

The Men's Toolbox

Tool for
intervention

Good Practices for Working with Men

Goal

Present specific ways to counsel and support men in difficulty to help you review practices, recognize practices already adapted to this clientele, and choose improvement targets.

1 Facilitate access to services

Many men want to consult a professional but are discouraged by the lack of access to services. In fact, services that remove barriers are used by more men. These simple steps can make a big difference:

- Let a relative or the man's partner make the appointments.
- Agree to have a significant person accompany the man, if this is easier for him.
- Offer walk-in consultations.
- Minimize the number of steps and wait times between the appointment and the session.
- Encourage interdepartmental agreements so that the man doesn't have to resubmit a request for each department.
- Provide referrals to another resource and follow up on this referral.
- Consider offering teleconsultations.

2 Make the most of the first session

We can either lament the fact that many men only seek professional help once, or we can try to make that first meeting as useful as possible. This will also increase the likelihood that the man will come back for another session.

- Value the efforts that the man has already made, such as asking for help.
- Highlight his skills and values rather than his weaknesses.
- Start by identifying what would be most useful right away and what would make him want to come back.
- Spend the most time on what's important to him right now; fill out the forms later.
- Explain how you work and provide options.
- Choose something with him that he can succeed at right away.
- Offer to help him with a task or action, when appropriate.
- At the end of the session, ask him if he was satisfied with how things went and if he would like to make any changes for a future session.

3 Be proactive about suicide

The majority of men who died by suicide had sought help in the months leading up to the act. It is because they are thinking about suicide that some decide to seek counselling, but without mentioning this motive. This is why you shouldn't wait for the man to bring up suicide: you should look for the signs as soon as possible.

- In the first sessions, determine whether the man is suicidal or could become suicidal due to aggravating events, such as the loss of custody of his children, a court appearance, etc.
- Pay particular attention to situations he may find humiliating, such as losing his driver's license for drinking and driving.
- Help him feel useful and point out that he has a role to play, even if he is going through a hard time.
- Give him multiple reasons for living: talk about his motivations and encourage him to take concrete actions right away to reconnect with what is meaningful in his life.
- Remove any access to suicide means.
- Provide close follow-up after a suicide attempt.
- Get training in the assessment of suicide risk.

4 Help him relieve his isolation

Men's social networks have a significant impact on their health. Every effort to maintain or restore this network will have an impact. This is not just about finding people they can talk to, but rather about having strong connections, especially in a context where they feel useful.

- Determine the fastest way for him to reconnect with his friends and family.
- Prepare him to reach out or reach out with him.
- Identify the different roles the people in his life can play, as not all of them will have the skills to listen.
- Consider the changes desired by his immediate family (life partner or children), as these demands may be his primary motivation.
- Talk about the people with whom he feels useful, not just those who could help him.
- Get someone involved to help him make a change, for example, to play sports.
- Use his interests to make new connections.
- If the man is really isolated or doesn't want to reconnect, help him find places where he might meet people who share his interests.

5 Recognize the difference between anger and violence to better manage these behaviours

Although irritability is a recognized sign of depression in men, health care services rarely welcome expressions of anger. However, anger is an emotion like any other that also needs space to be expressed. On the other hand, this does not mean that we should accept acts of violence. This is why it is extremely important to differentiate between the two.

- Learn about safety measures in case of violence or set up protocols if these are not yet defined.
- Facilitate the expression of emotions, including anger.
- Recognize the distress behind the anger.
- Validate and acknowledge the legitimacy of this emotion given the context.
- Recognize your own issues with anger or violence and get the appropriate support (supervision, team discussion, psychotherapy).
- Get training to become comfortable enough with anger and learn how to avoid escalations to violence.
- Get training on how to recognize and prevent domestic homicide.

6 Respect the man's dignity

Shame and guilt can prevent men from seeking help or make changes in their lives. When working with men, it is especially important to choose words that help them save face when they experience a setback or do not make the progress they hoped for.

- Avoid saying things that may cause more shame or guilt, such as asking the man why he didn't come before, why he stopped his therapy sessions, why he he didn't do what he was supposed to do, etc.
- Take part of the responsibility and redirect the intervention with phrases like, "I underestimated how hard that would be; that action should have been broken down into smaller steps..." "You are already carrying a heavy load," "You don't have every chance on your side," or "If it were easy, you would have done it already!" etc.
- Emphasize the difficulty of the task rather than the weakness of the man.
- Attribute some obstacles to the demands of masculinity that he has had to cope with (e.g., the idea that asking for help is a sign of weakness).

7 Adapt to cultural diversity

Each culture has its own particularities, and we must therefore pay attention to cultural biases (roles, division of labour, gender status, values, perception of mental health and social problems, etc.). Remember that, for many men, improving their family's living conditions was often the main motivation for emigrating.

- Humbly own up to your own lack of knowledge, preconceptions, etc.
- Ask the man questions to get a sense of his vision of family, marital, social and professional roles.
- Value the different roles that he can play, including as a father or spouse.
- Create a safe and welcoming space: more than one man will have been discriminated against or traumatized (e.g. by war).
- If the man has been an immigrant for many years or was born in Quebec, assess his degree of integration, i.e., success factors and obstacles (barriers, internal or community value conflicts).
- Aim to get him to adjust to these changes and encourage him to find compromises.
- Stress his ability to adapt and point out all of the efforts, skills, and qualities he drew from during his migration pathway and while settling into life in Quebec, even if he is a second- or third-generation immigrant.
- Express your own desire for less discrimination in society.

8 Use appropriate language

There are important differences between men who seek services. Ideally, you should adapt your language to each one. A good overall approach is to use everyday vocabulary instead of technical terms associated with psychosocial services and psychotherapy.

- Avoid rephrasing or translating what the man says into psychosocial language.
- Repeat his words and metaphors back to him.
- Take an interest in his area of expertise, his work, and his passions.
- For example, use impact techniques and analogies to explain concepts or suggest exercises that he can do between sessions.
- Use expressions such as *working as a team*, *concrete signs that you are making progress*, *signs that the session was useful*, etc.
- Observe non-verbal cues, which can often be telling.
- Check whether he has understood what you said and, if necessary, rephrase in clear and simple language.

9 Adapt to sexual diversity

The term *sexually diverse men* refers to all men whose sexual orientation (sexual or romantic attraction) is not heterosexual or whose gender identity (a personal, intimate feeling) differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Many of these men have a lot of barriers on top of what other men face. Sexually diverse men are often reluctant to seek out services, as they are exhausted from having to constantly explain their lives (i.e., having to make "coming out" repeatedly) and define the terms they use.

- Create a safe environment for sexually diverse men through inclusive internal policies, through forms and documents that are explicitly rather than implicitly inclusive, and by adopting the attitude of an ally.
- Empathize, listen, and be humble about the challenges of a being man who does not fit into heteronormativity.
- Avoid expressing preconceived notions and clichés, for example, that all gay men are effeminate, have a high sex drive, etc.
- Avoid specifying his gender: it is crucial that you use the name and pronoun that he uses to refer to himself.
- Use the words that he uses to refer to his life partner without trying to find out this person's gender.
- Highlight the strengths that he has shown in his journey, such as his efforts to maintain healthy relationships or avoid being bullied.
- Help the man see himself with compassion: if he feels shame about not expressing his sexual orientation or gender identity before, he probably had a good reason to wait.
- Avoid presuming that his sexual diversity is necessarily a problem or a hidden reason for counselling; like anyone else, he may be seeking help for anxiety at work, challenges with a teenager, etc.



10 Account for social inequalities

Not everyone is equal when it comes to health, which is largely influenced by social status and the resulting living conditions (work, housing, food, etc.). Social inequalities in health are caused by an unfair distribution of resources and power. These inequalities can be reduced through accessible services that are adapted to people in situations of social or economic disadvantage.

- Acknowledge your own privilege and express compassion for other people whose lives may be more difficult.
- Offer low-threshold services, e.g., travel to meet the man, provide remote consultations, provide access to services without a health insurance card.
- Attribute some difficulties to social inequalities rather than assuming the man is not sufficiently engaged in his treatment or does not have a good attitude (e.g., lack of access to sufficient housing, having to work too many hours just to get by, impact of financial stress on concentration, etc.).
- Consider that the man may be ashamed to talk about any financial problems that would explain his absence (e.g., inability to pay for bus fare, put gas in his car, return phone calls, because he can't pay his phone bill, etc.).
- Give him information about programs or resources that could help him financially and facilitate access to services.
- Establish a protocol to help him access services that have been withdrawn, for example, due to violent behaviour or substance abuse.

Consult all the toolbox tools

www.polesbeh.ca/en/documentation/mens-toolbox

The Men's Toolbox



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