

# WHAT MEN ARE TAUGHT ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

Men often view themselves as the strong, controlling, rugged type in a relationship. The men that were mentioned so far in this guide (David and John) probably would have assumed that they were as strong as the next man was. After reading their stories, how strong do you think they were? 'Strength' in this context is not really what it is made out to be. It is actually avoidance by men of the knowledge of how they rely on their wives or partners for emotional support, and how important their family is in their life. Assuming you are 'strong' leaves you more vulnerable. Whereas acknowledging your feelings and your human desire to give and receive love makes you more aware of how important relationships are in your life. It sounds paradoxical, but acknowledging your vulnerability within your family and your desire to give and receive love actually makes you stronger.

A clear theme in the stories of David and John is that of breadwinner and provider for the family. They perceived that their contribution to the family's security was through the money they brought in but not having any other function in the family. These ideas are a very lop-sided way of understanding yourself and your relationships with your wife (or partner) and family

members. It actually limits men to being like a machine for the provision of money but not having any other function in the family. Men living this way feel remote or disconnected from other family members. They come home from work; their wife is often tired, and perhaps irritable. (She mostly does the work around the home and often has a part-time paid job as well.) Sometimes the children are difficult to manage, or absorbed in their own activities. Then, when things go wrong, men usually say to themselves something like this: 'But I work so hard to earn the money!' 'How come I'm the last to know what's going on around here?'

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A lot of what we learn about being a husband and a father comes from watching our father and absorbing from him how to relate to women. For example, a man whose father was a heavy drinker, controlling and aggressive might grow up and repeat what his father did. I emphasise that he might grow up and repeat what his father did. Some men are acutely aware of having an unhappy childhood like this and they