worse for younger males.

Although, statistically, more women suffer from mental health problems, men are three times as likely to die by suicide, and are far more prone to go missing, sleep rough, become dependent on alcohol, or to use drugs frequently. But why is this the case, and why do men find it so hard to talk about their mental health?

### **Dr Martin Robb:**

It's the persistence of outdated stereotypes about masculinity that often prevent men and boys from seeking help.

Despite massive changes in ideas about gender roles and relationships in recent years, many young men still feel a pressure to act tough and hide weakness, choosing to bottle things up or turn it into a bit of a joke rather than seek support.

### **Narrator:**

This is something that could be having a damaging effect on young men's health and well-being, as well as the lives of those around them.

It might feel as though this is painting a pretty bleak picture, but it's not all doom and gloom. Mental health services and voluntary organisations, and indeed men themselves, are finding imaginative and creative ways to engage men in talking about their mental health and wellbeing.

Alright Mate is an organisation that develops participatory art projects that normalise conversations about male mental health. Through their work, they've gained a unique insight into how to tackle this challenge.

### **Cally Hayes**

Based on our experience, there are three key things we've learnt about engaging men around their mental health.

Go to spaces where men are already. We know that men are not so good with accessing healthcare, for their physical health or mental health, so we want to take the conversation to where they are. We took our fatherhood and mental health installation into barbershops, sports centres and boxing clubs, and it was amazing to see how powerfully a familiar

environment affected conversation and participation. We found one of the biggest motivators to engage in our projects was altruism.

Men wanted to do this not necessarily to help themselves but to help others. What was important was that they could produce something that was tangible and useful. The sharing of their stories and experiences to co-create the installations and the books that we've done was instead motivated by a sense of usefulness, purpose and the desire to support other people. But for some men they found participating in the project helped them to process the experiences they were sharing in a way that they were not expecting.

Using stories and relatable voices is key to connecting with people. By hearing and seeing other people talk about their own stories and struggles, you're able to more easily recognise shared experience. You realise that any one of us might have had our own battle and have our own story to tell. By talking, we normalise that we all struggle with our mental health from time to time, that if we speak up, we don't need to do it alone.

**Narrator:**

Across the country, there are lots more initiatives just like Alright Mate, bringing men together to share their experiences in innovative and unique ways. From football teams founded by fathers suffering after the loss of a child, to walking groups that help veterans open up about trauma or even shed set up to help men to talk around a shared hands-on activity.

Evidence suggests that men prefer these in favour of more traditional therapies.

**Dr Martin Robb:**

It's clear that we need to rethink how we approach men's mental health. We need to rethink how we offer help to men who are struggling with their mental health, building on the brilliant work being done by organisations like Alright Mate, and making sure that the help we offer is accessible and inclusive for everyone. But we also need to rethink the messages we give to men and boys about what it means to be a man.

We need to challenge outdated ideas about masculinity that prevent men from seeking help in the first place, so that no man has to suffer in silence, and so that men see that it's better to open up than to man up.