

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN BANTER GOES TOO FAR?

TRY
THIS

Banter is how lots of men connect - it builds ease, humour and belonging. But it's also one of the places where things can quietly go wrong.

A joke is only funny when everyone's laughing, and other men learn just as much from the tone you set as from the words you use. When teasing turns into targeting, or when one person is always on the receiving end, the humour can slip into exclusion. What's seen as "just a bit of fun" by some can feel like humiliation or pressure to others - especially for young men who are still figuring out where they fit. They are watching, not just at what's said, but at what's encouraged, ignored, or challenged.

As a role model, the way you handle these moments sets the tone, and shows that humour and respect can exist side-by-side.



SPOTTING THE RED FLAGS

Spotting the red flags gives you a chance to act before things cross a line.

- ☐ The same person is always singled out as the punchline.
- ☐ People start laughing less naturally, are forcing their smiles and looking away.
- ☐ Someone changes their behaviour to be more timid or reserved.
- ☐ The topic hits a nerve.
- ☐ 'It's just a joke' becomes the defence - if you need to explain the intent, you missed the mark.
- ☐ The joke keeps going long after the fun has stopped.

ADDRESS IT IN THE MOMENT

When you hear something that crosses the line and everyone freezes for a split second...

1. Take a breath and keep your tone light, not angry.
2. Use a quick line that resets the tone: "Alright, that one landed a bit hard, let's move on."
3. Smile as redirect to diffuse the tension.
4. Give the group something else to pivot to: change the topic, shift the energy. Move on quickly with no lectures.

Why it works: You've drawn a boundary without embarrassing anyone.

CHECK IN ON YOUR MATE

You think someone was uncomfortable but didn't speak up...

1. Wait until you are one-on-one.
2. Say something short and direct: "Hey mate, that joke before didn't sit right with me. Are you alright?"
3. Don't assume - ask - and listen more than you talk.
4. Back them if they need support: "If you want, I can say something next time."
5. If they shrug it off, fine. They'll remember that you noticed.

Why it works: Quiet support builds trust. It tells people they're safe around you and that's the core of real leadership.

RESET THE TONE AFTERWARDS

You want to keep relationships strong but stop something from repeating...

1. Catch them privately after.
2. Keep it calm and clear, naming the behaviour and not the person: "When you said X, it got a bit uncomfortable."
3. If they get defensive, stay steady: "Yeah, I know, I'm just flagging it early."
4. Explain impact over intention - That your intention can be good and the impact can still be hurting, which matters.
5. Finish with something neutral or positive to keep connection: "You're good, I just wanted to say something."

Why it works: You protect the relationship and shift the culture.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN SOMEONE IS LOST ONLINE?

A lot of young men are spending more time online than in conversation with real people. Algorithms feed them the same strong opinions and easy answers about what it means to "be a man" - often wrapped in anger, blame or false confidence - over and over until a passing joke becomes an opinion, and then a value set. It can sound convincing, especially to boys who are trying to make sense of the world or find belonging.

As a role model, you don't need to know every influencer, meme or phrase to make a difference - you just need to show up in a way the internet can't. What matters is being a grounded, authentic presence that shows there's another way to be, and means they're far less likely to be pulled into the noise.



SPOTTING THE RED FLAGS

Keep an eye out for subtle shifts in what young people say or how they talk about others:

- ☐ Repeating extreme opinions with confidence but no curiosity.
- ☐ Making sweeping statements about feminism, success, or "real men."
- ☐ Making jokes that "don't sound like them."
- ☐ Showing frustration or contempt when challenged.
- ☐ Dismissing empathy or respect as "weak."
- ☐ Spending long hours online and withdrawing from real activities or friendships with secrecy.

OPEN A REAL-WORLD CONVERSATION

You hear a young person echo something they've picked up online...

1. Stay calm and curious - no eye rolls or lectures.
2. Ask a question that opens space: "Where'd you hear that?" or "What do you think he means by that?"
3. Let them talk. Don't fact-check. Ask what they think in their own words.
4. Share your own take once they've been heard: "I get why that sounds appealing. Here's what I've seen in real life."
5. End by inviting thinking, not shutting it down: "It's good to hear different views. Just remember - online isn't the whole story."
6. Let them know you are always there to bounce ideas off of.

Why it works: Curiosity builds trust; confrontation builds walls. The best way to interrupt reinforcement is by getting them to think, not copy.

BRING THEM BACK TO REAL LIFE

They seem stuck online or disengaged offline...

1. Suggest doing something shoulder-to-shoulder: cooking, working on a project, kicking a ball - something hands-on.
2. Keep the vibe casual, not corrective. Connection grows from time spent, not pressure to talk.
3. Use the moment to reconnect: "What've you been watching lately?"
4. Build routine contact through regular, low-stakes moments where they can show up as themselves.

Why it works: Real experiences challenge online ones. When you give boys something tangible to belong to, you make the digital echo chamber less appealing.

TRY THIS

BREAK THE ALGORITHM YOURSELF

They're quoting online influencers like they're mentors or experts...

1. Ask: "Who do you know in real life who thinks like that?"
2. Highlight lived examples: coaches, uncles, mates, teachers: "What does Uncle Jack think about showing weakness?"
3. Compare the influencer's behaviour with how real men they admire act. "Uncle Jack always admits when he can't do something by himself."
4. Let them draw their own conclusions.

Why it works: Because it shifts their focus from loud, distant voices to the steady, real men in their actual lives - the ones whose actions, mistakes and integrity genuinely shape who they become.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN STEREOTYPES CREEP IN?

Even if we don't believe in old-school ideas about what it means to "be a man," most of us still feel the pressure to live up to them. Stay in control. Don't show weakness. Be the provider. Be tough. Keep emotions in check.

Those unwritten rules can slip into our lives and relationships without us realising. The danger isn't that all those traits are bad - it's that when they're the only ones we allow, they block things like empathy, patience, and honesty.

As a role model, you have the chance to show that there is no right way to be a man, that it is up to each of us to define for ourselves. The way you live your values, follow your interests, share emotion and stand firm in who you are gives others permission to do the same.



SPOTTING THE RED FLAGS

Spot the moments when stereotypes are sneaking in - in yourself, or in others:

- ☐ You feel you have to "fix" things instead of listening.
- ☐ Someone hides a mistake or emotion to look strong.
- ☐ Someone mocks something "soft" or "feminine."
- ☐ Competition turns personal, not playful.
- ☐ You find yourself avoiding vulnerability in front of others.
- ☐ Someone avoids an interest because of how it "looks."

LEAD WITH WHO YOU ACTUALLY ARE

Whenever you notice yourself shrinking or reshaping who you are because of old-school expectations...

1. Name the value or interest that matters to you, even if it's not "traditionally masculine."
2. Act on it in front of others without apologising or softening it.
3. Share why you like it or why it feels important - keep it simple and real.
4. Back yourself publicly when you feel the pressure to "blend in."
5. Encourage others when they show different sides of themselves too.

Why it works: Because it gives others the permission to bring their full selves too - not just the parts they think will be accepted.

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CHALLENGE THE MAN BOX

Anytime you hear comments, jokes or behaviours that reinforce the idea that there is only one "right" way to be a man...

1. Keep your tone relaxed and steady - not confrontational.
2. Call out the stereotype, not the person: "That's one way, but not the only way."
3. Offer a different example.
4. Make space for others: "You do you - that's what matters."
5. Back the people who are already breaking the mould.

Why it works: It normalises a broader, healthier version of masculinity and gives others permission to define their version.

EXPAND THE EMOTIONAL SPECTRUM

In moments where you or someone else is frustrated, disappointed, stressed or avoiding emotion...

1. Say what you're feeling in a simple, grounded way: "I'm having a tough day."
2. Show that emotions come and go - they don't control you.
3. Invite others to name what they're feeling without judgement.
4. Model calm coping strategies like a breath, a pause, a reset.
5. Celebrate emotional honesty in others when you see it.

Why it works: It teaches that emotions aren't weaknesses - they're tools for clarity, connection and resilience.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN CONVERSATIONS GET REAL?

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Some conversations just aren't easy, but they may be the most important moments that you have with people around you. They'll be the chats that feel uncomfortable, the ones that start with silence, frustration, or fear of saying the wrong thing.

Maybe a mate's drinking more than usual. Maybe a teenager in your life has shut down. Maybe someone's going through something you don't understand, and you don't know how to help. Most men tell us they hesitate because they don't want to make things worse.

As a role model, how you show up in these moments matters more than what you say. Tone, attention and honesty matter more than the "right" answer.



SPOTTING THE RED FLAGS

You might be in a tough conversation moment when:

- ☐ Someone close to you is withdrawing, moody or acting out of character.
- ☐ You can feel tension sitting between you - something unsaid that's hanging in the air.
- ☐ Someone brushes off something serious too fast with "I'm fine."
- ☐ They hint at something but avoid details.
- ☐ You keep replaying a moment later, thinking, "I should've said something."

MAKE SPACE, NOT A SCENE

You want to check in on someone, but you're not sure how...

1. Choose a setting that feels natural - the car, a walk, fixing something together.
2. Keep it gentle and casual: "You've seemed a bit quiet lately - everything okay?"
3. Don't press for answers, just give them space to talk if they want to.
4. If they shrug it off, give them space to respond in their own time.: "No worries, mate. I'm here if you want to chat later."
5. Follow up a few days later - consistency builds trust.

Why it works: People open up when they feel safe, not cornered.

LISTEN MORE THAN YOU LEAD

They start talking and you're not sure what to say...

1. Put distractions away, especially your phone.
2. Show you're listening - nod, give small "yeah"s, "makes sense" or repeat key words.
3. Don't jump straight into fixing - let them speak first.
4. When you respond, name what you've heard: "Sounds like that's been pretty heavy for you."
5. Avoid rushing to advice. Instead, ask: "What do you reckon you need right now?"
6. If you're out of your depth, be honest: "I don't have all the answers, but I'm glad you told me."
7. Use everyday touchpoints to stay connected - a text, a quick chat, a shared activity.

Why it works: Being heard is as powerful as being helped.

KNOW WHEN TO HAND IT OVER

When the conversation becomes too heavy, serious or emotionally loaded for you to manage...

1. Stay steady and calm - they borrow your composure.
2. Acknowledge their courage: "Thanks for telling me, that's not easy."
3. Ask gently: "Would talking to someone else help too?"
4. Offer options: a GP, coach, parent, mentor or support service.

Why it works: You're walking with them and helping them get the support they deserve.