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## SESSION 17

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# Real Men

## Power and Privilege

In most Western cultures, men are a privileged group. Many men grow up believing that they should receive preferential treatment just because they are men. They hear this from other men and from women who were raised to believe the same thing. Both men and women have been constricted by the traditional roles imposed on them by society. Women are limited in what they are allowed to do, what they believe about themselves, and what they can aspire to. Men are limited in how they relate to others, what they are allowed to experience emotionally, and where they are supposed to dedicate their energies. Male-female relationships are inherently problematic as the result of this difference in power.

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Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1. What are some of the rights or expectations that men grow up with?

2. What are the costs to women when you expect or demand these rights?

3. What are the costs to you when you expect or demand these rights?

4. How does this sense of entitlement affect the way in which you relate to other men?

The most common arena in which power and control are contested is the intimate relationship between a man and a woman. Heterosexual men are most likely to assume a privileged role with a spouse, partner, or girlfriend. The following are beliefs that some men have about male-female relationships.

## The Rights of Male Entitlement

1. To control her behavior
2. To make all decisions
3. To be in charge
4. To treat her like a servant
5. To treat her as your property
6. To be taken care of at home and at work (meals prepared, laundry done, coffee made)
7. To believe that, because you are a man, you are better than she is

Answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1. Have you ever assumed that you had any of these rights?
2. How do you think the other people involved felt as a result of your behavior?

3. How did you feel after acting this way?

4. How do you feel about that behavior now?

## Grief

When you first begin a recovery program, you may experience deep regret for how you have lived your life, and you may begin to grieve for the losses you have experienced as a result of addiction. You may begin to get in touch with feelings of grief for people and relationships that you have lost, including loved ones who have passed away. Perhaps you numbed these feelings with alcohol and other drugs, but now they are coming to the surface. Initially, it may seem as though the feelings of grief will overwhelm you. You may be afraid that, if you acknowledge the grief, you will never stop hurting.

Merle Fossum wrote one of the first books about men and recovery; in it, he said this about grief:

First we learn to surrender; then we feel the grief that follows; and then we must go back even further and surrender to the grief itself rather than beat it back. This is the process of transformation. This is how we work

with the mystery of powerlessness and allow change and growth into our lives. Through this mystery, a new healing occurs, and a feeling of peace, self-acceptance, and excitement comes over us.

Answer the following questions in the space provided.

1. On a scale of one to ten, with one representing no significant losses, what number would you assign to reflect the losses you have experienced in your life? Explain.

2. How did you deal with the most recent loss you experienced?

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- ~~3. What are some of the fears that you have about dealing with grief and loss?~~

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The quotation is from *Catching Fire: Men's Renewal and Recovery Through Crisis*, by Merle Fossum 1989, pp. 34-35. Center City, MN: Hazelden. Copyright 1989 by Hazelden Foundation. Reprinted with permission of Merle Fossum.

4. What would you need to feel safe enough to fully express your feelings of grief?

5. Do you have any unresolved grief issues? How important do these seem to you at this time?

## A New Definition of Masculinity

In Session 2, you identified many of the rules for being a man that you learned from your family, at school, through the media, and so on. While some of these rules may have worked well for you, many of them are not consistent with how you want to lead your life in recovery. Now that you are clean and sober and have had the opportunity to explore some new ideas about masculinity, you are in a position to create some new rules for yourself.

1. What are the new rules you would like to live by with respect to how you deal with your feelings and other aspects of your inner life? An example is "My emotions are normal and natural, and it is healthy to share my feelings with other people in my life."

2. What are the new rules you would like to live by with respect to the important relationships in your life? An example is "Asking for help and support is a sign of strength and confidence, not an indication of weakness."

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3. What are the new rules you would like to live by with respect to your sexuality?  
An example is "It's okay to express my sexuality in any way I want as long as I am not harming myself or another person."

4. What are the new rules you would like to live by with respect to your spirituality? An example is "I will give to others because it enriches me in the long run."



# Meditation

Twelve Step programs such as A.A. encourage you to establish "conscious contact" with a higher power. Prayer and meditation are useful ways of developing and nurturing your spiritual self. Meditation is the practice of being still and focusing. It is a way to surrender, let go, and receive peace. Through meditation, by doing nothing, you can find the wisdom and strength to handle the challenges of life.

Two simple methods of meditation involve breathing and walking. They are summarized here.

**Breathing.** Sit in a quiet place, free from distraction. Empty your hands and lap, sit up straight, and place your feet flat on the floor. (If you prefer, you may sit on the floor.) Close your eyes, lower your eyelids, or focus on one object. Count to four slowly as you breathe in. Then count to four as you breathe out. Pay attention to your breath. Empty your mind of all other thoughts. Try to keep doing this for five minutes or so. If a thought comes into your mind, just acknowledge it and let it go. Then go back to focusing on your breathing.

**Walking.** Find a place either indoors or outside where you can walk without interruption. Walk very slowly, focusing on how your body feels as you move. Let each cycle of breathing be one step. As you breathe in, move one leg slowly forward. As you complete half of your step, let your breath out slowly until your leg lands gently on the ground. This type of meditation takes patience; there is no hurry. Empty your mind of all other thoughts. Relax your breathing. Try to disregard whatever is around you. If a thought comes into your mind or you notice something outside yourself, just acknowledge it and let it go. Then focus again on your walking. Do this for five minutes or so.

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## Assignment

The assignment to be completed before the next session follows:

Using any medium or format that you choose, create a representation of your new definition of masculinity. This project should express any of your ideas about what it really means to be a man. You could write a short poem, a song, or a rap. You could create a drawing or painting. You could make a collage or a clay sculpture. You may believe that you don't have any creative or artistic talent, but this assignment isn't about talent or the quality of your effort. It's about tapping into the creative part of your mind and using that aspect of yourself to expand your understanding of masculinity.

You will have the opportunity to share your project at the beginning of the next group session. However, you will not be required to share it with the group if you are uncomfortable doing so.

## Reflections on Recovery

Developing a new definition of masculinity requires a process of rigorous self-examination. You need to look at your past, your present, and your desired future. You need to accept where you came from and what you've learned along the way. You need to be honest about who you are and what you really feel. You need to look at all your old behaviors and attitudes and ask which of these have worked for you and which haven't. Becoming the man that you want to be is a physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual journey. With each step along this journey, it is important to give yourself credit for the distance that you have already traveled.

Use the space that follows to record any thoughts you have about the material covered in today's session.

## Into Action

This is an optional activity. What you choose to do does not necessarily have to relate to the material covered in this session; however, it should relate in some way to your recovery. Examples of action steps:

1. Talk to your partner or another woman in your life about her experience with men and male entitlement. Ask how they were affected by this.
2. If you have any unresolved or lingering grief issues, schedule an appointment with your counselor, a chaplain, or another professional.

Use the space below to describe what action step you will take between now and the next session. You also can record what results were achieved.

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