

GEORGE'S STORY (PSYDONAME)

This month is the annual Movember movement across the world, an opportunity to raise awareness and tackle the issues of men's health.

In recent years, this has grown and expanded from the opportunity to avoid shaving for 30 days (that was always my excuse) to addressing many health topics including suicide prevention among men. This has been a particularly welcome in Wales, where suicide rates are higher for men than in other part of the United Kingdom.

Part of the stigma that still exists about mental health for men is that men have greater difficulty talking about their own struggles than women do. My own personal experience as a Mental Health Champion with Time to Change, has also evidenced the challenge "us blokes" face. In the last twelve months, I have seen more talks, more blogs, and more online content on the subject from women than men.

Why does it seem to be more difficult for men to address their own mental health?

I am still faced with some outdated stereotypes as a man suffering from depression; men as a source of

In many of these macho images, there is little room for showing poor mental health. The men who are most revered in society (famous, wealthy, successful, powerful) are not always ready to admit their struggles in public and that can leave the "average bloke" feeling uncertain about speaking out.

It is great that the tide is turning for men. When Prince William and Prince Harry began talking openly about their own mental health challenges, it gave the nation an incredible lift. One by one, more of these revered men are coming forward and openly addressing mental health; footballers, politicians, actors, anyone can talk about it. I do not consider that these men are weak or failing by speaking out, in fact, they are the brave ones.

That expression is still often used for the wrong reasons, unfortunately. The concept that mental health can be conquered by simply acting more "like a man" is misguided.

Whenever I give an awareness talk, I stress that the guidance, support and services that are available do not discriminate based on gender; men are as entitled to help and respect as women.

Perhaps I have been one of the lucky ones. I suffered from depression from the age of 14, I came perilously close to suicide twice and I faced struggles with my mental health for most of my life. Yet I am still here. This is down to a few good people, a lot of difficult days and one resolution to survive that has often wavered but never failed.

One of the reasons that I turned my life around is that I managed to tackle this problem directly. Not only did I endure those hard times, it made me determined to learn more about mental health problems. I became a champion of mental health in the workplace, I joined the

TTCW (Time to Change) campaign and for the last five months, I have been working for one of the biggest mental health charities in Wales.

I was lucky to find the support and strength to not just endure my problems but to turn it into my own personal campaign to address stigma and discrimination so that other men like me feel safe in talking about their own challenges.

There has never been a better time to seek – and be accepted for – help with your mental wellbeing. I recently reminded a friend that while you can get better, the first step has to be yours. If you are suffering from poor mental health, it might feel like the hardest step to take but it can lead to easier and better steps too.

Some of the ways I found to tackle this challenge include:

- Talking to someone you trust, a close friend or family member, maybe even your doctor (my sister was the first person I could open up);
- Considering why you find it uncomfortable asking for help and whether those reasons are actually stopping you from getting the support you need;
- Reading more about mental health and the varied guidance and advice that is easily accessible;
- Finding a support group, there are many around the country that are free and open to anyone (a friend of mine runs a very helpful drop-in service in Clydach near Swansea);
- Consider what are your weapons in this fight (i.e. the ways you combat poor mental health) – it could be anything from regular exercise to spending time with friends (for me, creative writing helps to lift me during the darker days);
- Finding stories and case studies that will help you understand what other men have been through;
- Getting involved in the great campaigns and activities that raise awareness of mental health (I love being a part of TTCW but there are many ways to get involved).

I have spoken about this subject to men of all ages, different backgrounds and with a variety of mental health concerns. It is encouraging to see more men talking about mental health and this trend needs to continue.

I share my story and experiences as a way of encouraging others to do the same but you can find a path that suits your needs.

The next time somebody tells you to “man up”, remember mental health affects us all regardless of gender so do not feel like being a man (or the perception of what it means to be a “man”) is a barrier to finding the path to a healthier, happier you.

Find out more about talking to people about your mental health by reading our [resource](#) and read more about [depression](#)

Would you like to become a [Time to Change Wales champion](#)?

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/your-stories/man-up-getting-more-men-in-mental-health/#.WplbfEx2smw>