



## TOP 10 LESSONS

*Big Boys Don't Cry?* is full of invaluable advice on ways of coping, from men who have suffered (or are suffering) mental health challenges and who have survived. Although the backgrounds of these men are hugely diverse – lawyers, postmen, soldiers, construction workers, *Big Issue* sellers, businessmen – and the causes of their mental illness vary greatly – loss and bereavement, childhood bullying, a chemical imbalance, the violence of war, breakdown of a marriage, sexual abuse – they share a range of common ways of combatting their different mental illnesses.

Here is a summary of the 10 most popular tips from men, for men:

**1. Talking** – without doubt the most important step you can take. Nearly every man in the book stresses how crucial it is to reach out to family and friends when you're struggling, however impossible it may seem at the time. Not one of the men said they'd regretted opening up about their problems and many of them said it had literally saved their life.

**2. Therapy** – following naturally on from 'talking' is the advice from men to seek counselling. Whether it's group therapy arranged by your local National Health Service, a peer-group or one-to-one therapy with a private therapist, the benefits of sharing your negative thoughts, previously locked inside your head, with an impartial and non-judgmental listener/s are immeasurable. Cognitive behavioural therapy or CBT, which helps manage your problems by changing the way you think and behave, was a very popular approach taken by the men in this book.

**3. Medication** – many of the men writing in the book admit to feeling sceptical and afraid at first of taking antidepressants – often SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) such as Citalopram and Fluoxetine or 'Prozac' – but found that medication really helped lift them out of a dark place. Combining prescribed medicine with another of the activities found on this list, especially talking therapy, is recommended as the best approach.

**4. Visit GP** – often one of the first steps that the men in the book took. Speaking to their doctor was the start of their recovery and just having a trusted, neutral person listen to their problems and offer guidance and support made the effort to pick up the phone and call the local surgery extremely worthwhile.

**5. Mindfulness** – the simple act of focusing on your breathing and learning to be present – not ruminating on the past or worrying about the future – is a surprising and enlightening game-changer described by many of the men in the book who had previously thought meditation was, as one writer put it, 'airy-fairy'. Definitely worth giving it a go, if you haven't tried it before.

**6. Exercise** – whether it's an individual activity like running, going to the gym or taking a yoga class - or a team sport like football, rugby and cricket - a large number of men pointed to the proven benefits of physical exercise. Despite often struggling with fatigue, listlessness and a lack of motivation, they found that even five minutes of exercise released those helpful endorphin chemicals that made them feel a whole lot better!

**7. Self-Acceptance/Self-Compassion** – learning to tame your inner-critic and accept yourself for who you are, 'warts and all', was seen as a key step in recovery for many of the book's contributors. Being kind and compassionate to yourself, lowering your high standards and trying to avoid the pitfall of perfectionism were common themes within the men's stories.

**8. Avoid Alcohol or Drug Abuse** - the message from men in the book is clear: turning to drink and drugs (or any other self-medication) to avoid your problems, although very tempting and understandable, is simply not the answer. Those men who have recovered, or are recovering from addiction, say that they only began to get better mentally when they became sober. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and their 12 Steps programme is cited as a great support for many men struggling with alcohol or drug addiction.

**9. Faith** – having a belief in something greater than yourself - be it God, Buddha, Allah or another 'higher power' - is a great comfort to many of those who shared their story. In a world which places such a high value on commercial and material success, having something spiritual in their lives gave these men a greater sense of meaning and purpose.

**10. Hobbies** – finding something to be passionate about - just to distract yourself from the 'grind in your mind' - was recommended by many of the men in the book. Photography, gardening, Sudoku – whatever you're interested in – try and make time for old hobbies and be open to new ones too.

You can read more inspirational men's mental health stories on our website [bigboysdontcry.co.uk](http://bigboysdontcry.co.uk) – and if you would like to share your story, either named or anonymously, please get in touch: [bigboysdontcrybook@gmail.com](mailto:bigboysdontcrybook@gmail.com) We'd love to hear from you!