

# Toxic masculinity

## Explain dangers

**Toxic masculinity** is a cultural norm that involves pressures on men to behave in a certain way—often based on outdated and unrealistic stereotypes of “manliness.” **This does not mean that men are toxic.** However, the pressures we place on men to live up to masculine ideals have been shown to be harmful to both men and women.

According to some researchers, toxic masculinity has three core components\*:

1. **Toughness:** The notion that men should be physically strong, behaviourally aggressive, and unemotional.
2. **Antifeminity:** The idea that men should reject anything considered to be feminine, such as showing emotion or accepting help.
3. **Power:** The assumption that men must work toward obtaining power and status (social and financial) to gain the respect of others.

A man’s race and ethnicity may play a role in how he views masculinity, as well as how others perceive him. Likewise, men who identify as LGBTQ+, or who do not conform to traditional gender norms, are at greater risk of experiencing physical and psychological harms due to toxic masculinity.

Toxic masculinity can have many effects on men’s health, including:

- **Glorification of unhealthy habits:** The notion that “self-care is for women” can cause men to treat their bodies like machines. They skimp on sleep, work out even if injured, and push themselves to their physical limits. They may also be less likely to seek preventative healthcare, which can lead to chronic problems down the road.
- **Mental health stigma:** Toxic masculinity views depression, anxiety, substance abuse issues, and mental health problems as weaknesses. It also discourages men from talking about their feelings or seeking mental health treatment. This avoidance may further increase feelings of isolation and loneliness.
- **Failure to help:** Men who view themselves as more masculine are less likely to engage in “helping behaviours,” such as consoling a

victim, calling for aid, or otherwise standing up to those who engage in bullying and other harmful acts. However, studies have found men *will* intervene if they think that not doing so will compromise their masculine reputation.

As a result of these and other effects†:

- Men are less likely than women to access mental health services.
- Men are far more likely than women to die by suicide.
- Significantly more men than women die from opioid overdoses. This is particularly true of men who work in the construction industry.

## Identify controls

**Challenge your thinking:** We all must think critically about what it really means to “be a man” in today’s society. Ask yourself: Am I brave enough to be vulnerable? Am I strong enough to help others—and to seek help for myself?

**Practise self-care:** Men who embrace physical, emotional, mental, and social self-care can have a positive “ripple effect” on those around them‡. Some easy ways to practise self-care are:

- Eat healthy, regular meals and stay hydrated.
- Stick to a consistent sleep schedule, if possible.
- Stay connected with friends and family.

## Demonstrate

Supervisors have the opportunity to be role models for developing a healthier culture of masculinity in the workplace:

- Educate yourself and others about toxic masculinity and its outdated assumptions.
- Challenge social norms and stand up for others in need.
- Share the ways that you practise self-care to maintain your physical and mental health.

\*[verywellmind.com/what-is-toxic-masculinity-5075107](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-toxic-masculinity-5075107)

†[verywellmind.com/the-dangerous-mental-health-effects-of-toxic-masculinity-5073957](https://www.verywellmind.com/the-dangerous-mental-health-effects-of-toxic-masculinity-5073957)

‡Benjamin Harris, *Toxic Masculinity: An Exploration of Traditional Masculine Norms* (University of South Carolina—Columbia, 2021)

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## facilitator support resources

### Prepare

#### Review

[How to Talk About Mental Health at Your Workplace](#), IHSA's guide for supervisors delivering safety talks on mental health.

#### Watch

The trailer for the film [The Mask You Live In](#) gives a sense of the pressures placed upon boys and young men to define themselves based on a narrow and unhealthy definition of masculinity.

#### Read

Some reasons why [toxic masculinity may be quadrupling the suicide rate](#) for Canadian men.

#### Dive in/Bookmark

[Breaking the chains of stigma in the construction industry](#)

#### Post

This [Toxic Masculinity: Cultural & Generational](#) poster identifies some common phrases that sustain negative stereotypes about how men should act.

### Reinforce

Supervisors have the opportunity to be role models for developing a healthier culture of masculinity in the workplace:

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- Challenge social norms and stand up for others in need.
- Share the ways that you practise self-care to maintain your physical and mental health

### Next steps

Consider renting the full, 1.5-hour documentary, [The Mask You Live In](#). Don't forget to offer a trigger warning if you show it to others.

### More resources

- Learn more about the [different aspects of toxic masculinity](#) and how it intersects with race, ethnicity, and gender.
- Understand the [dangerous effects of toxic masculinity](#) on boys and men.
- Discover [five ways every man can challenge the toxic culture of masculinity](#) and be more open about their mental health.
- TED Talks speaker Justin Baldoni explains [why he's done trying to be "man enough"](#).

### Questions?

Consider asking your crew the following questions after delivering the safety talk.

**Remember, masculinity itself is not toxic;** our culture's narrow, conformist, bullying "tough guy" version of it is. With this in mind:

- How have you seen Western cultural norms (about masculinity) negatively impact men and boys when it comes to their willingness to seek help for themselves and others?
- How do you think this affects mental health?
- How does this impact the workplace?

**Note to facilitator:** If time permits, have your group watch the three-minute trailer for [The Mask You Live In](#).

Do *you* have questions? Did your crew have questions you couldn't answer? Remember, it's okay to not have all the answers.

**For further comments, concerns or requests, please contact [info@ihsa.ca](mailto:info@ihsa.ca)**