

DEPRESSION IN FATHERS & HOW MATES CAN HELP

In 1912, when an iceberg opened the side of the Titanic, there were 2223 passengers and crew on board. Without enough lifeboats, and many launched half full, only 704 people survived – 3/4 of women on board and half the children. Most of the victims who died of hypothermia in the Atlantic waters were men.

Although social roles for men and women have changed since 1912, there is no indication that today's fathers would behave any differently from those on the Titanic. Men's honour, duty or sacrifice is an enduring and powerful theme. As a community, we generally expect men in a crisis situation to ensure women and children are taken care of first.

But for fathers in the throes of depression, in conflict over access to their children, or facing financial ruin or serious personal difficulties, it is possible that the idea of 'women and children first' carries the wrong message. Some fathers mistakenly believe that sacrificing themselves will be best thing for their families. Men separated from their families are six times more likely to die by their own hand than fathers in intact families. A strong warning sign for contemplating suicide is making comments such as 'they'd be better off without me'.

SIGNS OF DISTRESS

Depression can affect a father's ability to think clearly. Fathers overcome with hopelessness can grossly underestimate their importance to their children, and believe their children don't really need them or that their connection to the family is not important. It is vital for men in this situation to get help and support, and this is where their mates can step up.

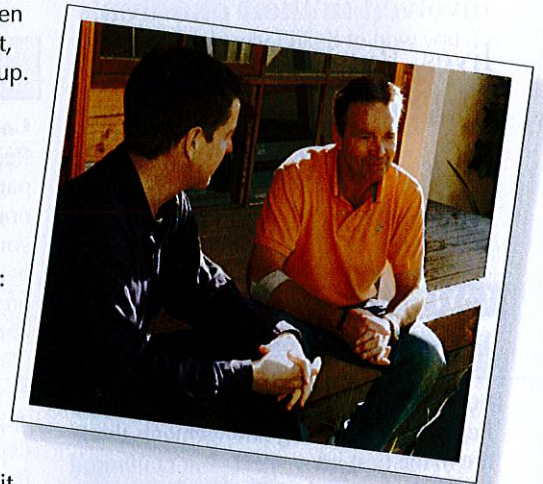
IF YOU'RE CONCERNED FOR A MATE

If you have a mate you know is going through a rough patch there are three things you can do to help the situation:

- Seek out information on depression and its causes and treatments. Try asking your mate about the list of symptoms.
- Make sure that your mate knows where to get some help if he needs it.
- Most importantly, let him know you think it's smart to get help. Tell him that getting help will also help his children.

FOR MORE HELP

Ring **Mensline** or **Lifeline** and check out your thinking with one of their trained counsellors. They talk to all types of men so they can help you figure out what may be going on for your friend.



FATHER FACT

Don't mess with depression

Fathers can become depressed at any time, especially in times of stress. However, just having a baby can trigger depression. One in 14 men may experience depression around the birth of their baby. Men whose partners are depressed are at greater risk, but men can also be affected by depression regardless of their partner's experience.

Everything is connected. Depression in fathers following the birth of a baby has been found to have a detrimental effect on their children's early behavioural, social and emotional development. Your kids need you, so take action on your depression.

Signs of depression in a father

A notable change in mood (sadness, irritability, frustration), social life (withdrawing), work (increasing or decreasing time at work), interests (loss of interest in food, sex, exercise, or hobbies), risk taking, or increased use of alcohols or other drugs, can all be signs of depression. In deciding whether someone has depression, a mental health specialist would look for:

- signs of feeling sad, down or miserable most of the time
 - loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities.
- Plus four or more of the following:
- major change (increase or decrease) in weight or appetite
 - disturbed sleep
 - feeling slowed down, restless or excessively busy
 - feeling tired or lacking in energy
 - feeling worthless, excessively guilty or guilty about things you should not be feeling guilty about
 - poor concentration or indecisiveness or difficulties in thinking
 - recurrent thoughts of death.

(Source: *beyondblue*. Visit www.beyondblue.org.au)

