

TEACHING NOTES

The 21st Century Man

Everything you need to run your own
21st Century Man Workshop





Introduction

"When talking to men about masculinity, I often feel I am trying to talk to fish about water."

Grayson Perry

Grayson is certainly right that most men haven't spent much time thinking about masculinity, but in our experience once you give them the opportunity, it's hard to stop them talking about it.

The 21st Century Man Workshop was developed by Humans Being CIC as part of the Men's Health Unlocked project, which ran activities around Leeds that link men into services, activities and strategic decision making.

The workshop will give you a format for a stimulating, interesting conversation that leaves men feeling clearer and more positive about what masculinity means to them.

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for Humans Being CIC
and Men's Health Unlocked



Less heat, more light

Masculinity can be a divisive topic and it often feels as though we're being asked to pick sides, with the most aggressive voices at each extreme stereotyping and denigrating the other. It can be a damaging cultural environment for male identity, fuelling defensiveness, conflict, confusion and low self-esteem.

In our experience most men don't fit into a particular 'side' – their identities are nuanced and complex but tethered firmly to universal ideas about how we care for ourselves and others. It's a world away from what we see in newspaper columns or social media.

We've tried to create a format that frees the conversation from the heat of the culture wars and throws light on the personal and universal quest for healthier and happier lives for all.

As soon as men see that masculinity is an idea and are invited to talk about what it means to them, they have the power to **reject, reclaim and redefine** it for themselves.

It's important to note that this workshop is not promoting a particular kind of masculinity or discouraging others – it's for men to define **what they think is healthy** for them and others.



'It's food for thought. Thinking about positive masculinity helps you get to grips with who you are'.

Who this workshop is for

This workshop is for any adult identifying as male. We've run it successfully more than 20 times – with brewery staff, self-described geeks at an ICT project, elderly Jewish men in sheltered accommodation, mental health support groups, HIV positive men, a black and Asian men's group, healthcare workers, asylum seekers and more.

You may want to tweak some of the materials to fit your participants, particularly if you are delivering outside the UK, but this structure can open up a positive conversation about masculinity for any group of adult men.

This workshop wasn't designed for under-18s or women and hasn't been tested with them.



Outcomes

What participants will get out of the session

The workshops we've run have been wide-ranging, with discussions about being a father, being a son, friendship, violence against women, mental health, films and TV, childhood, physical health, relationships, stoicism, sexism, creativity and lots of laughter.

By the end of the session, participants will:

- Have reflected on different kinds of masculinities
- Be able to explain what they value about being a man
- Be able to explain what they think healthy masculinity is
- Have felt that their feelings and thoughts about being a man in the 21st century have been heard

They may also:

- Set themselves a goal for putting their ideas about healthy masculinity into practice
- Take practical steps towards a happier and healthier life

"I've really liked thinking about men from the past and looking to the future – men being more open, emotional, listening more, being less cock-sure and hopefully making a better, less violent future for the survival of humanity."

Many participants found it fairly easy to find **practical ways** to put their ideas about healthy masculinity into practice.

These included:

- Getting in touch with friends they hadn't spoken to for a long time
- Making an effort to be more appreciative of their wife/partner
- Physical activity – going for a walk, gym, football
- Improving diet, cooking healthy meals

Other participants took away more general ideas:

- "I'm going to make an effort to be kinder to myself – life can be tough and you have to be compassionate."
- "There is no one way of being a man – 'you are enough.'"
- "I'm going to remember that it's okay to ask for help."

'It's made me feel connected, I'm not alone and you can always see solutions to problems if you look'.

'It's really good to feel listened to'.

Practicalities

The workshops take between 1.5 – 2 hours and can be run online or in person.

It is suitable for groups of between five and thirty men.

A whiteboard – either physical or virtual – is necessary to create a good discussion. For example, when participants can see a list of attributes of healthy masculinity growing in front of them, they will feel inspired to add more.

Writing contributions on the board also helps to keep the conversation on topic.

For in-person delivery you will need:

- A comfortable space with room to write, preferably with tables
- 'Images of masculinity' paper handouts or a way of showing the slides
- A whiteboard, flipchart or similar
- Copies of the 'my healthy masculinity' cards for each participant

For online delivery you will need:

- Images of masculinity slides
- A virtual whiteboard or similar



Promoting the workshop

We ran this workshop in environments where men were already meeting regularly, mainly support groups, social groups, workplaces, educational and residential settings.

With 'captive' audiences the workshop was almost universally popular.

Paradoxically, we didn't find it easy to recruit men to attend the discussions with posters and social media alone.

We'd be really interested to hear from anyone who finds a successful way of promoting the workshop to the general public.

Dealing with sexism, homophobia and transphobia

The workshop tends to keep a positive focus but there's a possibility that some participants may use the topic to air discriminatory views.

This session isn't designed to be a place to explore these kinds of views and there is a risk that they could derail it with arguments, negativity and hurtful rhetoric.

We suggest that these kinds of views or language be **challenged rather than explored** in this session.

Encourage participants to keep to the topic of what healthy masculinity is for them rather than telling people of other genders or sexualities what they should do.

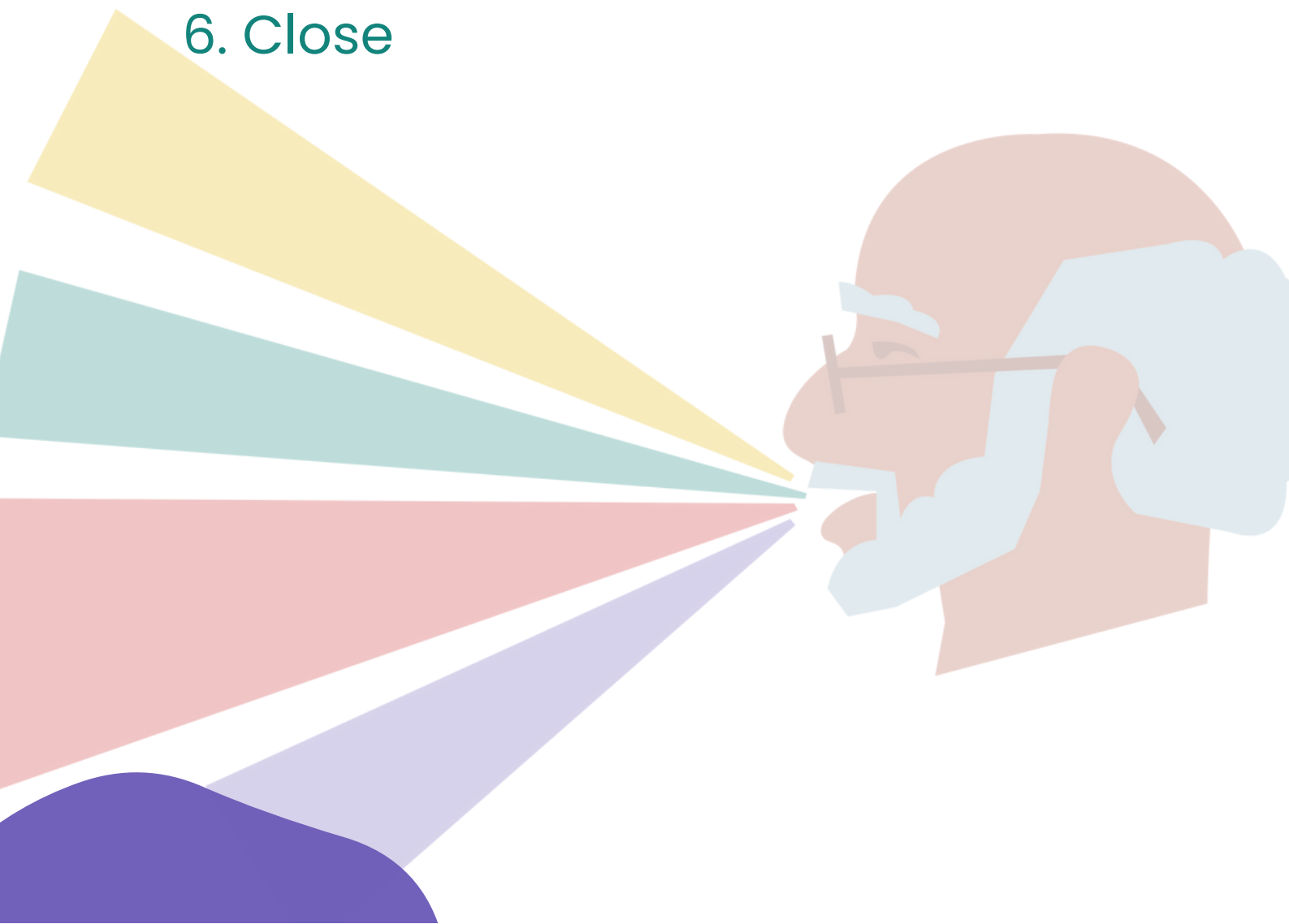
The discussions should be open and non-judgemental but we advise beginning the workshop with some **group guidelines** that ask participants not to use discriminatory language.

Ensure that you're clear in your mind what is and what isn't acceptable and how you will challenge it.



The workshop

1. Introductions
2. Images of Masculinity
3. The 'Act Like a Man' Box
4. The 'Healthy Masculinity' Box
5. My Healthy Masculinity
6. Close



1. Introductions

Welcome the participants to the workshop and summarise the content and outcomes.

Explain that we're going to look at some stereotypes of masculinity – society's idea about what a man should be; then we'll look at what you think healthy masculinity looks like; finally we'll think about how you might put your own ideas into practice.

Tell participants that there are no right or wrong answers.

The aim of this is for all of us to have the chance to think and share thoughts and experiences about being a man and have a clearer idea about what's really important to us.

Explain that although it will be an open discussion and we want to hear everyone's honest thoughts, we have to make it a comfortable space for everyone so please don't use discriminatory language. You may already have guidelines or a code of conduct for the setting.



2. Images of masculinity

Explain that for any discussion about masculinity, we have to know what masculinity is.

What does the internet think masculinity looks like? Here are some images that Google gives us if we search for 'masculine man' or 'real man'.

Hand round the 'images of men' handouts or show the slides. Explain that these are some of the top images that appear in a search.

Ask:

What do you think about these images?

What kind of people do they show?

What sort of personalities are they trying to show?

Share that Google very carefully works out which are the most popular searches, so this doesn't just tell us what Google thinks, it gives us an idea what society thinks in general.

TIP: The images we provide were produced by a Google search in the UK in 2022. You may want to update them for your workshop.

Although the images you show shouldn't be offensive, they don't have to be culturally appropriate – participants may be interested to see how little mainstream media images represent them and their communities.

3. The 'Act Like a Man' Box

Ask: Has anyone has ever been told or heard someone being told to “act like a man” or “man up”? What do you think people mean by that?

Write “Act like a man” at top of the whiteboard/screen and compile a list. Clarify that you’re not asking for facts, personal opinions or feelings, you’re asking for stereotypes – what wider society tends to think.

- You can use these follow-up questions to deepen the discussion: How are men ‘supposed’ to be different from women?
- What feelings is a “real man” supposed to have and how is he supposed to show them?
- How are “real men” supposed to deal with problems?
- How do real men deal with risk and safety?

Draw a box around the list. Entitle it ‘**The act like a man box**’.

Ask: What do you like about the things in this box?
What do you dislike?

TIP: While there may be some positive contributions to the box (for example ‘supporting others’, ‘taking responsibility’), some participants may talk about feeling belittled, repressed, frustrated or hurt in other ways by expectations of masculinity.

It’s important not to let this activity take up too much space in the workshop – it’s the part where negative or contentious topics are most likely to come up.

Think of it primarily as a way of framing the next activity. The men will be defining a problem, which will make it easier for them to create a solution in the next section.

4. The 'Healthy Masculinity' Box

Ask: To you, what is healthy masculinity?

Clarify that by 'healthy' you mean 'positive' rather than just physically healthy.

Create another box with the title 'Healthy Masculinity' and add contributions.

You can **broaden the discussion** with these questions:

- What kind of masculinity is healthy for men?
- What is healthy for women?
- What is healthy for sons and daughters?

Emphasise that we don't have to agree. Everyone has their own ideas.

TIP: This activity will create an inspiring list of possibilities that will give participants the beginning of a new vision of manhood. It should be lively, optimistic and validating. Although we are creating a list together, participants don't have to agree – there is no 'one size fits all'.

5. My healthy masculinity

Ask: From the list we've created (or in addition), what's most important for your health and happiness?

Choose 3 – 6 things only and put them on the front of the card.

Hand round the 'My Healthy Masculinity' cards for participants to fill in individually. This should take around five minutes. If you're running the workshop online, ask participants to write down their lists on paper or digitally.

Supplementary Exercise – encouraging healthy masculinity

Ask: Think about the healthy masculinity box.

What can we do to encourage healthy masculinity in this workplace/college/etc.?

Make a plan with some practical actions.

After 10–20 minutes, bring the group back together for quick feedback.

Ask: How could you put those things you care about into practice? Take a look at your list and think of one step you can take for a healthier and happier you.

This activity could be done in pairs or individually.

Bring the group back together for quick feedback.

TIP: participants will begin by picking their favourite aspects from the list created in the previous activity.

This is straightforward but choosing 'one step I'm going to take for my own health and happiness' may be difficult for some people to complete. It may help to put participants into pairs.

6. Close

Ask each participant in turn:

What will you remember from today?

Is there anything you want to find out more about or do differently?

Embedding the learning

After the session compile the healthy masculinity list onto a poster that can be shared online and displayed in the setting where the workshop took place.

Healthy masculinity - our way

What does healthy masculinity mean?

Notes from Leeds group discussion April 2023

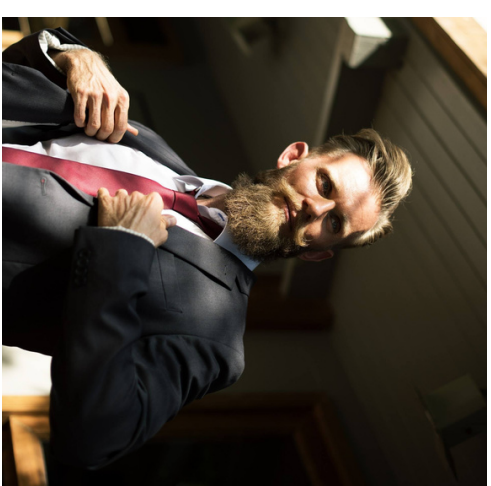
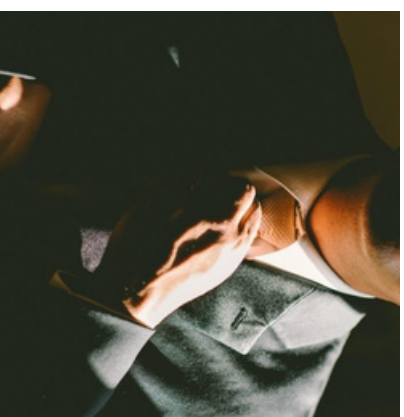
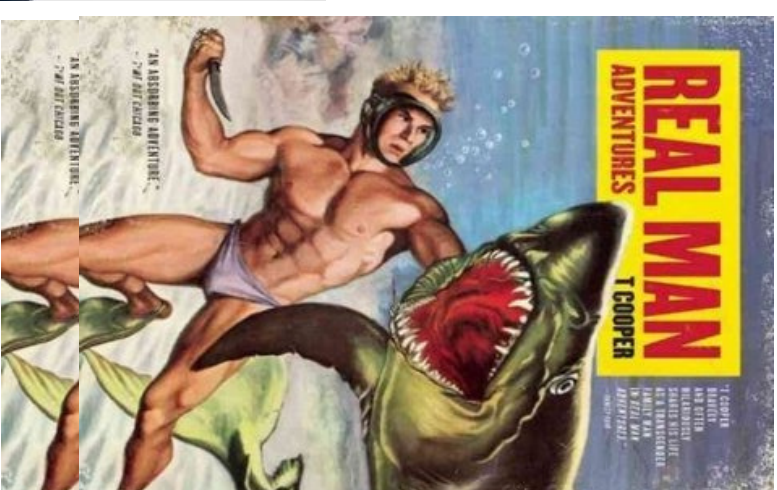
*Knowing yourself
Striving for equality
Being open and honest
Help others, be generous
Self-care - diet, sleep, health
Teamwork over competitiveness
Being comfortable to share emotions
Maintain friendships, keep in touch
Being aligned with your emotions
Taking a breath, reacting appropriately
Encourage women in male-dominated roles.
encourage men in female-dominated roles
Go against the stereotype when you need to
Equality and respect - there's no gender-specific roles
Self-compassion (be kind to yourself, life can be tough)
Having a positive way of dealing with anger/frustration
Expressing justified anger assertively and in a timely way
Not pushing feelings down or holding grudges
You don't have to be the loudest voice in the room
Providing a degree of strength and protection
Dependable & reliable (hormones may help)
Be a human being, not just a human doing
It's about being a decent human being
Equality at home - helping with housework
You don't have to be a superhero
Be open with your emotions
It's okay to have a cry
Admit uncertainty
Listen to others*



Resources

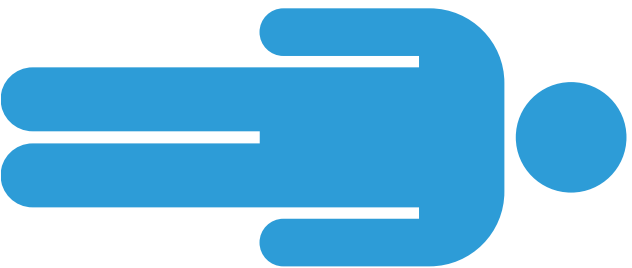


I Googled 'real man' and these are the images that came up...



Healthy masculinity *my way*

What's most important for my health and happiness

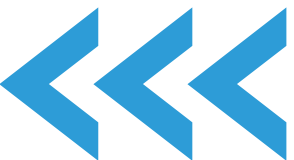


Healthy masculinity *my way*

What's most important for my health and happiness



One step I'm going to take for
my own health and
happiness...



One step I'm going to take for
my own health and
happiness...



Further reading, links and references



Men's Health Unlocked – the Leeds network of men's health organisations, including a directory of services.

A Call to Men – a USA organisation with training and resources for positive masculinity.

Tony's Porter's powerful Ted Talk about the Man Box.

Men's Health Forum – resources and campaigns for men's health (UK).

Andy's Man Club – weekly support groups in the UK enabling men to talk, share and look after their mental health.

Global Boyhood Initiative – resources for teaching healthy masculinity.

Mankind – resources and activities.

About Humans Being CIC

Humans Being enables people to improve their mental wellbeing through workshops and courses for vulnerable people and the volunteers and staff that support them.

We use gender-specific, evidence-based approaches that allow people to explore new ways of seeing themselves and their strengths, and to find opportunities and motivation to make meaningful lifestyle changes.

People in the groups form a real sense of community through sharing experiences, ideas for self care and care for one another. These connections and friendships often last far beyond the end of the course, reducing social isolation and increasing mental resilience.

Keep in touch!

We would love to hear how your workshop went!

Please drop us an email:

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<https://humansbeing.org.uk>

