

# Why Don't Men Speak?

**Men don't speak because no one is listening. Let's find a way to listen...**

**By Kenny Mammarella-D'Cruz**

- Do you wish you could truly 'reach' the men in your life in a more meaningful way?
- Do you feel you often hit a brick wall when talking with your husband?
- Do you have any concerns about the future of your son / nephew?
- Has your husband turned into your son?

Men seem to have become increasingly unapproachable, confused and aloof. If you consider that the biggest killer of men under 45 is suicide, that one in four men have thought about taking their own life, and that over 40% of men suffer in silence, never sharing their feelings, we may have some insights into why so many men are struggling to heal, feel and 'get real' - why it's tough being a man.



With the rise of significant public focus on toxic masculinity and the #metoo movement, men are struggling to speak about their needs and feelings, and to find space for themselves in their own lives, leave alone in society.

So many men don't have a sense of who they really are, their core needs, passions, purpose, or even their perspectives on life. They're coming [from 'am I?' rather than "I am"](#), they don't have a clear sense of self, they're dependent on the approval of others, paranoia rules, and they hand their power over to others.

Having worked with men for almost 30 years, I have noticed a big increase in mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, isolation, and suicidal tendencies. A resistance to seeking traditional professional help for their mental health issues has obvious devastating consequences for the men, their families, their friends and their communities. One of the most heart-breaking patterns is how the suffering is passed down from generation to generation, causing history to repeat itself. Men who don't know how to express their true feelings and distress, are unable to pass those life skills on to their boys and young men, and so the cycle continues.

So why do men find themselves in such a sorry state of affairs? Throughout the years, I have observed a few recurring elements which might explain the helplessness that many men feel today. One major cause has been the harmful cultural narrative that says that males are weak if they express emotions other than anger. A lack of services and support geared towards the male psyche is a second, often overlooked, element – men simply don't know who to turn to in moments of need. There also seems to be a cultural bias, that emphasises the bad things that are perpetrated by males and minimises the good (the Male Psychology Network calls this the [Gamma Bias](#)).

So how come don't men speak about what's really going on for them? I put this question to the audience at a talk I gave at the [Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce](#) (RSA), whose mission is to enrich society through ideas and action, since 1754.



Here's what came up:

**(i) Fear of humiliation and abandonment**

In my experience, men would rather take their own life than die of humiliation or be abandoned. Men can be ruled by guilt for what they've done wrong, what others say they've done wrong and for what they haven't been able to put right.

A lot of men are often in what I describe as '*survival mode*'. By this I mean that they generally come from an internal place of panic and fear, and will do anything to avoid abandonment, humiliation and losing their place in the pecking order. All of this can operate on a deeply unconscious level, while the unsuspecting man goes about his day. Men often over-ride their feminine responsive side, and get addicted to reacting to life in panic. Fear, inner turmoil, unruly testosterone and male hormones, can enslave a man to an attitude that life is unsafe, and that he is constantly under attack, and therefore, he needs to live in a perpetual survival mode.

Most importantly, men can't bare their feelings when those around them, especially the women, are angry or in pain. So men second-guess, step forward and fix, or step back silently.

**(ii) No one's listening**

Sadly, these days, many men don't have male friends and even for those who do have friends, many would consider it to be a huge risk to speak truthfully to them about emotions. They don't feel it's safe to open up about what's really going on in their lives with their drinking chums, fellow jocks, work colleagues, family and friends. Understandably, men need their sense of belonging - being part of a pack and accepted by the tribe is fundamentally important to men and boys.

If a man starts speaking honestly and questioning the status quo, it can be perceived as a threat to family and friends and therefore, home ground may not be fertile soil in which to plant new seeds. Any unearthing of old roots and reasons might be better done with compassion and care, away from home ground.

Then where does a man go to find out who he is and who he no longer needs to be? Is there a safe place where he doesn't have to risk losing who and what he already has? Where he doesn't have to risk being met with a brick wall, ridicule, humiliation, or being told to forget about it and get another round of drinks in? Is there a place where a friend won't immediately tell their own dramatic counter story that leaves him feeling that he doesn't have a right to feel his feelings because others are far worse off?

These were the questions I was asking myself sixteen years ago, after having travelled the world and lived in Australia and Fiji for five years. Upon returning to London I found my friends distracted by drink, drugs, money, power, sex, love and unhealthy behavior. They were unconsciously either trying to fill their

emotional holes with empty fixes, or to avoid them by moving into the land of limbo in their heads. So, I gathered a dozen or so friends in my lounge and told them that I was going to start a men's group. I admitted that I didn't know what one was, as I'd never been to one before, but I soon got a format together, and we kicked off to a good, healthy start.

### **(iii) Betrayal of family and father**

Every family has a family culture, family 'scripts' that often repeat, family illnesses and causes of death, that seem to be handed down from generation to generation. I wonder whether what's really handed down are the family suppressions, anxieties and belief systems, that turn into emotional, mental, physical and social health issues?

Many men have difficulty opening up about their emotions because they have not had men in their lives who were capable of modelling emotional intelligence for them. Perhaps their fathers were distracted by corporate and social ladders, or were childishly unavailable for conversations of depth and courage. Perhaps their grandfathers had grown distant - still surviving a war. Perhaps their uncles had been absorbed by a 12-steps programme, a religion, or had quoted the wisdom and stories of others because they were unable to truly share themselves or meet others where they are.

So perhaps these men didn't speak because they didn't know how to be there for themselves, let alone for another human being. People can't share what they haven't got.

Some men don't speak honestly about their feelings because of a sense that doing so would be some sort of betrayal of the accepted norms of society or the family. Questioning familiar values, uncovering secrets and lies and living beyond the successes (and limitations) of the father can be distressing for all concerned. It can risk feelings of betrayal, isolation and bringing badness to the family - whether it would help move things beyond current dysfunction or not.

How can we challenge, change and empower our fathers, brothers, sons, friends and society, so that all voices are heard, and healthy men and boys are enabled to contribute to their communities? Here are some suggestions:

### **(i) Speak with other men**

Why take the risk of speaking if there's no one around who knows how to unconditionally, non-judgmentally, open-heartedly listen? Many men don't do well with hierarchy, and going to see a therapist may feel like going to the headmaster's office (where incorrect behavior might come with unpleasant

consequences). This is where men's groups come in. A men's group is a group of men sitting in a circle listening and talking from their own experience in a non-hierarchical and safe space.

Support groups and therapy are stereotypically perceived to be for severely distressed people, and therefore men are less likely to attend them and more likely to attend men's groups. Peer-to-peer groups empower men and allow men to empower others, to lead the way, to call the shots, and to 'save' themselves, rather than having to depend on an authority figure or expert.

Men's groups offer both the support and the social interaction that men need for good health. They offer men a place to air potentially embarrassing men's health issues, to be held accountable and to have a space to explore any number of other needs which, if left unmet, might lead to a mental health issue later.

At my own online and face-to-face MenSpeak men's groups we hold a space of equality, encouraging peer-to-peer support, where men can safely speak in the language of their minds without running the risk of someone trying to save, smother or censor them. It is a space where a man's grunts and mumbles are welcome and understood; a space where 'male' means growing with consciousness and authenticity, rather than being subject to masculine or feminine judgments and restrictions. Men's groups are where we get real, share our 'stuff', learn from other people's experiences and leave feeling lighter - having turned fraudulent 'masculine' into more authentic and available masculine.

I have found that in men's groups men are more than happy to express 'unmanly' emotions such as fear, grief, sadness, helplessness and loneliness, disproving the stereotype that men don't or shouldn't show emotions. Once a safe space is made, and once men are communicated with in a manner that suits their wiring, they feel free to express themselves. When one man in the group expresses a 'taboo' emotion, this gives the other men permission to express theirs - hence men's groups are a fast way of changing the cultural narrative that has been imposed on males: that showing emotion is weak.

## **(ii) Know yourself**

Men can't share what men don't have. Therefore, in my opinion, the most efficient first step, is to set aside notions of blame and to just accept the facts. The next step is to set aside the logical stories we've grown to believe and to explore our own emotional journey.

It's important to feel your feelings and allow the pain to pass, rather than avoiding the pain and thinking about how to 'perform' feeling. Some men get addicted to their rageful/aggressive/helpless feelings. Some avoid them by getting high either with gushing over-enthusiasm or with drugs. Others avoid them by getting low with depression or with alcohol. Many obsess, or abuse themselves or others. Sadly many men withdraw, think crazy thoughts and move towards suicide.

As a man allows himself to feel his own feelings, he gains access to the feelings of others, and can sit with uncomfortable feelings and allow them to pass.

One of the most powerful tools that I use in my practice working with men, is called Voice Dialogue. It's a method that allows you to come into dialogue with the inner voices that belong to the various parts of your personality - your 'selves'. Each of these selves has its own job and its own way of thinking, feeling, behaving and observing.

We usually identify with one or more sub-personalities - our so-called "primary selves" - often to the exclusion of other, important sub-personalities. In Voice Dialogue, the various selves are invited to speak freely and to manifest themselves with all their energy. We all have many, common sub-personalities, including an inner (adult) man, an inner child, a protector. A major problem is that our ego often identifies itself strongly with sub-personalities that are very critical of our actions, such as the 'controlling protector' and the 'critic'.

Normally, there are many conflicting and confusing voices in our inner worlds. I use Voice Dialogue to speak with the relevant sub-personalities individually, allowing each one to bring forward its own profound messages. They can then function as a team, to determine the best way forward. The man who emerges from within is then able to internally pass the proverbial ball to the best sub-personality to handle the task at hand.

Every one of us has a vulnerable part inside, which feels and expresses emotions. Some people call this part our 'vulnerable self', others call it the 'inner child' while others call it the 'little boy or girl inside'. More and more men are learning to take care of the fearful little boy inside themselves, rather than sending it out into the world to do a man's job.

### **(iii) Come out of 'survival mode'**

Here's a quick, simple mind-trick that I teach men to use to get out of their fearful minds and to embody the here and now.

I tell them: *"If you notice that you're lost in your obsessive thoughts and fearful feelings don't even think to the end of the sentence. Stop. Take a deep breath. On the inhale think: 'Thank you for reminding me who I used to be.' Then on the exhale, take part with what's in front of you and reengage with the here and now."*

Two of my favourite MenSpeak men's groups' ground rules encourage men to use language that is authentic and empowering, rather than language that disowns and disempowers. They are:

1. Own what you say by using "I" statements rather than "we" (which inflicts the same perspective on others), "you" (which depersonalises and safely points the finger), or "one" (which takes

everybody into their head with superiority). It feels powerful and connected to consciously own your words;

2. Be in the present by using “happened” rather than “happens” when referring to something that you don’t want to happen anymore, so that there’s space in the present for change to take place.

Don’t overthink things. Little, if anything, about life is ever worked out in the head. We our lives forward but we understand it backward so take part in life and adjust accordingly rather than just thinking about it before taking your first step.

Perhaps my favourite ground rule is to live beyond the rules. Playing small, in order to be ‘safe’ or ‘liked’, will probably keep you small and stuck. Exploring the edge of your comfort zone is likely to bring challenges and help you grow. Live beyond your fears, fantasies and old restrictions, to express a more authentic you in daily life.



Here’s to living life larger and more authentically, as we step off the edge – and fly! In addition to the private sessions and men’s groups (in London and online), hanging out together is a basic need to keep men sane, connected and alive. At MenSpeak, we go camping, travelling and still love to play with fire.

## About Kenny



*Kenny Mammarella-D'Cruz* FRSA  
**THE MAN WHISPERER™.CO.UK**

As a [personal development consultant](#), I help men (and women) achieve their life, relationship & career goals. I work online with private clients, hold men's groups in London and online and train people to facilitate their own groups and communicate more consciously with men.

I'm also a business consultant, specialising in family-run businesses helping to hold the focus of the organisation while exploring interpersonal issues.

My unusual life journey has taken me from refugee camps, through overcoming OCD, Tourette's and other mental health issues, to working with Mother Teresa and the dying in Calcutta and becoming one of the UK's leading men's personal development consultants. I love helping men (and women) gain the awareness and tools to consciously embody their potential and meet all of life's challenges.

'Newsweek' entitled their chapter about my work 'The Man Whisperer' in their brilliant book [The Descent of Man: Investigating Male Suicide](#).

I have been hosting weekly [MenSpeak men's groups](#) for over 16 years, with countless men's lives being saved, in ways big and small, and numerous communities and friendship circles being born through groups meetings and outings.

I also host a weekly show on [The Men's Radio](#) station, I'm getting a good airing on TV and will launch a charity this year to simply pass all of this on, to save, turn-around and give a breath of life to the many people who want to set their lives free.

*"He's a gentle voice in the ears of the many men who come to him for help with life – a man whisperer."* – Newsweek

*"Coach, consultant and guru of all things men."* – Daily Express

[www.themanwhisperer.co.uk](http://www.themanwhisperer.co.uk) | [www.mensgroups.co.uk](http://www.mensgroups.co.uk) | +44 7957 350034