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**"I started to realize that I'm not broken.
I'm not being sent back to the manufacturer
... I get up every morning and figure it out."**

Former Carolinas Panther Steve Smith



Mental Health Matters: A Monthly Blog Post from the Director

Real Men Ask for Help: Focusing on Men's Mental Health

As a woman, I know how cathartic a good cry can be. I know how therapeutic it can be to talk with girlfriends and loved ones about my anxiety and the things causing stress in my life. So, as I thought about a blog focused on men's mental health, I also realized that the very things that provide me with comfort and emotional healing, may not be acceptable responses by the males in our culture due to societal "norms" on manhood and masculinity.

June is Men's Health Month and there exists a silent crisis where men and mental health are concerned. Men make up more than 75 percent of suicide victims in the United States, with one man killing himself every 20 minutes. In our culture, men are not given the space to deal with their mental health in a positive way, having been told to "man up" or "be strong" throughout their lives. As a result, accessing mental health resources can be seen as weak in our society.

Despite being a 23-time Olympic Gold Medalist, Michael Phelps has had his dark days, including days when he thought of suicide. Now he says, "Since that day [I opened up about my emotions], it's just been so much easier to live and so much easier to enjoy life." Phelps now talks openly about therapy and has become a strong advocate and role model for mental health.

Experts say that men, throughout their childhood, receive messages that discourage them from ever letting anyone know they need help. This, however, is starting to change. On May 21, Mental Health America of Central Carolinas held its 5th annual *Wake Up for Wellness* Event, where former Carolinas Panther Steve Smith spoke about his own struggle with depression. At the event, Smith shared that when he first started seeking counseling, he said he was so worried about the stigma surrounding mental health that he had the counselor come to his house. But as the years of therapy have gone by, Smith said he has come to see the value of being more open. "I started to realize that I'm not broken," he said. "I'm not being sent back to the manufacturer ... I get up every morning and figure it out."

Through Smith, Phelps and others who have the media spotlight, there has been a growing interest and

openness about the subject of men's mental health. This is important since men often struggle silently for years. As noted earlier, 75 percent of suicide victims are men and depression is one of the leading causes of suicide.

“I am no less a man because I fear. I am no less a man because I am mentally ill. I am no less a man because only I get to decide what it means for me to be a man.”

— Shawn Henfling

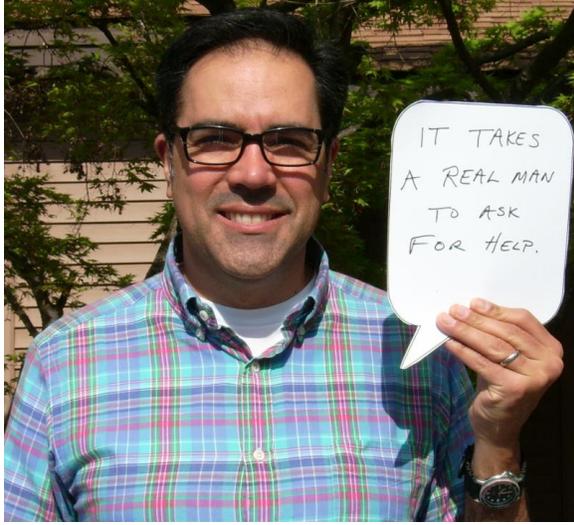
Like any mental health diagnosis, fighting depression is difficult not only due to the illness, but also the stigma that surrounds it. NAMI shares the following by Joshua Beharry, who has become a mental health advocate after surviving a suicide attempt in 2010:

“5 Myths That Prevent Men from Fighting Depression”

1. **Depression = Weakness.** Depression has nothing to do with personal weakness. It is a serious health condition that millions of men contend with every year. “We show our strength by working and building supports to get better.”
2. **A Man Should Be Able to Control His Feelings.** Depression is a mood disorder, which means it can make us feel down when there is absolutely nothing to feel down about.
3. **Real Men Don't Ask For Help.** Consulting a professional who has more knowledge of depression and treatment options is the smartest thing someone can do. “Trying to battle a mental health condition on your own is like trying to push a boulder up a mountain by yourself.”
4. **Talking About Depression Won't Help.** Ignoring depression won't make it go away. Talk therapy is a proven treatment for depression. It's useful for gaining new perspectives and developing new coping skills.
5. **Depression Will Make You A Burden to Others.** Being unhealthy and refusing to seek treatment can put pressure and stress on those who care about you, but asking for help does not make you a burden. It makes people feel good to help a loved one.

Just as we encourage our loved ones to get an annual physical, make sure our spouses take their blood pressure medication, or that our sons eat right and exercise, we should also be encouraging our men and boys to take care of their mental health. Let's work on creating a culture and society that makes it okay to ask for help. Asking for help should be a sign of strength and resiliency, not one of weakness or shame.

MHA is seeking more male Storyteller volunteers like [Guillermo Villar](#), pictured, who shares his experience of living with depression at events like [MHA's Coffee & Conversation](#). The best way to break stigma is one conversation at a time. Join us for a Coffee & Conversation to learn more and review our [MHA Storyteller volunteer description](#) for details.



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Mental Health America of Central Carolinas promotes mental wellness through advocacy, prevention and education in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties.



Member Agency

Mailing Address

3701 Latrobe Dr., Suite 140

Charlotte, NC 28211

704.365.3454

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