



Men's emotions and the 'Old rule book'

Very early on men learn not to express the strong basic emotions of fear, sadness, or shame, because of many experiences of being ridiculed if they did.

How many times have you been told **'Don't be a girl' or something similar if you acted in a 'non-male' way or showed any of your gentler emotions?** How many times did you hear 'Big boys don't cry,' robbing you of your ability to fully grieve over the sad times in life... the death of close friends or family, relationship break-ups, the loss of a job, and so on?

The old rule book way to deal with these powerful feelings is to switch into power-taking behaviour rather than risk fronting up to feelings of vulnerability. The rule that **says 'men don't have emotions,'** combined with the strong urge to feel okay, invites men to move into the mode of self-righteous anger (which is not one of the basic emotions - but a secondary emotion - see the diagram below). **This might make you feel good in the short term but will have a disastrous impact on those around you.** While self-righteous anger may feel good in the short term, very soon you are back with your old feelings and the pattern starts again.

So how do you change this pattern, given that it is so much a part of who you are?

The answer is both simple and hard. Simple because it requires that you become bi-lingual in your expression. Becoming bi-lingual means reclaiming the language of emotional expression in addition to the language you now speak.

I believe nearly all men know the language of emotional expression and are aware of most emotions, but being taught powerful messages about not expressing these, means we need practice.

Reflection questions...

- *How does your 'Old rule book' impact on your expression of emotions within your relationship?*
- *How would you like to be able to express emotions within your relationship?*
- *What is one or two things you could start doing today that would allow you to be more 'emotionally expressive' within your relationships?*

Emotions diagram

