

Boys and Mental Health

A 90-minute workshop on how masculine norms shape help-seeking

FOR PARENTS, COACHES, TEACHERS, AND SCHOOL COUNSELORS

WELCOME AND OBJECTIVE

This workshop creates space for adults to honestly examine how the messages boys receive about masculinity affect their willingness to struggle openly, ask for help, or show vulnerability. It is not about blame. It is about awareness.

OVERVIEW

Boys are experiencing mental health struggles at rates comparable to girls. They are far less likely to seek help, and far more likely to die by suicide. Understanding why requires looking honestly at the culture we are all participating in.

RESEARCH

13.2%

of young men ages 16–24 access mental health services when struggling. High adherence to traditional masculine norms reduces help-seeking by 26–28%.

4x

more likely than girls to die by suicide. Researchers tie this disparity directly to norms that discourage emotional openness in boys and young men.

EXERCISE 1 — THE MESSAGES WE CARRY (INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION, 15 MIN)

Reflect on the messages you received about masculinity growing up. Write them down without filtering. Then ask yourself: which of these am I passing on, intentionally or not, to the boys in my life?

EXERCISE 2 — STAYING IN IT (ROLE-PLAY, 20 MIN)

Role-play a conversation with a teenage boy who is clearly struggling but deflecting with humor, irritability, or withdrawal. Practice staying present without pushing too hard. What does it feel like to hold that space? What makes you want to back off?

DISCUSSION

- What does it look like when a boy is struggling but hiding it?
- What are we modeling about vulnerability as adults in this boy's life?
- Where do we draw the line between respecting privacy and enabling avoidance?

CLOSING

Each participant identifies one norm they want to actively counter in their home, classroom, or practice. Name it specifically. What does countering it actually look like?