

MEN ARE SUPPOSED TO BE TOUGH

A son's journey

Michael's 28-year-old mother was killed by a drunk driver when Michael was 8 weeks old

BY MICHAEL GERSHE, adapted from the book, *Grief Diaries: Through the Eyes of Men*
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We have to remain strong

Men are emotional and we do cry, and not just when our team wins a championship. The hardest part is actually expressing ourselves because we just don't want to be seen as weak, or at least that is how I see it.

Men, by society's rules, are supposed to be tough. We may want to share our feelings, but just don't know how. Perhaps I have a different situation, because my mother died when I was so young, and it's hard for me since I have no memories of her. I grieve her death even though I didn't know her.

Opening up is not something we are used to or comfortable with, but we will, in our own timeframe. You can't rush us or we will never open up with our emotions when it comes to our grief journey. Perhaps it is a pride thing too, and we think we can handle it ourselves, when in truth we really cannot.

The hardest emotion for me to express is probably the pain I feel because I protect myself so much. I end up keeping myself at a distance so I don't feel that pain of losing someone like my father did with my mother. It's a rotten way to live,

even when I am in a relationship, because I don't allow myself to feel loved. Even though I know I should let the wall down for someone, I guess it's just much easier said than done.

My grief journey has not been easy, and I think we men find ways to cope that work for us. We probably won't volunteer our feelings, but that doesn't mean we aren't hurting. We will withdraw, we use our humor, sometimes inappropriately, as a defense mechanism. We will spend hours in the garage or man cave alone with our thoughts.

We have the same emotions as women, but we also feel that we have to remain strong at the same time. It's tough to ask for help when we need it, too; at least it is in my case. I feel like I need to handle it on my own, which is probably farther than the truth after writing about it.

