



M is for MASCULINITY

This resource has been designed by Lyn French, A Space Director, to be used with the emotional learning cards from the set entitled '**A-Z of Emotions**'. Purchase the cards online at www.inivacreativelearning.org

Many boys and men feel under pressure to be a certain way simply because they are male. Girls and women can also have fixed ideas of what makes boys and men 'masculine'.

- Describe what masculinity means to you.

Often masculinity is associated with being tough and never showing softer feelings or crying. All of us, regardless of our gender, are part of the human family. We share the same feelings and qualities such as those listed below. Select one or two and describe some situations in which boys or men might feel this way.

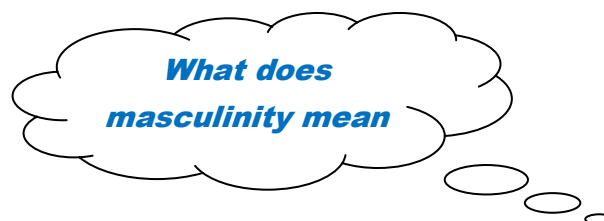
tender-hearted / gentle / tearful / compassionate / understanding / in need of comforting

The British rap star Professor Green says real courage is not acting tough but being able to show emotions and talk about them. Professor Green was filmed for UK television talking openly about his Hackney youth on a London social housing estate. He spoke of the feelings he still has about his father leaving his family when he was still very young. When Professor Green was in his early 20's, his father committed suicide.

- Why are fathers important? If fathers aren't around, who can fill the gap?

The subject of his father's death is one which Professor Green has returned to in his songs such as "*Read All About It*". Now he is in his 30's and wants to come to terms with the emotional pain he still feels about his dad leaving him as a child and then dying before he had a chance to get to know him.

- If you saw a young man crying, what would be your first impression?
- Why do you think it's important to come to terms with left over feelings from childhood?



In the TV show, Professor Green talks to a therapist about how important it is for boys and men to explore all their feelings. Professor Green says no one should be ashamed of crying.



Both he and his therapist agree that young men need to learn that talking about emotions and expressing them is normal.

- Which of these feelings or mind states do you think boys or men might feel more comfortable expressing? excitement / sympathy / pride / fear / anger / hurt feelings / ambition / self-sufficiency (never needing anyone). Why might boys/ men cover up more vulnerable feelings?
- Which feelings do you think boys or men find hardest to express? feeling low or depressed/ feeling sad and tearful/ feeling hopeless/ feeling not good enough / feeling scared or anxious. Select one or two of these and describe some situations in which boys or men might feel this way.

In today's world, being aware of our emotions and being able to talk about them is seen by many as the most important qualities to have. The feelings listed above are felt by everyone. We all have the same set of feelings regardless of our gender. We learn whether it's ok or not to express our feelings by observing how our family, friends, peers and other adults around us act.

- Have you seen boys or men crying or showing vulnerable feelings? What does this bring up for you? If you haven't seen boys or men exposing their softer side, do you still feel ok expressing your own hurt feelings?

Our family's opinions or culture or religious beliefs might be giving us messages about what is expected of boys and men.

- Whether you're male or female, what impressions of masculinity have you picked up from your family or your culture or religion?
- Do you need to change the way you think?

In his TV film, Professor Green talks to Dr Aaron Balick about getting help to understand and work through his feelings about being a man who is still carrying childhood pain.

- Professor Green's father moved away from his family when Professor Green was very young. What feelings might this have left him with?
- What other childhood experiences might leave behind difficult feelings and thoughts?

Dr Balick is a psychotherapist, author, academic and resident therapist on Radio 1. He tells us that there are lots of expectations about what it means to be a boy/ man or girl/ woman but there is no one way to be either. When it comes to feelings, he says that we all need to be in touch with our emotions regardless of our gender.

Another stereotypical but outdated idea is the assumption that boys are expected to be attracted to girls and that having a girlfriend is an important way of showing their status.



- If a boy or man you know is in a same sex relationship, what are your feelings and thoughts about this?

Dr Balick says when it comes to sexuality, you can't make assumptions about people either. We don't have to label ourselves right away as 'straight' or 'gay' or 'bi' or 'trans'. Sexual identity can take time to work out and may change as we get older.

CONCLUSION

We're all a combination of so-called 'masculine' and 'feminine' traits. Feelings are not gender-specific - we all have the same set of emotions. It's ok for boys/men to feel sad, tearful, anxious, vulnerable and in need of support just as it is for girls to feel this way. It's also fine both boys/men and girls/women to feel strong, empowered, ambitious and full of life!

LEARNING MORE

Look at other worksheets and **Emotional Learning Cards** to support you in identifying your feelings and figuring out who you are. Our cards use art to help start you thinking and talking about themes such as what we feel, who we are and where we're going in our lives. Here are some of the sets in our series:

- *A to Z of Emotions*
- *What do you feel?*
- *who are you? Where are you going?*
- *How do we live well with others?*
- *What do relationships mean to you?*

You can also read more about growing up in Dr Balick's book called '**Keep Your Cool: How To Deal With Life's Worries and Stress**' - you'll find out we all have similar feelings and thoughts as we are growing up!

