

MIND MATTERS



ARE YOU BOGGED MATE?

www.areyouboggedmate.com.au

As I recently watched a massive line of four-wheel drives file slowly in and park reverently outside a small country town church, something in my heart changed forever.

They emerged, dressed in their Sunday best; some of these blokes I didn't even know owned a tie. It was a really busy time of year, but they stopped all of those important farm jobs to come and say goodbye and pay their respects to a mate who decided to hand in his time sheet way too early.

As the minister lamented quotes from the bible about 'a time for everything; a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to reap'; you know the one.

All I could think was, these are farmers, no one knows better than this crowd about planting and reaping but I'm stuffed if I could find any reason for this man to die at his own hand in the prime of his life. And judging by the faces on the country men around me, neither could they.

The statistics are everywhere, Australian males between 15 and 45 years of age are one of the highest risk categories for suicide. Men are 3 to 4 times more likely to take their own life than women and the further you move from the coast into regional, rural, and remote Australia, the more that figure climbs. Why? Why are my country heroes cashing in their chips early?

The experts will tell you that that it's due to reasons like 'the isolation', 'men don't talk about emotions', 'they don't know how to express their feelings'... Well I call bullshit! I don't have a psychology degree of any kind, I'm not a doctor of any type, I haven't studied mental health at all but I do know country men. And this is what I do know... country men are the toughest, hardest working, funniest, most sincere, totally dependable, thoroughly genuine people you will ever meet. So, don't sit in your university office in the city and tell me that you know rural men.

As a rule, I don't think rural men are challenged by 'the isolation'. I think most actually thrive on it, they enjoy the peace and tranquillity that surrounds them. They enjoy the time they spend tending the earth and its creatures.

They are nourished and challenged by nature and all its hardships. Everyone needs interaction with other people, but isolation only really becomes a major problem when coupled with depression.

Let's face it, rural men are never going to be like their soft pink-handed city counterparts (no disrespect to city blokes intended, purely a comparison!). Country blokes aren't going to join a men's group or catch up with mates to discuss their feelings, relationships, or finances over a double decaf latte at some hipster café that has kale on the menu. That's not how they roll.

Rural men let off steam (release emotions) differently. They play footy, go camping, shooting, fishing, ride horses or dirt bikes, go water skiing, have a few beers with mates, they might even throw a few harmless punches with a mate after too many beers or on the footy field. These are just some of the release valves for rural men and they need to be supported and encouraged to do whatever it is that gives them release. Don't let the pressure build up inside.

The suite of skills needed to live and work in the rural sector has never been greater and yet the divide between city and country has never been bigger. Never before has agriculture been so scorned by city dwellers who view farmers as environmental vandals and poisonous food producers. And if all that isn't enough pressure for rural blokes, what about adding a sick child, the loss of a loved one or a marriage breakdown into the equation? I don't think we need another study to find out why rural men are struggling.

We have all been bogged at some point. It might have been just a sticky patch of the road or paddock where the vehicle stopped moving, you panicked, threw it into four-wheel drive and got out. Maybe you needed low range, maybe you had to winch yourself out, but you got out, you got through it.

But what happens when you get properly bogged? When it's down to the running boards, sitting on the chassis, you are not getting out of this one easily - that's the kind of bogged I mean. So, what do you do? Do you burn the vehicle? Hell no!

When you have finished swearing, praying and walking around in circles scratching your head; you know this is as bad as it gets, you are going to have to ask for help.

Oh the shame! The whole district is going to be laughing about it, your mates will bring it up for years (probably forever!). You don't want anyone to know but you have to get help.

It's a bit the same with depression, but it's not funny like when you get bogged in mud. Most of the time we get ourselves through the rough patches in life but when depression strikes, you need proper medical care to get you out of this bog hole. The more bogged you get the harder it is to ask for help.

In your head, you will justify to yourself with a million excuses why you can't or won't ask for help. None of those excuses are any comfort as I watch a grieving widow, a young family and a whole community grapple to find answers and repeatedly ask 'why didn't he tell someone'.

You don't want anyone to know that you aren't coping and you don't want to talk to some counsellor that doesn't know you, I get that.

But please, for the sake of your family and your precious rural communities, reach out to somebody, anybody, your partner, your mates, or even me.

We will support you. You are only bogged, it's ok, we all get bogged but most importantly, you can definitely get out of it.

Don't destroy your vehicle just because you are bogged to the arse. Tell someone you are feeling bogged. If your son was struggling, would you want him to ask for help?



I PROMISE YOU THERE IS ALWAYS A WAY OUT OF THE BOG HOLE AND THERE ARE PLENTY OF PEOPLE READY TO HELP YOU. DON'T CHOOSE A PERMANENT SOLUTION FOR A TEMPORARY PROBLEM. WE HAVE ALREADY LOST TOO MANY GOOD MEN.

#areyouboggledmate

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR THAT YOU OR A MATE ARE NOT COPING?

Some of the signs that someone is not doing well mentally are not always the obvious ones.

A combination of these feelings or behaviours indicate that something is most definitely not right:

- quitting activities that were previously important
- feelings of hopelessness
- expressing rage, anger or revenge
- engaging in reckless or risky behaviours
- increased use of drugs and alcohol
- withdrawing from friends and families
- putting affairs in order, e.g. giving away possessions, especially those that have special significance for the person
- anxiety or agitation
- abnormal sleep patterns
- dramatic changes in mood, such as sudden feelings of happiness after a long period of sadness, or depression

WHY WOULD YOUR MATE GET BOGGED?

There are multitudes of factors that lead to depression in rural men – droughts, floods, rising input costs, falling commodity prices, pressure from banks, family pressure, feeling compelled to stay on the farm, etc.

Today rural men and particularly farmers have additional pressures to previous generations.

They are expected to be soil scientists, agronomists, hydrologists, accountants, meteorologists, chemical experts, mechanics, engineers, marketers, environmentalists and the list goes on.

The suite of skills needed to live and work in the rural sector has never been greater and yet the divide between city and country has never been bigger.

There's a lot of challenges of living in the bush and takes guts to speak out if you're bogged. Look out for your mates and help them reach out to the right people.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

Generally, you should seek professional help if you are noticing one or more of these signs and they are:

- constant or noticeable most of the time;
- persisting for a period of about two weeks or more;
- affecting your daily life in a negative way.

However, if you are feeling any concerns for your personal mental health and wellbeing at all, there is never a wrong time to seek help. You are encouraged to seek help at any time.

HELP IS CLOSE AT HAND

LIFELINE AUSTRALIA

13 11 14 | www.lifeline.org.au

Lifeline is a national charity providing all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to 24-hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.

MENSLINE AUSTRALIA

1300 789 978 | www.mensline.org.au

MensLine Australia is a telephone and online counselling service offering support for Australian men anywhere, anytime.

BEYOND BLUE

1300 224 636 | www.beyondblue.org.au

Provides information and support to help everyone in Australia achieve their best possible mental health, whatever their age and wherever they live.

SUICIDE CALL BACK

1300 659 467

www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service is a national 24/7 telehealth provider that offers free professional phone and online counselling for people living in Australia.

RURAL AID

1300 327 624 | www.ruralaid.org.au

Rural Aid is a holistic support program aimed at helping rural Australia. Please note that Rural Aid is currently only available to primary producers.

VIRTUAL PSYCHOLOGIST

0488 807 266

virtualpsychologist.com.au/rural-remote

Don't feel like talking to someone on the phone? You can send text messages to Virtual Psychologist.

FARMSITTERS

07 4669 6686 | www.farmsitters.com.au

Australia is the first of its kind, providing a link between you and a wide range of potential short-term caretakers for your property. Take some time out for yourself and your family. Relax, rejuvenate and enjoy doing the things that make you happy.

AUSTRALIAN MEN'S SHED ASSOCIATION

1300 550 009 | mensshed.org/find-a-shed

Find some mates near you with Australian Men's Shed Association

IFARMWELL

www.ifarmwell.com.au

A free online tool kit to help farmers cope effectively with life's challenges and get the most out of every day.

RURAL FINANCIAL COUNSELLING SERVICE

1800 686 175 | bit.ly/rfcs-help

Talk to a rural financial counsellor. It is a free, confidential service. They can give you individual support to meet your needs and help you to make the right decisions for your business.