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How is a man supposed to be a man?

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In my research, I have been honoured to interview men in the UK about their experiences of wanting to be a 'Dad'. All the meetings have been moving and reflected some aspect of my own thoughts and feelings regarding not becoming a father – a status so easily achieved and important that it can't usually be talked about. What do the men say? Well quite, a lot and I can just give a flavour of the depth and range that the impact of male involuntary childlessness has had on them. Shane (33) blamed his two divorces on his desire for fatherhood. He saw the children as completing a family and himself as person, ***"You need to have the child to make you blossom as a person, as a family."*** Such was the impact of not achieving his dream of being a father by the age of 30 that, ***"I was very, very depressed last year, suicidal."*** Many men wanted to repeat their own experience of being fathered, ***"I saw him as a role model. For being a good Dad. Enjoying being a Dad. He was delighted to be a Dad. And I'd always assumed I'd become a Dad"*** (Phil, 51). Harry (64), a widower, had assumed he would die first and so when his partner of 39 years died two years ago he was left bereft, ***"If we'd had children there would be a little piece of her still around"***. In addition, he now thought that because he was now a solo living, older man, he had to be careful ***"I don't want someone to look saying, 'Watch that old man'."*** The fear of being seen a paedophile has been very strong with the men I've spoken to. Frank (56) single and solo living in a large rural village said, ***"How is a man supposed to be a man?"*** I believe his questions reflected the dramatic changes that have taken place socially and economically over the past 60years. How are you supposed to be man in the 21st century? How are you supposed to be a young man, a middle aged man, a young-old man, an old-old man? Is the breadwinner, provider, unemotional, yet virile ideal-man stereotype still valid? Was it ever? Where are the new resources that will provide the narratives to support men who 'don't quite fit'? Finally, one of the most moving chats I had was with a man who had nothing to do with research. 'John' (@ 45) was laying a concrete ramp at my home. As we chatted I explained my research and about my own

expectation to have been a Dad. John (@45) stood up and looked me in the eye and said with real emotion in his voice, ***“I don’t know what I’d do without my kids.”*** In that moment, we shared an understanding. Men talk – it is the listening and the hearing that is the difficult part.