



Handout 7-2: Male Help-Seeking Behaviors

The literature suggests that men are less likely to seek help than women are. This is strongly influenced by how men are socialized. The following identifies some common barriers some men may have in seeking help and some strategies useful to meeting the unique cultural needs of men that may ameliorate these barriers and increase the likelihood that men will seek help.

Barriers some men experience in seeking help include:

- **Difficulty admitting that there is a problem.** This stems from difficulty with accepting weakness.
- **Difficulty in asking for help and intolerance for depending on others.** This stems from the strong valuation of autonomy and independence.
- **Difficulty in accepting, identifying and processing the more tender or “soft” emotions.** In our culture, it’s not acceptable to be perceived as weak.
- **A fear of intimacy and vulnerability.** Displaying intimacy or vulnerability is also viewed as a weakness.
- **Sexualization of female helpers and homophobic feelings that block opening up to male helpers.** Often men feel they have to be stronger than women are and that they cannot demonstrate weakness in front of a woman.
- **A scarcity of treatment approaches that are sensitive to men’s needs and dilemmas.**

The following strategies to promote help-seeking behavior in men are based on what is known about men’s socialization, gender and cultural needs:

- **Normalize their experience.** Men do not want to be perceived as abnormal. This can best be done by another man, as other men may share a general understanding of what it is like to be a man in society. Many fatherhood groups help do this very well.
- **Minimize efforts to have men reflect on affect and emotions.** Instead of asking men “how do you feel?” ask, “what is it like for you?”
- **Provide direct feedback that will assist them in becoming better problem solvers and decision makers** while ensuring that the feedback provides action-oriented steps the father can take.
- **Use metaphors to help men visualize their situation in a concrete, relatable way.** Metaphors allow men to see problem solving as connected to an action and allow fathers to separate the problem from themselves and gain a sense of objectivity.
- **Use approaches that focus on logic and behavior,** such as cognitive behavioral therapies that seek to connect thoughts, feelings and behaviors and redirect them into actions the father can take.

(Adapted from Shears, J., & Furman, R. (2008) *Working with fathers: A review of the literature*. Charlotte: University of North Carolina)