



Unmasking the truth behind men's mental health

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THOMAS HATHAWAY

At the age of 14, senior Thomas Hathaway was terrified to sleep every night, screaming in fear or feeling as if he was fighting the devil. Even his mom's comfort wasn't enough to save him from his struggles. It was way more than just a bad day, it was the start of a long mental health journey.

Mental health is a sensitive and important topic, especially for high schoolers becoming more independent, navigating identities and future goals. Among men in particular, it has created significant problems over the years and will continue to do so.

A big factor that causes mental health struggles for male high school students is isolation. Kelly VanEe, a social worker at Huron High School, has strong words to describe the isolation teens have been putting themselves in.

"There's this feeling of connecting, playing online games," VanEe said. "It works for a lot of guys, but that is not a replacement for face-to-face, hanging out, playing pickup all together, going to McDonald's or whatever. I think that is a problem, even isolation from family. I think there's not many families that eat

together anymore. And if it can't be dinner, then when are you connecting with your family?"

Hathaway experienced this state of loneliness. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he faced many issues, which led to him showing some symptoms of mental health disorders.

"I'm an extrovert," Hathaway said. "Being home alone for a long time by myself just kind of put me in this tiny box where I couldn't talk to people. It messed me up."

Social standards and expectations are another factor preventing men from seeking help. Social norms have always claimed men are too weak to express their real feelings or that men should just "tough it out." Clinical Social Worker and Therapist at Psychology Today Kathleen Kyzar has been working with teens for years and can clearly see this has been an issue for many male teens seeking help.

"That makes it harder for them to admit when they're struggling, even to themselves. They're not necessarily less emotional, but they may be more afraid to let others see it and less willing to acknowledge the emotions rising up in them," Kyzar said. "Traditional masculinity teaches men to be strong, self-reliant, and in control. Some men worry it makes them look weak or broken, which couldn't be further from the truth."

With that being said, young male adults need to be able to find safe spaces where they can discuss their mental health. Huron High School provides many

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