

## Therapy for Men

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Why would a newsletter from Youth and Family Counseling (YFC)—an agency whose name implies a focus on children and families—feature an article about therapy for men? Isn't YFC concerned mostly with children's problems and the challenges that children and their families face as they grow and experience life? The answer is yes, children and families are our focus. And that is one significant reason why promoting therapy for men is so important.

One of the foundations of psychology is that each person views the world through a lens made of his or her experiences. Because parents shape the nature of their children's environment, both mothers and fathers bear the primary responsibility for their children's experiences and thus for the construction of their children's view of the world and consequent emotional health.

For any father, bearing this responsibility can be challenging. Today, many men, including the fathers of the children we see at YFC, are wounded in many ways.

According to James Hollis, a prominent therapist who specializes in men's issues, men have been trained from early boyhood to "collude in a conspiracy of silence whose aim is to suppress their emotional truth." The result is that **many men live in a constant state of fear, unwilling and unable to examine their anger, their sadness, their anxiety or any emotional state.** Sensing that something isn't right, but not being able to figure it out, they may unknowingly display symptoms of these suppressed emotions, which may inadvertently cause them to disrupt their families and careers and pass along portions of their own emotional wounds to their children.



Living and parenting in today's complex and stressful society can be difficult for many men. For example,

- A man might have been raised with a framework or idea of masculinity that is totally unsuited to the life he now leads.
- He may have been raised in a family without a father, which may have left him to construct expectations of a man's role on his own, perhaps relying on the often misguided images of the role of men presented by society.
- Or he may have been raised in a family environment in which his own father's personal suffering revealed itself through symptoms of suppressed emotions. His own father may have been distant, offered little interaction or been prone to engage in physical and emotional abuse, drug and alcohol problems, rampant conflict or other dysfunctional behavior.

How can the fathers of today's children find within themselves the necessary emotional tools, resiliency and willingness to effectively father their own children, if that was not done for them?

One potential solution is **to seek the help of a caring and knowledgeable psychotherapist** who can safely help a man first accept and then untangle the confusing emotions of his own life. This requires an environment of extraordinary safety and trust, in which a man can learn to understand his fear as a signal and to examine his emotional truth and the wounds that define it. Developing this ability over time will provide any man with a foundation that will empower him to function more effectively in his work, in his marriage or relationships, and especially as a father to his children.