Dan Doty's Tips for Men's Mental Health During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic presents some unique challenges on mental health, especially for men. Dan Doty shares his ideas.

May 15, 2020 By Justin Birckbichler

Dan Doty has dedicated his life to men's mental health and the direct link between our mental health and our overall well-being. According to him, connection and taking on challenges together is the only way to thrive. I recently sat down with him to discuss how men can take care of their mental health during this COVID19 pandemic and beyond, to complement a previous article on how to spend your "Quarantime."

ABSOT: Before we dive in, I want to know...Who is Dan Doty?

Dan Doty: I am the co-founder of EVRYMAN. Before that, I was a wilderness therapy guide for many years. I became a high school inner city high school teacher in the Bronx for a couple of years where I specialized working with young, struggling young men. I was also a television director and executive producer for a cult hit TV show called Meat Eater, a hunting and food show."

ABSOT: Pretty cool that we both have a background in education. Let's get to business, specifically yours. What's the goal of EVRYMAN?

DD: The goal of EVRYMAN is to bring on a new paradigm of men's emotional health and wellness in the world by setting a stage and a network and a community of men who come together to practice slowing down, getting in touch with what they feel and sharing it with each other. In doing so, we are dismantling maybe the stereotypes of men as stoic and isolated. That's the goal of EVRYMAN. We want to get a million men into men's groups in five or ten years.

ABSOT: What led you to form EVRYMAN?

DD: It was clearly something I was setting out to do since I was in my early 20s, working with young men in the wilderness. I was basically shown simple ways for guys to interact, communicate and slow down out in the wilderness. Immediately, I knew that it was a great crime that this information, or these ways of being, were mostly just shared in reactive ways to deal with crises. I envisioned something that could bring good tools to men proactively, so that fathers could be good fathers, guys could be good partners, and all of those things [we strive to be as men]. There was a clear desire to do something proactive.

Then the Healthline partnership came up and they reached out and said, 'We're looking for potential content partners for men's mental and emotional health.' That just was a very good fit right off the bat. They were looking for voices and perspectives on a particular health crisis and that's what we're serving. As a writer myself, and as sort of the front man for EVRYMAN, it's a pretty awesome collaboration and opportunity to get out in the world.

ABSOT: Obviously, this pandemic is a major event that is impacting men everywhere. What tips do you have to share for supporting men's mental health during COVID-19?

DD: I've have a few, practical steps on how to help men's mental health during isolation:

- Feel Your Feelings – Taking proactive action for your mental health not only gets you the support you need, but it also helps break down the cultural stigma that can be a barrier to other men getting help.



- Reach out to Connect – A call with your parents, a video chat with your co-workers, or a text message to a sibling can be invaluable right now. In order to make the best of these moments of connection, you can make them count by being more vulnerable and transparent.

- Go Inside (Yourself) – You don’t have to become a great meditator or world-class yogi to benefit from the amazing meditation apps that are out there. Don’t overthink it – try an exercise of setting a timer and writing for 10 minutes without stopping. Let go and write anything and everything that wants to come out.

- Take Action – It might feel very tricky to take action right now, but a helpful strategy is to slow down and find small, manageable ways to move forward and orient ourselves to simple, practical actions. What may seem small and mundane at first glance can bring an air of progress and forward momentum.

It all comes down to connecting.

It is the time to put in play the very basics of EVRYMAN: the ROC formula: Relax, Open and Connect.

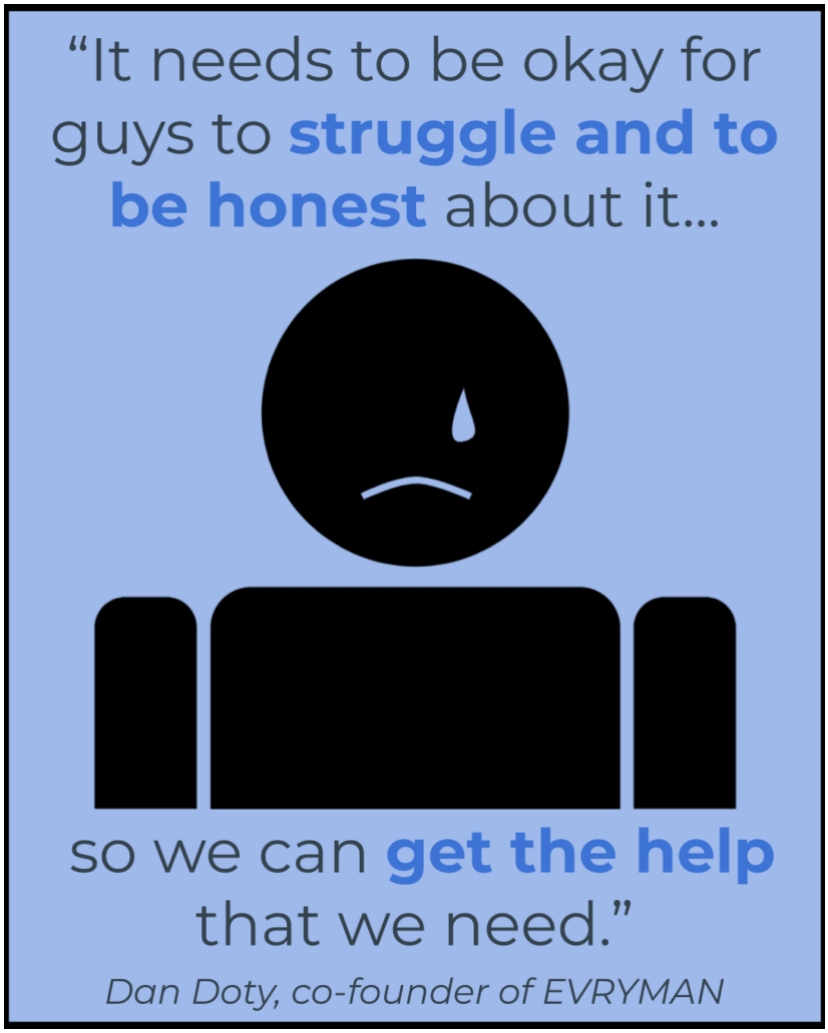
Another way to say it is slow down, be honest with yourself, get in touch with what you feel, and take that risk of being vulnerable with other people. In doing that and taking that action like that will naturally bring about the supportive relationships and connections that men need, and those that are around them need. So it’s not just for the men, but it’s for those in their life that are hurting as well.

This is not a gendered thing. We work with men specifically, because there’s a specific need, but this practice and these methods, it’s just about tapping into a simple way that we’re all wired as humans to connect.

ABSOT: At some point this crisis will end, and how would you like to see men handle their mental health beyond COVID-19?

DD: I would like us to learn from this experience and recognize that the needs that we have now during this time are not different than our normal needs. I think they’re heightened and we’re having this opportunity where everything has been held back. Our basic needs are basic. Everything is coming to the forefront.

What I tell people when they ask how I feel, I say it feels like I’ve been in a Crock-Pot and all the meat has fallen off my bones and all that’s left there is the structure; the structure of what I need and the structure of who I am. I feel like hopefully there are moments of vulnerability that men are going through and they can get the connection they need.



And then this can stick. For example, right now, there's an article in The New York Times about how our leaders are crying in public. This used to be a huge no, no with a huge stigma. I read in that article that there were senators that got hate mail for decades for crying in public. It's crazy. It's just so crazy. And it's not that man needs to just start weeping everywhere all the time. That's not it at all, but just that it needs to be okay for guys to struggle and to be honest about it so we can get the help that we need.

ABSOT: Very insightful. So thinking broader here, why is it so important for men to speak up about mental health?

DD: Simply, because it's not the norm and because there's this crazy thing that men are assumed to be, expected to be not human. Really, that's what it comes down to is giving men the permission to be human. Humans need each other and humans struggle, right? Guys struggle. All guys struggle. You know, the fact that it's still unpopular to be honest about that is really unfortunate. It just doesn't help anybody out for people to walk around pretending that they're okay when they're not. I foresee a great chain of events in which guys can just literally cut the BS and start to be honest about how they feel.

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