



# SUPPORTING

## Men in **Distress**

*A Resource for Women*



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TRAINING FOR LIFE

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# Introduction

We have somehow grown up with the idea that men are an open book, and can be easily understood. Yet just as men generally acknowledge that women can sometimes be hard to understand, increasingly women, out of genuine concern for the males in their life, want to know more about what makes men tick, and especially, how to help them when they are in distress.

It is interesting that, despite women having their own burden of personal, relationship and mental health issues to deal with, when asked about their key family or community health concern, they often reply: the mental health and wellbeing of my husband, partner, father, son (or another male in their life).

Women tend to be better informed than their male counterparts about available support systems in their community, and have often expressed frustration about the lack of appropriate services available for men. Unfortunately, mainstream health and human service agencies and professionals often struggle to understand and to know how to engage successfully with their male constituents. Perhaps the most telling evidence of this is reflected in male suicide statistics, with males accounting for nearly





78% of all suicides in Australia – a trend that has not abated in the last two decades.

It is well recognised that women play a key role in the health of their families and in the lives of their menfolk. They are key agents of prevention and early intervention for mental health and wellbeing, and their particular help-seeking orientation and active social capacity represent potent protective factors of significant benefit to men.

This is not to suggest that women should assume responsibility for the psychological health and wellbeing of men. However, the fact remains that the well-being of families, children, intimate partner relationships, and communities, is irreducibly dependent on the mutual empathy, support, understanding, and compassion of both genders. There are numerous occasions in life when each of us needs the consideration and generous support of others.

This is not to suggest that women should assume responsibility for the psychological health and wellbeing of men.

This resource aims to provide women with sensible, empowering and practical knowledge and strategies for responding to the men in their lives – particularly those experiencing distress. The topics have been chosen to reflect the most common themes and issues encountered by women in their struggle to understand and respond helpfully.

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## Men in **Distress**

### A Resource for Women

Thoreau's observation that "*The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation*" will come as no surprise to many women. Be it a struggle with illness, relationships, ageing, work, parenting or the shifting expectations of society, most men at some stage of their lives will experience one or more of the situations so accurately described in this book.

All too often I have had a woman in my consulting room distressed and at a loss as she struggles to support the man she cares about in a time of crisis. Until now there has been little in the way of a ready resource that could be offered, something that gives tested advice for the most commonly encountered problems that is both easy to understand and to put into action.

In this practical *go to* guide for women supporting men in distress, John Ashfield has distilled the insights gained from decades of working with men on the edge and in raising awareness of the all too tragic outcome of male suicide. A possibly lifesaving book to have within reach for all those who work with women in such difficult circumstances.

*Dr Mark Johnson, General Practitioner, Hamilton, Victoria*

This book is a crucial read... for women and men! It highlights the differences between men and women in times of distress and delivers some golden nuggets along the way.

As women, we all too often want to help our men in the same way we help our girlfriends, but this book provides bite size chunks of information about the mental health and wellbeing of men and how we can help them. The example prompts that are included will help us have those crucial conversations.

Every woman will be able to glance at the contents page of this resource and find a situation they can relate to. This book will be your life-long mentor.

*Pip Job, 2014 RIRDC National Rural Woman of the Year*



Dr John Ashfield is a bestselling author, educator and psychotherapist, known all over Australia for his efforts at providing people with simple yet effective self-help strategies for taking care of their mental health. His books have received wide acclaim and endorsement and with nearly one and a half million copies in print, he is the most read author of mental health promotion literature in Australia.

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