

# Helping Farm Men Under Crisis!

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**Traditional Male Farm Identity** or beliefs how men should behave have roots at many levels of society and at many levels in the minds of men. This identity encourages men to be independent, strong, self-reliant, competitive, achievement oriented, powerful, adventurous, and emotionally restrained (Harris, 1995). This leads to four traditional attitudes about masculinity:

- men should not be **feminine** (“no sissy stuff”),
- men should strive to be respected for **successful achievement** (“the big wheel”),
- men should **never show weakness** (“the sturdy oak”), and
- men should seek **adventure and risk** (“give ‘em hell”) (Brannon, 306).

This traditional view of being male causes many men to hesitate to seek help...some men are taught that masculine power, dominance, competition, and control are essential to proving one’s masculinity; that vulnerabilities, feelings, and emotions in men are signs of femininity and are to be avoided; that masculine control of self, others, and environment are essential for men to feel safe, secure, and comfortable; and that men seeking help and support from others is a sign of weakness, vulnerability, and potential incompetence. (Robertson, Fitzgerald, 1992).

**Perception of Self and Others** causes men to not seek help as concerns about their personal or financial reputation; lack of knowing what help is available; not having a mindset of seeking help; lack of time, money or insurance to seek help; feeling need to be self-reliant; fear of being perceived as lazy or mentally unstable, or simply too much pride or distrust of those in helping professions.

## **Bottom Line = Need to Change the Mindset!**

**Mindset strategies** below can help men emotionally survive a crisis and may offer support and encouragement:

**Embrace the crisis.** Why? Because you will learn how strong you are and how strong you can be. Let the crisis teach you about yourself. Realize you will never be the same person after the crisis. But, if you so choose, you will be stronger.

**Refuse to be a victim or Play the blame game.** An unforgiving spirit takes a lot of energy. You may be a victim of circumstance but don’t blame others or yourself for what happened or dig yourself into a rut. You may not be able to control the crisis, but you can control your attitude toward it. Remember, your life has a purpose because you are alive and much more. Forgive those who wrong you and focus on love.

**Accept your emotions.** Laying in bed at night, the chest pounding and mind racing, thoughts of anger, failure, guilt, shame, and even death may surface. Do not deny these thoughts but accept as part of the learning experience. They are normal; they are who you are. Living with your emotions is painful, but it builds your resolution to persevere.

**Connect with other men.** This is not easy for our gender because, in general, men are not great communicators. But simple gestures from other men, such as phone calls and texts, can be very comforting. Silence, on the other hand, is invariably seen as judgment or lack of concern. Reaching out to others keeps you connected to the world.

**Stay away from negative people.** Nothing brings you crashing down faster than negative thoughts. Research on stress and crisis, as well as health issues, shows that people with positive attitudes handle and recover from crisis better than those with negative attitudes. Keep your sense of humor. It is often said that 'laughers survive and survivors laugh.'

**Decide when to worry.** If one worries about their crisis in the evening, one might toss fitfully all night with negative thoughts consuming them. Limit worry to two hours every morning when one has more energy and a better attitude--then try (not always successfully) not to worry the rest of day.

**Don't shut out your family.** When facing crisis, men often become quiet and withdrawn. This causes anxiety in other family members, which then causes more withdrawing. Let the people in your family know how you're feeling, your worries, your fears, and if you really are okay.

**Take care of yourself.** There is a wealth of research on the value of good health in handling stress and crisis. It gives you energy, protection, a positive attitude, and a sense of control. Practice added safety. Eat well, exercise, get enough sleep, and rely on your faith to pull you through. Research has shown prayer to be a positive tool in healing and life quality.

**Believe in tomorrow.** There may be a reason this crisis is happening to you, and your job is to find out why. Keep telling yourself, I will survive, I will get through this. The future is promising in many ways: believe you will be there to see it.

Though farm crisis, family crisis, and personal crisis are all different, the human response is similar. 'Anyone can give up, but only the strong will continue to battle.' Men can use male identity value of “Take the Bull by the Horns” using Mindset strategies, and deal with crisis or stress in competitive ways.

**Men in rural areas tend to be more introverted, thus taking more of an inward approach during stressful times. Encouraging and helping connections while respecting the needed time to privately process stress is important.**