

Man up? What does this mean? Be tough? Get it together? Hold it in?

By Kate Silcock

For some, this can be used as a flippant term and in no way meant to be insulting or damaging. But when you look behind the words, how can it not be? You're telling someone to stop feeling, and insinuating that, because of their gender, they should be tough. How can that be anything other than damaging for individuals and society.

I was a little apprehensive about writing this – maybe because I'm a woman and a mum, and not a man or a dad, that I feel somewhat unqualified to talk about it, not wanting to offend, presume, or insult anyone. But, more of me says 'post' than 'discard'.

And here's why: men suffer, men cry, men worry, men panic, men weep, men feel, men hold it in, men try to keep it together, men get lonely, men feel isolated, men get anxious, men get depressed, men get sad, and men take their own lives too.

When I think back to when our first child was born, I want to kick myself for not asking how my husband Harry was doing. I'd been through a traumatic labour and had taken a while to recover post labour and Harry had been incredible. He'd watched his wife go through a worrying nine months of pregnancy: emotional, hormonal, uncomfortable, worried, anxious and, quite frankly, a bit of a mess.

Yet, he never showed any sign of stress. He took on board my worries, my stress while keeping me sane, and it didn't affect him in the slightest.

Only it did.

He watched me become quite poorly quite quickly after the birth and he didn't say a thing. He was handed a baby that he didn't know, hadn't grown, and now felt every eye in the room watching him. He took our baby and held her. He fed her. He changed her nappy. He soothed her. He comforted her. He did what I was supposed to do, what I wanted to do, but couldn't.

After eight days of post-birth recovery I was able to 'get it together', but I didn't ask him how he was. I cried, panicked, got so overwhelmed that I couldn't function, but he did. He coped; he functioned. He kept it all together. For me and for his new little family.

And it struck me – who was asking him if he was alright? Who was checking that he was okay?

No one. He was a man; therefore, he was okay. Men don't get anxious. Men don't need to talk or worry or feel low or depressed. Men don't need reassurance.

But you see, they do.

They feel as much as we do and it's terrifying to think that some men feel they can't speak out, speak up, or tell people how they hurt, how they're suffering, how they too worry about the same things that women do: parenthood, finances, relationships, body image, societal pressure, work, insecurities, health anxiety, OCD, postnatal depression, general anxiety, PTSD – the list goes on... It's all real.

It's hard for anyone, male or female, to admit that they're struggling, I've been there. But what I have found is that women tend to open up and chat about it a little more than men. Maybe for women there are more opportunities to talk: maternity leave, mum groups, lunch, baby groups. Men usually get two weeks (some less, some more) and then they are back to their work, their domain, their world before kids, and while this can be a luxury (and one I've resented at times), it's also an escapism, a distraction to what's really going on inside.

But this doesn't solely apply to dads. Life is hard, regardless of gender, age, or any other demographic factor. We should all be aware of the support available and encourage each other to talk and communicate. Dads, stepdads, single dads, dads to be, men who aren't dads, the who don't want to be dads. The men who feel life is hard. The men who feel they must put up a pretence. The men who don't want to be hugged. The men who do want to be hugged. The men who don't want to be judged. The men who don't want to be asked. The men who do want to be asked. The men who don't want to talk. The men who do want to talk. The men who mask their insecurity and social anxiety with confidence, sometimes arrogance. The boyfriend, the partners, the fiancés, the husbands, the sons... the men. Please know that you're loved, you're loved beyond words and appreciated more than you know. But please know this, it is more than okay for you to say what you feel, to say what you're going through, to say that you're not okay. You are so important to a lot of people and you matter too. Be kind to your mind, be brave and speak out. You deserve help and support too and you most certainly do not need to 'man up'.

To connect with Kate Silcock, follow her on Facebook and Instagram @flourishwithkate and @aliceinworryland. Kate is a freelance writer and offers content packages, well-being workshops and social media training to local business, for more details, please email kate@aliceinworryland.com.

