

## Breaking the Silence on Prioritizing Dads' Emotional Well-being



*I do not own this image*

Let me start with a short story. This is an actual situation that recently took place as I was catching up with a friend (dad) recently. Let's call him Jeff. I had not seen Jeff for a few months now as we kept saying that we would grab that catch-up coffee but somehow days turned to weeks which turned to months. I am sure you are familiar with that scenario. I knew that we both were very busy and had a few business trips. Still definitely never a good excuse. I should have made more of an effort. I also remember that the last time we caught-up, Jeff was struggling a bit. He was dealing with a friend's passing as well as some instability in career and the "what's next?" question was lingering there. I also have to say that Jeff is in my eyes a very "strong" man on all aspects, ranging from physical to emotional. I genuinely look up to Jeff. Interestingly though, as we were catching-up, relatively early in the conversation, he took a deep breath as if to prepare to say something that is not easy, and then mentioned that he had been seeking therapy and professional help since we last met. Jeff and I are not strangers to opening up and showing vulnerability, however, it was very eye opening to me that even someone as "strong" as my friend Jeff, had to slightly hesitate and push himself to share something like that with me. I of course, quickly made sure to have Jeff realize that I am no stranger to that and that he did great by doing this. It makes one wonder though, how many others are in similar situations and never

seek help or even mention it? How many are struggling in silence? I hence wanted to accelerate my agenda and write my thoughts about this. Time to break this silence.

The evolving role of fathers in modern society brings with it a need to address the emotional challenges they face. However, societal expectations often discourage men from openly expressing their feelings, creating barriers that hinder their emotional well-being. Prioritizing mental health for men in general and dads in particular is therefore very important. Despite variations in severity between countries, I explore below the societal pressures that make it challenging for dads to open up, and the urgent need to address this issue globally.

### **Emotional Challenges, Societal Pressures and Cultural Variations**

Dads, like any human being, experience a wide range of emotions, but traditional gender norms and societal pressures often discourage them from openly expressing vulnerability. In many cultures, men are expected to embody strength and stoicism, leaving little room for emotional transparency. This can create internal conflicts and contribute to feelings of isolation, as men may fear judgment or perceive their emotions as a sign of weakness. This is magnified for men in fatherhood roles as expectations and scrutiny are even higher. The fear of not living up to societal expectations can lead to a sense of inadequacy, adding to the emotional burden.

The societal pressures that hinder emotional expression vary between countries and cultures. For instance, in countries with more conservative norms, fathers will face stronger resistance when attempting to defy traditional gender expectations. On the other hand, in more progressive countries, while the pressures may be less severe, the lingering influence of historical gender norms can still make it challenging for men and dads to fully embrace their emotions. For an enlightening TED Talk on this, refer to The unfortunate effect of toxic masculinity, by Lisa Nielson PhD <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVauMOZfYLU> .

### **Why focus on Fatherhood?**

Fatherhood itself, while an amazing and wonderful growth and fulfilling experience on so many levels, brings a unique set of emotional challenges that can further complicate the journey toward emotional well-being. Dads often experience increased responsibilities, heightened financial pressures/expectations, and a desire to be actively involved in their children's lives. (See my article on "the changing role of dads" here [https://medium.com/@michaelmalek\\_1980/the-changing-role-of-dads-2bcd26f66132](https://medium.com/@michaelmalek_1980/the-changing-role-of-dads-2bcd26f66132)). Balancing work, family, and personal needs becomes a delicate juggling act, leaving little time and energy for introspection and emotional self-care. The intense emotional investment that comes with fatherhood can amplify the need for dads to address their emotional well-being, as their mental state directly affects the family dynamics and the well-being of their children.

Although the severity of these challenges varies among dads in different countries, it is crucial to recognize that even in more progressive societies, the problem persists. Opening up about emotions and seeking support should not be limited by geographical boundaries or cultural contexts. Mental health is a universal concern, and it is essential to foster an environment that allows fathers to prioritize their emotional well-being without fear of judgment or social repercussions.

Here are some well-known strategies to overcome the challenges and prioritize emotional well-being. Make sure to practice and experience one or a combination of them:

1. **Self-reflection and Emotional Awareness:** Take time to reflect on emotions, validate them, and practice self-compassion.
2. **Open Communication:** Foster open and honest communication with partners, family, and friends, creating a safe space for sharing feelings.
3. **Seeking Support:** Connect with other dads through parenting communities, support groups, or professional help when needed. Reach out and let's explore how we can create communities to support dads further.
4. **Developing Coping Mechanisms:** Engage in activities that promote relaxation, prioritize self-care, and practice stress management techniques. There is no harm in experimenting with coping mechanism. Each one of us is different and benefits in a different way from different techniques. A helpful book that I read recently is the "Miracle Morning" <https://miraclemorning.com/>
5. **Engage in Men only activities:** Take time with your buddies, or other men that share similar interests. Men do need that time with other men where they can be more in touch with their masculinity without having to worry about anything else. Dads are no exception. Arguably they needed even more as they are often expected to be nurturing and caring, and in control, in their family setting and with their kids. Examples could be team sports, men only events, clubs, camping, retreats, race track, Golf etc.

The above is easier said than done. What counts the most though is for you to be kind to yourself and understand that nothing can ever be worth sacrificing your emotional well-being. This is where it all starts. You will not be able to fulfill any role adequately when you are not whole.

There is hope though as we see more and more awareness on this topic surfacing and even some corporates have started to promote change. Here are some examples of initiatives of companies addressing Men's emotional well-being:

- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs):** Several companies offer EAPs that provide counseling services and resources to employees, including fathers' specific, to support their mental health.
- **Parental Leave Policies:** Some progressive companies have implemented extended and flexible parental leave policies that acknowledge the emotional challenges faced by dads and promote work-life balance.

- Employee Resource Groups (ERGs): Companies have established ERGs focused on fathers and men's well-being, providing a platform for open discussions, sharing experiences, and promoting mental health awareness.

- Mental Health Training: Organizations are investing in mental health training programs that equip managers and leaders with the knowledge and skills to support their male employees' emotional well-being.

By implementing such initiatives, these companies and institutions create a culture that normalizes conversations around men's emotional well-being, reduces stigma, and encourages open dialogue. However, despite all these great initiatives and many multinational companies clearly providing a lot of organized support, our well-being as men and dads remains our own responsibility and a priority that we need to put out there with the other priorities that we tend to often overlook. Not everyone works for a multinational or has the chance to be exposed to such initiatives. It is time to seek it and to disseminate the knowledge, to break the silence on prioritizing emotional wellbeing for dads and men in general.

### **Some final thoughts**

Nurturing emotional well-being in modern dads requires addressing the societal pressures and barriers that hinder their ability to open up. While the severity of these challenges may vary between countries, it is crucial to acknowledge that no man or dad should feel ashamed or isolated for expressing vulnerability or need for help. By promoting open dialogue, challenging gender norms, and providing support networks, we can create a more inclusive and compassionate society that empowers fathers to prioritize their mental health. Let us work together to break down these barriers and ensure that men in general and dads in particular worldwide can truly embrace their emotions, seek support, and lead fulfilling lives as they navigate the ever-changing landscape of fatherhood. By doing so we are able to better fulfill our purpose as men, support our partners, support each other, our colleagues, our kids, our societies, and live life as our true selves.

By Michael Malek

*Thank you for your time and attention. If you like what you read and would like to see more similar content, please go to [Seekmike.com](http://Seekmike.com)*

*References and inspirations:*

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