



The Mindful Man: How mindfulness can help you be the man you want to be

By eM Life teacher Mike Engles

What makes a man? Is it responsibility? Strength? Imagine the ideal man in your mind. Does the image of a warrior come to mind? Or perhaps a handsome father providing for his family? If you asked this question to someone today, you would get a different answer than if you asked 50 years ago.

Our cultural ideas of what a man is and how a man should act are always changing. As cultures continue to develop, the traditional roles and ideas of what makes a man are continually challenged and shed. How can mindfulness shape your perception of your own manhood?

It Can be Confusing to Know what it Means to be a Man

All this change makes it quite confusing to figure out how to be a man. Movies and television present one idea, your grandfather tells you something else, and your father tells you something completely different. Without thinking about it, we typically adopt some societal or familial beliefs about a man's role and then we identify with them.

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Maybe you believe that men aren't supposed to be emotional, so you hide your emotions. Or maybe you believe that men are supposed to be tough, so you act aggressively to show your strength. Regardless of where you get your ideas of how to be a man, it's important to see why you hold them and question whether that's what you really want or not.

Let Your Identity Change

Your identity will change throughout your life, even though you might desperately

try to keep it the same. The boy becomes an adolescent, and the adolescent becomes a man. Each of these stages requires different roles to be adopted. Later, if he chooses to start a family, the man becomes a father. This is an entirely new role for a man to take in society, and it requires skin to be shed and new responsibilities to be accepted.

If you don't allow some flexibility in these ideas of what makes a man, then you get stuck with an idea that is carried past its expiration date. If you cling to any idea of yourself, then when life changes you'll be stopping the natural process of growth that life is offering you.

Life is about growth and change, and there are always opportunities to shed skin and step into new roles. It's important to loosely hold your idea of what it means to be a man and open up to the possibility of manliness looking different according to the situation. Maybe being a man looks like a warrior fighting in battle; maybe it looks like a caregiver changing diapers and bottle feeding; maybe it looks like a confident businessman charming his way through a meeting.

If you are open to your identity changing and your actions looking different in different situations, you'll be able to move with the ebb and flow of life, and you'll ease into the different roles offered to you. This will not only make life easier for you but also for those around you.

Mindfulness Helps Us Grow Our Identity Over Time

Self awareness is essential for us to grow into our new roles and identities. When you're aware, then you can override the previous beliefs that you normally follow blindly. The more you can become aware, the more you'll be able to see why you act the way you do, and the more you'll be able to challenge any ideas that are trapping you in a fixed role.

Should I buy this pink shirt? No, men don't wear pink. But why not? In the end, it's a sense of self confidence that makes you strong, not just choosing the colors that fit into your ideas of manliness. And self-confidence arises naturally when you know why you're choosing to be a certain way and you make that choice consciously, not basing your identity on someone else's ideas.

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The Mindful Man: A New Definition

So, what does it mean to be a man? I'd suggest that having a mind that is honest, aware, flexible, and resilient makes you more of a man than any set idea or role. This is where our mindfulness practice brings such great benefits.

The more we practice, the more we're able to work with our beliefs and open up to change. We open ourselves to the flow of life and stop getting stuck in ideas that no longer serve us. Practicing mindfulness and training your awareness is the keystone to creating a flexible mind. And although it doesn't happen overnight, it's one of the best investments you'll ever make in your life.

