

HANDBOOK FOR STARTING A MEN'S GROUP

(Revised Edition)

Prepared for the

Vancouver Men's Evolvment Network

by

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Handbook for Starting a Men's Group
by Gervase Bushe
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OVERVIEW

The image of the lone, independent man who can go it alone and doesn't need others is so deep in our culture that most adult men find that they have no or very few close, intimate relationships; and most of those are with women. We find that when we look in our heart of hearts, we really don't trust men and we have little sense of brotherhood. Our culture has very few images of positive masculine authority. How many positive images of older men do you carry inside you? How, then, can we find a positive sense of maleness, of our own masculinity, if we do not have positive, caring, and intimate relations among men?

Since recorded history men have formed into groups to hunt, to judge, to decide, and to delve into the mysteries of life. We have found that forming men's groups supports us as individuals to find and express the deep masculine energies within us in healthy, life-giving ways. So part of the mission of Vancouver M.E.N. is to encourage the formation and maintenance of men's groups and the development of a larger men's community.

The purpose of this Handbook is to provide guidance and direction for the first five meetings while a men's group is forming. It is designed to do the following:

- A) Help the men in the group get to know each other.
- B) Explore some of the things that can be done in the group.
- C) Come to agreement on the group's purpose and procedures.
- D) Help individuals decide whether they want to belong to this group.

The handbook is designed for leaderless, self-managing groups but it can also be used by a group facilitator.

The first 6 pages of the Handbook introduces you to some aspects of group dynamics, to issues specific to men's groups, and provides some recommendations for how to begin your group. We recommend that you photocopy and distribute those pages to all group members.

The rest of the book contains a sequence of activities for the first five meetings of your group. We recommend that you chose a different member to facilitate each of these meetings, and only they read the section on that meeting before the meeting.

Before you hold your first meeting, decide who will facilitate it and give this handbook to him.

AN INTRODUCTION TO BEING IN A MEN'S GROUP

The difference between a group and a collection of individuals is that members of a group have emotional bonds with each other. Emotional bonding requires members to have some significant experiences together. During the formation of a group, before bonds have been fully developed, it can be difficult for a group to get rolling. Certain patterns of "group dynamics" can get in the way and interfere with the development of a healthy, productive and satisfying group.

Two of the most difficult dynamics for a newly formed group to manage are power and decision-making. Groups can get so caught up in trying to work out how to decide things that nothing gets done. This is most pronounced in "leaderless" groups. Groups without a formal, designated leader often go through an uncomfortable and potentially destructive time before they work out how they will manage themselves. The events that take place during this time can be so disturbing that the group falls apart. Groups that work through these "birthing pains", however, and become self-managing, can be highly effective and satisfying for their members.

The purpose of this Handbook is to act as your group's leader for the first five meetings while you are developing emotional bonds and getting a sense of what this group is and might become. After that, you will, hopefully, be able to manage yourselves.

This introduction is designed to do three things. First, to teach you something about group dynamics and how to build successful groups. Second, to give you some tips about what to pay attention to in men's work. Finally, to tell you how to best use the Handbook itself.

GROUP DYNAMICS AND BUILDING SUCCESSFUL GROUPS

When groups form, they go through 3 predictable phases before becoming fully self-managing. These phases are called Inclusion, Influence and Intimacy.

INCLUSION During the inclusion phase members are most concerned about how they are being seen and treated by others. People want to make a "good impression", and act so as to be seen as significant and worthwhile by others. How people try to get included varies widely. At one extreme is the person who talks incessantly. He believes that if people are listening to him he must be included. At the other extreme is the person who says nothing. He believes that if he is asked for his opinion, he is included. During the inclusion phase members are very polite and conflict is rarely expressed. People are most concerned about looking good and keeping the peace. How people act during the inclusion phase is never a very good indication of how they act normally, so it is a good policy to not pass judgment on people when the group first forms. To pass through the inclusion phase, everyone has to feel that their presence is noticed in the group; that they belong.

INFLUENCE Once members feel that they do belong to this group, the next phase arises. Here attention turns to how much respect and credibility people feel they are getting from others. In almost all groups, some individuals have held back expressing dissatisfactions during phase 1 to keep the peace. Now these will begin to surface and can, at times, escalate into roaring conflicts. Sometimes these conflicts appear to be about some issue in the group but are really about people not feeling like they have enough influence in the group. For example, a conflict over what the group should do, early in its life, will probably have more to do with people feeling like their ideas are not being listened to, and less to do with the actual activity being discussed. For the group to mature into an effective unit, everyone must feel that their opinions will be heard and respected and that they can influence the group for its own good. To move past the influence phase it is necessary for the group to experience a successful conflict. A successful conflict is one in which people fully express their thoughts and feelings, and find a resolution that leaves everyone feeling better than they did before the conflict was expressed. Often, this will be conflicts over group activities. It may also be a "personal" conflict that arose due to mis-perceptions or mis-communication.

INTIMACY Once members feel comfortable with their level of influence, they begin to wonder about how close they want to get with each other. Different people will want different degrees of openness and closeness with others.

Implicit norms (unspoken rules) about how "deep" and emotional it is OK to be, that were created during the inclusion phase, will be challenged and new levels of intimacy will be experimented with.

After the group has spent some time in the intimacy phase, deeper issues of inclusion and influence will surface.

Inclusion, influence and intimacy are issues at all times in a group's life. At certain times, however, one issue will be more salient. These issues never get permanently resolved; they are always present. As a group matures, however, members are better able to name what the issue is and to work it through more easily.

In general, successful, self-managing groups have the following attributes:

A) People tell the truth - about what they are really thinking, feeling and wanting. If they don't like what is going on in the group they say so. If they are feeling bored, left out, ignored, beaten-up, patronized, or whatever, they say so. The group cannot develop if people hold back the truth in order to be polite, not create waves, not hurt someone's feelings, etc.

B) Conflicts are expressed, win-win solutions are found. People avoid fighting for the sake of winning or beating the other guy. People don't accommodate simply to "be nice" either. People operate under the assumption that if we all tell the truth, avoid attacking each other, and are willing to take the time, we can find solutions to conflicts that satisfy everyone concerned.

C) People feel valued. Members treat each other as worthy of respect. People are supported in being the best they can be. No one is treated in a way that leaves them feeling small, inadequate, or ashamed. People tell the truth in ways that do not violate others' sense of worthiness.

D) Leadership is shared. Everyone feels personally responsible for the actions and success of the group. Things aren't left up to one person. Everyone performs acts of "leadership", like clarifying tasks, gathering information, offering and soliciting opinions, mediating conflicts, reducing tension, and anything else the group needs to be productive and fun.

Building successful groups is about getting people to tell the truth, getting conflicts into the open and resolving them, making sure everyone feels personally responsible for the success of the group, and everyone feels valued by the group. If you want to be a group builder, the first step is to do these things yourself. The second step is to encourage others to act this way and to support them when they do.

THINGS ABOUT MEN'S GROUPS

A group composed entirely by men for the purpose of supporting the growth and development of men faces some issues peculiar to itself. Here are some things we have learned from experience.

A. Containment and Sacred Space. For men to really get into deep places with each other it is necessary to create a special kind of atmosphere. We call this sacred space. This is a space where men feel safe enough to delve into frightening things. Sacred space requires building a leak proof container. You can only "cook" if the ingredients aren't leaking out. Seriously consider the need for the following ingredients to ensure that you build a leak proof container:

The space the group meets in must be free from any possible intrusion. No spouses, children, phones, etc. Dogs are alright and can even add a special atmosphere.

All members should attend all meetings. This is especially true for the first few meetings while the group is still forming. It will be impossible for the group to develop firm ground if the members change at each meeting.

Begin and end meetings at your agreed upon times. Ending on time greatly helps to increase the containment of your vessel. If you find that things only start to get rolling near the end, do not let the meeting go overtime without deciding as a group to do so.

Any rituals or special observances used by the group should be kept secret, known only to members.

No guests, unless they are considering joining the group and carefully consider whether you want to allow new members at all.

People should not describe or repeat what members do or say in the group to non-members.

People should not discuss really special, highly charged, profound, or painful events that occur in the group with non-members.

B) Talking and Doing. While the main mode for self-help groups is talking, men often need to do things together. Men can experience a deep sense of intimacy working together without talking at all. Seriously consider spending time as a group doing things as well as time talking with each other. Time spent close to nature, such as camping, sailing or hiking creates a special kind of energy. Time spent doing physical work or play also creates a special energy.

C) Moving Past Fear. Men fear each other, probably with good reason. For thousands of years, men who were not of the same clan were potential enemies. For some, this fear is unconscious. Being unconscious makes it a more powerful inhibitor to developing close relationships. Robert Bly and Michael Meade have observed that men do not begin to trust one another until an opportunity for violence has passed untaken. Violence here means not only physical, but emotional and mental. Probably the most frequent type of violence men do to one another in our society is public ridicule and humiliation. Trust is not going to get built if everyone is safely hiding behind some mask or in some cave. An opportunity for violence must pass untaken. Members will have to risk and put themselves in situations where they might get hurt in order for the group to develop trust. When members take a risk, they will have to feel supported by others, or distrust will develop.

D) Assigning Responsibility. Experience shows that simply meeting regularly and hoping that something significant will happen doesn't work. The group needs to program activities for itself but it can become a real drag if you spend too much group time discussing what to do. A common solution is to assign one member responsibility for leading the next meeting. Leading a meeting does not have to be an elaborate task. Simply providing some way to get people talking together, in a way they normally don't, works great. Support those who take responsibility for programming activities and those who risk designing new and "weird" activities.

E) Learning to Appreciate the Irrational and Intuitive. Men, for the most part, tend to err on the side of being too concrete, rational and pragmatic in their thinking. We tend to naively take things at "face value". We tend to focus on what a person actually says and not what they mean to say. We tend to believe that rational, logical thinking is the only kind that matters. We have highly developed heads but we can't feel our hearts. To plunge into men's work requires that you start looking squarely at all the irrational things you do in your life, and learn to love them. The point is not to

try and take control and make everything rational, but to allow the irrational, intuitive side of you back into the picture, to balance head and heart, thinking and feeling, to start paying attention to the meaning behind appearances, and to start listening to your inner knowing.

USING THIS GUIDE

THE FOLLOWING ARE SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW A SELF-MANAGING GROUP COULD USE THIS GUIDE.

1. Make an agreement that all members will attend all five meetings programmed in this Handbook. At the fifth meeting, people can then decide to commit to being a group member or decide this group is not for them.
2. The guide is designed for five, 3-hour meetings. Do not make the first five meetings shorter than that. You can make them longer if you want.
3. Decide ahead of time which member will be responsible for facilitating the subsequent meeting. Give that person the Handbook so that he can familiarize himself with the activities that are planned. Rotate the leadership so that a different person is responsible each week. If anyone in your group has experience facilitating groups, make him responsible for the first meeting. Hopefully, he will provide a good role model for others.
4. If most members of the group already know each other, or if the group was formed out of a men's workshop, skip the activities outlined for the 1st meeting and begin with the 2nd meeting.
5. The easiest thing to do is for the facilitator to simply read the appropriate passages from the Handbook to the group at the appropriate times. You can certainly embellish on this if you want.
6. The facilitator's job is to keep the group focused on the recommended activity and generally help to make the 3 hours go by smoothly. His job is not to play dictator, amateur psychologist, or task master. As a facilitator, the job is to stay with what is happening when the energy is high and move on to the next thing when the energy is low, keeping in mind the need to complete the activities within the agreed upon time.
7. During the first few meetings you will have some time to discuss what the group should do and how it should do it. Don't make any firm decisions about this, however, until the fifth meeting.
8. It is highly recommended that each of the first five meetings be 1 week apart, but no longer than 2 weeks apart. After that you can decide how often you want to meet, however, our experience is that groups which meet weekly are the most productive and satisfying.
9. You can make a copy of this handbook for everyone if you like, but we don't recommend it. In fact, WE STRONGLY RECOMMEND YOU DON'T READ AHEAD. If you know what activities are planned, the temptation to figure out what you'll say and do ahead of time is too strong to resist. This will greatly diminish the spontaneity and usefulness of the exercises. Do, however, make a copy of the first 7 pages for everyone.

1st Meeting

Theme: Why am I Here?

Preparation: Decide, ahead of time, who will be the facilitator for this meeting.

Make a copy of pages 1-7 of the Handbook for each member.

1. Talking Capsules

Time: up to 2 hours

In this activity every person gets an equal amount of time to talk about why they have chosen to participate in this group. They get a "talking capsule" that no one else is allowed to violate.

Talking capsules should be ten minutes each. If there are more than 12 people in the group, divide 120 minutes by the number of people in the group. That is the number of minutes per talking capsule.

Each person, in turn, gets into their talking capsule for the allotted period of time. During that time, they can say anything they like or nothing at all. In general, however, the purpose of this activity is to talk about "why I am here".

One person should act as time keeper and when time is up he should say, "Your time is up ". While a person is in their talking capsule no one else may speak. A person stays in their talking capsule for the full duration, whether or not they want to say anything. Periods of group silence are perfectly fine. There is no discussion of what a person says during their time in their talking capsule. If you want to ask somebody a question about what they said or make a comment, wait until this activity is over.

If you like, you can use a prop like a "talking stick" or feather, or anything to designate who has the floor. When a person's time is up, they pass the prop to the next speaker.

TAKE A 15 MINUTE BREAK AFTER THIS ACTIVITY.

2. Beginning to Organize

time: 30 minutes

It is too early in the group's life to make any firm decisions about goals, procedures and such, but it is probably a good time to start talking about goals and purposes without making decisions.

The purpose of the group is the reason for its existence. Each individual might have some idea of what he hopes the group's purpose will become. These ideas are likely to change over time as each person gets a better idea of who the other members are, what alternative kinds of activities are possible, and what other people want.

Allow the group to have a free flowing discussion of whatever people are interested in talking about. Make sure the conversation is not dominated by only a couple of men talking about something that is not interesting to most members. If you think this may be happening ask, "Is this a topic that everyone is interested in right now?" and let the others take care of it.

If you find that conversation is slow and awkward, ask the group to discuss the similarities they noticed in people's descriptions of why they came to the group. As the group does this, see if you can identify what kind of group purpose

might be satisfying for all group members. What could the purpose of this group be? Remember, this is not the time to make a decision, just discuss it. The fifth meeting will be a time to make decisions about the group's purpose and procedures.

3. Preparation for next meeting.

time: 15 minutes

Choose a time and place for your next meeting.

Decide who will facilitate the next meeting.

Someone needs to make enough copies of the sentence completion form (next page) so that there is one per member at the next meeting.

Everyone should bring a pen or pencil to the next meeting.

MEN'S GROUP SENTENCE COMPLETION FORM
(for distribution at the second meeting)

Complete each sentence stem as fully as you want.

1. What I like about men _____
2. I get really irritated when _____
3. I am proudest of _____
4. Women are _____
5. The difference between a boy and a man _____
6. What I most want people to notice about me _____
7. What I don't like about men _____
8. When people ignore me, I _____
9. Those who really know me _____
10. I am at my best with people when _____
11. When I am in a group of strangers, I _____
12. When people first meet me, they _____
13. I feel lonely _____
14. I envy _____
15. When someone is affectionate with me, I _____
16. My father _____

2nd Meeting**Theme:** Finding Out About Each Other

Preparation: 1 copy of the sentence completion form per member.
 Some extra pens/pencils.
 If available, some flip chart paper, a marker and masking tape for keeping the list in activity 2.

1. Talking in pairs through sentence completions

time: 2 hrs

In this activity you have the opportunity to talk personally, one-on-one, with all the other members of your group. You use your answers to the sentence completion form as a way to break the ice. You can choose how "deep" or "shallow" you want each interaction to be.

A) Step 1

Distribute 1 copy of the sentence completion form to each member.

Members complete the sentences in any way they wish. Take about 20 minutes to do this.

B) Step 2

1 member volunteers to be time keeper.

Each member of the group pairs up with one other member. Once in pairs, men share some of what they have written on their sentence completion forms and then let the conversation go from there. After a designated amount of time, everyone switches, finds another partner, and once more shares what's on their sentence completion forms. You keep doing this until everyone has been in a pair with everyone else

Each pair should have about 10 minutes before switching. To figure out how long it will take for all the pairs to complete the activity:

If you have an even number of members, subtract 1 from the number of group members and multiply by 10 [i.e., $10(N-1)$]. If you have an odd number of members, add 1 to the number of group members and multiply by 10 [i.e., $10(N+1)$].

If you have an odd number, 1 person will be left out each round. As well, there will be a few pairings left to go after the majority of members have been in a pair with everyone else. This is OK. Do not spend a lot of time trying to figure out an elegant way to sequence the pairs. Just plunge in and trust that everyone will look after everyone else and it'll all get done as well as possible.

C) Step 3

Men will want to discuss the similarities and differences they noticed in people's responses. Some may want to ask others more about something they said. Allow this conversation to take place as long as it has energy and everyone's interest.

As you talk about what it was like to share your sentence completions with others, encourage the group to talk about the process itself. Did you notice that sometimes your discussion was "shallower" and at other times it was "deeper"? What made the difference? Think about your own behavior over the past hour or two and be curious about other people's thoughts and feelings. As a group see what you can learn about how to make it safe and enjoyable for people to talk deeply about themselves in this group.

2. More Beginning to Organize (OPTIONAL)

time: 20 minutes

If you have 20 or more minutes left in your meeting and the energy from the discussion has died down, suggest that now is a good time to have a free flowing discussion of possible ground rules for the group. Again, it is too early to make decisions. Instead, make a list of "Do's" and "Don'ts" people would like to see group members adhere to. Remember, this list is just for discussion. Just because something is on the list doesn't mean it is an agreed on ground rule. Bring this list to your fifth meeting when it will be time to decide.

SOME DO's AND DON'Ts TO CONSIDER

DO's:

- Start meetings on time.
- Tell your own story
- Fully participate in the meetings
- Strive to be open and honest

DON'Ts:

- Give other people "advice"
- Interrupt and talk over others
- Make fun of others or use putdowns
- Tell others what they should or shouldn't feel

3. Preparing for the next meeting

time: 10 mins.

Decide where and when you will meet next. For the next meeting it will be helpful (but not essential) to meet somewhere with wall space that people can use to tape sheets of paper to the wall.

Decide who will facilitate the next meeting.

You will need to secure the following materials for the next meeting. Decide who will bring what:

2 sheets of flipchart paper or similar (approx 2 X 3 foot) paper per person

1 large tipped felt marker per person

masking tape

At the next meeting you will talk about key events in your lives that have shaped your sense of your own masculinity. Between now and then, think about what these have been.

3rd Meeting

Theme: Exploring Masculinity in Our Lives

Preparation: 2 sheets of flipchart paper or similar (approx 2 X 3 foot)

paper per person. Masking Tape. 1 large tipped felt marker per person. Make a copy of the "groundrules for questions and comments" either on a flipchart so everyone can see or make each person a photocopy.

1. Maleness Life Lines

time: 1 or 2 meetings

In this activity everyone draws a line that depicts the key events in their lives that have effected their sense of "maleness". They then talk about these to the rest of the group.

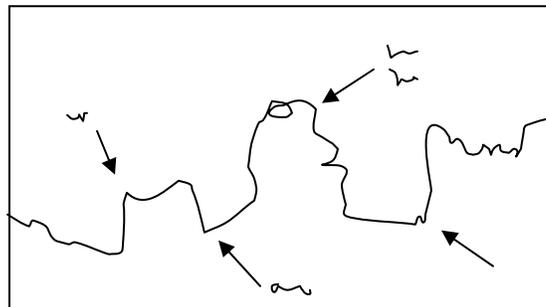
A) Step 1

Each person takes one sheet of 2 X 3 foot flipchart paper. Place it in front of you so that the 3 foot side is on the top/bottom. Imagine that, running from left to right, is a time scale so that the left side of the paper represents when you were born. About a quarter from the right side represents where you are now and the last quarter represents you in the future.

Draw a line from the left side of the paper to the right that represents the "highs and lows" in your journey of maleness. The line should in some way visually convey when events in your life, that you feel significantly effected your masculinity, occurred. The last quarter of the line can be used to convey significant events you feel are still to come.

Use large tipped felt markers to make these lines. Make sure the markers don't "bleed through" the paper. If they do, use a second sheet underneath.

Then, use arrows, key words and other symbols to indicate what events the line depicts. Try to make these large and clear enough so that others will be able to read them from 20 feet away. Here's an example:



You don't have to use straight up and down lines; use circles, spirals, loops, or whatever seems best to convey what you want to convey.

Take about 20 minutes for people to draw their lines.

B) Step 2

After everyone has completed drawing their lines, if you have enough wall space, tape each person's line to the wall. Each person, in turn, will stand beside their line and describe it.

If you don't have enough wall space choose a space where one man's line can be taped to the wall and everyone can see it. Each person, in turn, will tape their line to that space, stand beside it, and describe it.

Each person will spend some time describing their time line. Others can ask questions and make comments at any time, during the presentation or after it. Read or handout copies of the groundrules below.

Explain to the group that this exercise can bring up a lot of personal information about a person. You don't want to rush it. Figure on 30 minutes per person. If you have 6 or more members, you will probably need to stop before everyone has shared their line. Then the others can have their turn at the next meeting.

It is also very important to leave at least half an hour at the end of meeting, even if everyone has not gone, to discuss what came up. Of particular interest will be the similarities and differences in how men come to define their masculinity and who is important in that.

Decide now who will present their line at this meeting and who at the next.

Groundrules for questions and comments

You can ask any question to help clarify or understand what a person said or means.

You can ask for further information about what is on the line or what was said.

You can share your observations about things you found interesting, touching, unusual or that affected you some way.

You cannot tell a person that their line is in any way wrong or incorrect.

You cannot give a person advice or tell them how they "should" be, feel or do things.

Don't play amateur psychologist. Be curious, not judgmental.

Take a 15 minute break about halfway through the evening.

2. Preparation for next meeting.

time: 15 minutes

Choose a time and place for your next meeting.

If there are members who haven't presented their lines yet, that will be the activity at your next meeting.

If everyone has presented their lines, go on to meeting 4 in this Handbook. For that meeting, someone must volunteer to memorize and recite the enclosed short (2 page) folktale. He can use prompts, like index cards, to help his memory but he should strive to tell it as if it was his own story. This should be someone with a flair for the dramatic. He will also facilitate the meeting.

It will help the activity succeed if members refrain from reading the story before the meeting.

You will need to make 1 copy of "Mythology and Folklore in Men's Work" for each member of the group.

Each member will need to bring writing paper and pens/pencils to the next meeting.

Mythology and Folklore in Men's Work

To begin with, it is important to understand that the word "myth" has gotten twisted in our culture to mean a falsehood or something untrue. But this is not what a myth is. We view myths and fairy tales as stories about human nature written in the language of the unconscious.

You may notice that myths are very similar to dreams. They are not very logical and have peculiar characters who can do magical things. Normal, everyday limitations don't hold. Dreams are the voice of the unconscious mind, talking to us in symbols and images. Similarly, myths are the voice of the culture's unconscious, talking to us in symbols and images.

In the last 40 years there has been a renewed interest in the psychological meaning of the Greek myths, King Arthur and his knights' adventures and the Grimm Brothers. A short bibliography is included on the next page for those interested in learning more. It is important to remember that there is no one correct interpretation of a true myth. A true myth has many different facets, reflecting many different truths about people and a culture. That is why certain stories stay with us for thousands of years while most come and go. Those that stay with us are truly mythic, capturing some important truths about who we are and where we are going.

One of the useful things about myths is that they offer the unconscious mind a road map for change and development. We can consciously choose to change some aspect of our lives or behaviour, but that doesn't mean the unconscious is willing to change as well. The unconscious mind has its own agenda and the logical arguments and linear thinking that appeal so much to the conscious mind do nothing for the unconscious mind. The unconscious mind is not interested in logic. The unconscious mind works through symbols, images and connections it makes between the physical world and its own world of symbolic forms.

Myths (as well as stories, poems, movies, etc) talk to the unconscious mind even when we can't consciously make any sense out of them. In myths, nothing is as it first appears - everything has deeper, symbolic meanings. Those aspects of a myth which most resonate with the current state of your unconscious are those that will stand out for you the most, even if you don't know why.

According to Robert Bly, one of the important ways in which a man steps into his true, masculine feelings is through the practice of oral recitation. If you try this, you will find that telling poems and stories out loud, with gusto, opens up inner doors. In men's work, we strive to recite myths, poems and stories from memory. You can use something to help prompt your memory, but avoid simply reading out loud.

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Short Bibliography on Mythical Thinking, Especially for Men.

- Bly, Robert. Iron John. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1990. The fairy tale that launched the mythopoetic men's movement. Highly readable and highly recommended.
- Campbell, Joseph. The Hero With a Thousand Faces. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1949. A classic work of comparative mythology. Campbell does not explicitly consider whether the developmental model he presents, seen in thousands of the world's myths, has mainly to do with the masculine but many have suggested that it does.
- Hillman, James (editor). The Puer Papers. Dallas, TX: Spring, 1979. A collection of essays on the myth of the eternal boy. The essay "Peaks and Vales", is a classic of the men's movement, providing an important distinction between soul and spirit and the nature of "soul work".
- Johnson, Robert A. He: Understanding Masculine Psychology. New York: Harper & Row, 1989. A very short, easy to read introduction to Jungian thinking and the use of mythology for exploring the psyche.
- Jung, Carl G. (ed) Man and His Symbols. New York: Doubleday, 1964. An edited volume of essays designed to introduce people to Jungian thinking. Part 2 on "Ancient Myths and Modern Man" by Joseph Henderson is a very well written introduction to myth and dreams, the hero myth, the meaning of ritual, initiation, and the connections between myth and personal change.
- Jung, Carl. & Kerenyi, Carl. Essays on a Science of Mythology. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1963. An academic work on the spiritual and psychological meaning of mythology. Previous familiarity with Jungian thinking is not necessary.
- Layard, John. A Celtic Quest: Sexuality and Soul in Individuation. Dallas, TX: Spring, 1975. This exhaustive and authoritative interpretation of the story of Culhwch & Olwen, taken from the Celtic mythology recorded in the "Mabinogian", provides a fount of insights into the masculine psyche and demonstrates how a master goes about translating symbols in myths. Not recommended for those unfamiliar with Jungian thinking.
- Moore, Robert & Gillette, Douglas. King, Warrior, Magician, Lover. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990. Not explicitly mythical, this work on the archetypes of the "mature masculine" and the distinctions between "boy psychology" and "man psychology" is highly recommended.
- Monick, Eugene. Phallos: Sacred Image of the Masculine. Toronto: Inner City Books, 1987. Monick argues that men need a sense of a deep, primal source of masculinity (Phallos) to compliment and balance "The Great Mother". A revision of Freudian and Jungian thinking. Some parts can be difficult reading for those not conversant with analytical psychology.
- Wyly, James. The Phallic Quest: Priapus and Masculine Inflation. Toronto: Inner City, 1989. Working from the myth of Priapus, Wyly explores how and why men blow themselves up into bigger than life images and how they can develop a more grounded, mature, masculinity.

The following story is used in meeting 4. It will help the activity succeed if you refrain from reading it prior to the meeting. Only the story teller should read the next two pages.

THE DARKMAN'S SOOTY BROTHER

A soldier who left the army after many years of service had little to live on and did not know what to do. So he went to dwell in the forest and when he had walked for a short time he met a Darkman. The Darkman said "What ails you, you seem very sorrowful?" The soldier said, "I am hungry, but no food fills my hunger". The Darkman said "If you will come and work for me, and be my serving man, I will give you all you need for your life. You shall serve me for seven years and after that you shall be free. But one thing I must tell you, and that is, you must not wash, comb or trim yourself, cut your hair or nails, or wipe the water from your eyes". The man said, "All right, if there is nothing else I can do," and went off with the Darkman, who straight away led him down into hell. Then he told him what he had to do, he was to poke the fire under the kettles wherein the hell-broth was stewing, keep the house clean, drive all the sweepings behind the doors, and see that everything was in order. But if he once peeked into the kettles, it would go ill with him. The man said, "Good, I will take care." And then the Darkman went out on his wanderings, and the man entered upon his new duties, made the fire, and swept the dirt well behind the doors, just as he had been bidden. When the old Darkman came back again, he looked to see that all had been done, appeared satisfied, and went forth a second time. The soldier now took a good look all around him. The kettles were standing all round hell with a mighty fire below them and inside they were boiling and sputtering. The man would have given anything to look inside them if the Darkman had not been so forceful in forbidding it. Finally, he couldn't restrain himself any longer; he raised the lid of the first kettle, peeked in, and there he saw his former sergeant shut in. "Aha you old dork," said he. "Do I meet you here!?! You once had me in your power, now I have you," and

he quickly let the lid fall, poked the fire underneath the kettle, and added a fresh log. After that he went to the second kettle, raised its lid and found, inside, his former captain. "Aha you old dork, so I find you here! You once had me in your power, now I have you." He closed the lid again and fetched yet another log to make the fire really hot. Then he wanted to see who might be shut up in the third kettle - it was the general. "Aha you old dork," he shouted. "You once had me in your power, now I have you," and he fetched the bellows and made the hell-fire flare up hot under the kettles. He did his work for the Darkman for seven years, did not wash, comb or trim himself, did not cut his hair or nails, or wash the water out of his eyes, and the seven years seemed so short to him that he thought he had only been half a year. Now, when the time had fully gone by, the Darkman came and asked "What have you done?" "I have poked the fire under the kettles and I have swept all the dirt well behind the doors," said the man. "But you have peeked into the kettles as well! It's lucky for you that you added fresh logs and increased the heat or your life would have been over. Now that your time's up, will you go home again?" "Yes," said the man, "I would very much like to see what my father is doing at home." The Darkman said, "In order to receive what you have earned, go and fill your knapsack full of the sweepings, and take it home with you. You must also go unwashed and uncombed, with long hair on your head and beard, and with uncut nails and dim eyes, and when you are asked where you come from you must say 'From hell, and when you are asked who you are you are to say, 'The Darkman's sooty brother, and my King as well'." The man held his piece and did what the Darkman told him to, but he was not at all satisfied with what he had earned. As soon as he was back up in the forest he took his

knapsack and was about to dump it, but upon opening it the sweepings had become pure gold. "I wouldn't have expected that!" said he, and was well pleased and entered town. The innkeeper was standing in front of the inn, and when he saw the man he was frightened because the soldier looked so horrible, worse than a scarecrow. He called to him and asked, "Whence comest thou?" "From hell." "Who art thou?" "The Darkman's sooty brother and my King as well." The innkeeper would not let him enter, but when the soldier showed him the knapsack full of gold, he unlatched the door. The soldier ordered the best room and attendance, ate, drank his fill, but neither washed nor combed himself as the Darkman had bidden him, and at last lay down to sleep. But the knapsack full of gold stayed in the innkeeper's mind, and left him no peace, and during the night he crept and stole it away. Next morning, when the man got up to pay the innkeeper and travel further, behold, his knapsack was gone! But he soon composed himself and thought, "I have been unfortunate from no fault of my own," and straight away went back to hell, complained of his misfortune to the old Darkman, and asked for his help. The Darkman said, "Seat yourself, I will wash, comb and trim you, cut your hair and nails, and wash your eyes for you," and when he was done

with him, he gave him back the knapsack full of sweepings. "Go and tell the innkeeper that he must return your money to you or else I will come and fetch him and he shall poke the fire in your place." The soldier went up and said to the innkeeper, "You have stolen my money; if you do not return it, you will go down to hell in my place and will look as horrible as me." Then the innkeeper gave him the money, and more besides, only begging him to keep it secret. The soldier was now a rich man. He set out on his way home to his father, bought himself a shabby old coat to wear, and strolled about making music, for he had learned to do that while he was with the Darkman in hell. There was, however, an old King in that country, before whom he had to play. The King was so delighted with his playing that he promised him his eldest daughter in marriage. But when she heard that she was to be married to a common fellow in an old coat she said, "Rather than do it, I would go into the deepest water." Then the King gave him the youngest daughter, who was quite willing to do it to please her father, and thus the Darkman's sooty brother got the King's daughter, and, after the aged King had died, the whole kingdom as well.

You may be interested to know that this is a slightly adapted version of The Devil's Sooty Brother from Grimm's. A simple, Jungian type of interpretation of the story is that after a man has worked in the world for some time he needs to explore his unconscious (the forest) and go into the deeps where parts of him that have been unacceptable to society have been banished (hell - the Darkman is symbolic of the "shadow" side of the personality that needs to be reintegrated into the personality later in life). There he finds that he needs to "cook" those parts of him that are society's rules and standards that he has adhered to (the army personnel) and let his natural self come out (no washing or trimming). Having tempered social mores with his instinctual and darker aspects, he returns to society a "richer" man. The part of him that wants to be a traditional member of society (the innkeeper) may try to steal these riches away. Having learned how to make music he is ready to work on incorporating the feminine part of his nature (the King's daughter). Do not reveal this interpretation until your group reaches Step 6 of Activity 1 in Meeting 4.

Meeting 4

Theme: Using Myths and Imagination

Preparation: 1 member prepared to tell the story from memory (as much as possible).

1 copy of "Mythology and Folklore in Men's Work" per member.

1. Exploring Masculinity through Mythology

time: 2 1/2 hrs

One member of the group recites a mythical story. Other members listen. Then each member thinks about the detail from the myth that is most vivid for him. Each works with their detail and discusses it with the group.

A) Step 1

In preparation for this, begin by having everyone individually read "Mythology and Folklore in Men's Work". Once everyone has read it, discuss it to ensure everyone understands it. Voice any concerns or doubts that you have. You do not need to fully believe it - just be willing to be curious and try it out. Once everyone is willing to be curious, proceed to step 2.

B) Step 2

One member recites the memorized folktale. Others listen as attentively as possible. The one reciting the story can use whatever props and/or background music he likes to add energy to the telling. Once finished, thank the story teller.

C) Step 3

Each member takes a minute to think about what detail from the story is most vivid in his memory. You don't have to know why; just pay attention to what sticks the most. Don't spend time "thinking" about it. Just notice what is most present in your memory.

Once you've got the detail, write down what it is. Do this before reading on.

D) Step 4

Go back over the detail you've just written out and circle every object and every creature that is included. Do this before reading on.

The purpose of this exploration is to see if the myth and your imagination give you deeper insight into the issues your unconscious is currently focused on. You might find that these insights complement what you consciously think are issues in your life, or you might be quite surprised by what the unconscious offers up. The most useful attitude to take toward this activity and the information you get is "curiosity". Avoid judging whether the information is good-bad, right-wrong, useful-useless.

Individually spend some time imagining you are each of the objects and creatures in your detail. Close your eyes and put yourself 'in' the object. Become the object and then imagine what you, as the object, are feeling and thinking. You might find it helpful to say to yourself, "I am (the object) and I..." and just let your imagination finish the sentence without censoring it. When you've got a good sense of what this object is thinking and feeling, make a note to yourself about

what it is and move on to the next object/creature. Continue to do this until you've covered all the objects/creatures in your detail. Try this now.

If one or more members of the group are having a hard time understanding what to do read this example:

AN EXAMPLE

The detail that is most vivid for me is the soldier opening the third kettle and seeing the general.

There are three objects/creatures in my detail: the soldier, the kettle, and the general.

When I close my eyes and imagine I am the soldier in this detail I feel a mixture of desire to look and fear of what I might find. I feel that something inside me is compelling me to look and that I will have to fight what is inside the kettle or die.

"I am the kettle and I..." feel nothing in particular. I am cooking the general. He doesn't die, but he shrinks and becomes small and insignificant in me.

When I imagine that I am the general I feel like I am the voice of hundreds of years of authority screaming to be heard. I am used to people doing what I tell them, but in this kettle I'm not heard. I am infuriated by this. I want to escape and order that soldier around and when I do, he will pay for this indignity.

E) Step 5

Each member will talk about what stood out for them in turn. The sequence should follow the sequence of the story. So, the person whose detail came first in the story goes first, and so on.

Each member describes the detail that most stood out for them, the objects and creatures that are in the detail, and any insight they got from doing the imagination work with the detail.

Other group members can do whatever they think would help the person work with and make use of the information they get from this activity.

F) Step 6

Once everyone has presented and explored their detail from the story, discuss what you think the folktale is about. What implications does this have for the detail that stood out for you? Remember, there is no one correct interpretation of a myth - any interpretation which captures some human truth is valid.

Next meeting you will be making decisions about your group's purpose, groundrules and a group name. Use the time between now and then to think about these things.

Each member should come to the next meeting having thought about what they think the group's purpose should be. This should be written down in a brief (1 or 2 sentence) statement.

If someone kept a list for possible groundrules from meeting 2 they need to be reminded to bring it to the next meeting. It would be helpful to either copy these onto flipchart paper so everyone will be able to read them, or make enough copies for everyone to have in hand.

Bring a pad of flipchart paper, markers and masking tape to the next meeting.

Decide when and where you will hold your next meeting. It would be useful to have it some place where there is space to tape flipcharts to the wall.

Decide who will facilitate the next meeting. It should be someone who is certain he wants to be in this group. It would also be helpful if he is not likely to have strong opinions and can remain relatively impartial.

Week 5

Theme: Becoming a Group

Preparation: Flipchart, marking pen, masking tape.

The list of possible groundrules from meeting 2.

The times suggested for each activity are highly tentative. Feel free to change the timing to suit your group. If you do not have time to complete activity number 3, save it for your next meeting.

1. Clarifying Purpose

time: 1 hr

The group decides what its purpose as a group is. A statement is crafted that all members agree to.

Begin by having each member of the group write the purpose statement they developed before this meeting on a piece of flipchart, large and legible enough so that everyone can read it. Put all these up where they can all be seen. Once on the wall, these statements stop belonging to individuals and become group property. This should not be a competition between different member's statements.

Now, find a way to integrate these various statements. It may be that one statement captures the group's common intent perfectly - choose that one. It may be that a few statements only need to be combined or slightly altered. Or an entirely new statement might need to be devised that captures the significant similarities among members.

It may be that there are some real differences in what people want the group to be about. It is better in the long run to get these differences very clearly on the table and decide whether it would be better to form different groups, or that all purposes can be accommodated, or that some possible purposes won't be acted on. Now is the time to make clear decisions.

The result of this activity should be that group members have a very clear sense of what you generally want to do together.

2. Setting Groundrules

time: 1/2 hour

A) Step 1

If you generated groundrules during week 2 take this list out. Give all members an opportunity to add any other groundrules they think should be considered, without any discussion of their merits. If you don't have a list of possible groundrules, generate one now. To do this, have members call out any groundrule they want considered and keep a list. During this part of the process do not discuss what people offer, simply keep a list. Hold off all discussion until everyone has stated all the groundrules they want considered.

Once all possible groundrules are out, go through the list as a group and note any groundrules that any member does not feel should stand as a groundrule. Just note this. Do not discuss these until you have gone through all the possible groundrules.

B) Step 2

Now you have a set of groundrules that everyone buys into and a set of contentious groundrules. Go back through the contentious ones and discuss these. Either accept, modify or reject the contentious ones.

C) Step 3

Now is the time for members to individually stand and be counted as members of this group and to be initiated into the group. Now is the time for those who don't feel they really are willing to commit to this group to say so and leave. Commitment means that members buy into the group's purpose, its groundrules, and are willing to put energy into making this a successful group. Anyone who does not feel they can commit to being a member of this group should say their goodbyes and leave at this point.

Make a copy of your final set of groundrules. These, along with your purpose, should be typed up and distributed to members at your next meeting.

3. Ritualizing the Group time: 1 hr 15 mins

(THIS ACTIVITY MAY BE HELD OVER FOR THE NEXT MEETING)

What you need to do now is to create a name for the group and a symbolic process of initiation that captures something significant about the group.

A) Step 1

The group's name should be meaningful to group members. It might somehow capture a significant event in the group's life, or the group's purpose, or symbolize what the group is to become. Come to agreement now on a name for the group.

B) Step 2

A ritual is a set of behaviours that symbolize something significant. Rituals do little for the conscious mind, but they are very important to the unconscious mind. One thing rituals are very useful for is making a boundary or doorway between different places and states of mind. In order to make your group meetings something special, different from the everyday, mundane gatherings of people, you need to begin each meeting with a ritual. This ritual will help to create "sacred space" for your time together. The power and utility of your ritual will grow as you use it. You will find, over time, that the ritual helps to clear the unconscious mind of noise and focus its attention on the work of the group.

A ritual can be anything as long as it involves some behaviour(s) that you will do each time you begin your group meetings. It does not have to be elaborate and full of props (though that's great if you want to do it that way). The behaviour(s) should, however, symbolize something important about this group, its purpose, and/or its members.

Once the ritual is created, it should be kept secret and known only to the members of the group. The rule of secrecy is to maintain the integrity of the vessel you are building (see the introductory section on vessels, containment and sacred space) and it helps support the unconscious mind in taking the ritual seriously.

Once you have created the ritual, try it out on yourselves. See if it needs any fine tuning. If so, fine tune and do it again.

4. Preparation for Next Meeting

time: 15 mins.

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU ARE NOW A FULLY INITIATED MEN'S GROUP. GOOD HUNTING!

Decide when and where you'll next meet.

At your next meeting you will have to start running yourselves. You may want to spend some time before the next meeting thinking about what would be good for the group to do.

One member should take primary responsibility for organizing and facilitating the next meeting. Decide who that will be. You'll need to do this at the end of each meeting.

You may also want to consider creating a very brief ending ritual to close the container after each meeting. This could be as simple as a group hug (like a football huddle) or as elaborate as you want to make it.

A LIST OF THINGS YOU MIGHT TRY DOING AT FUTURE MEETINGS

- Watch and discuss a video or movie
- Recite poetry - poets who are into a "mythic" perspective include Bly, Yeats, Blake, Rumi, Rilke, Michado
- Do something for your community
- Try Sufi dancing, or other forms of men's dance
- Pick a topic and talk about your experiences of it
- Drumming, music making, get noisy...
- Make masks, sculpt, draw, paint, woodwork, carving, carpentry
- Do something for boys (recite myths to them)
- Organize some political action
- Pick something you'll all read and discuss it together
- Run naked through the woods together
- Try improvisational acting
- Build, make, create something together
- Find someone who can lead your group through a sweat lodge
- Go hiking, camping, kayaking, sailing, hunting, etc, together
- Try communicating non-verbally for an agreed upon amount of time