



White Ribbon
Australia

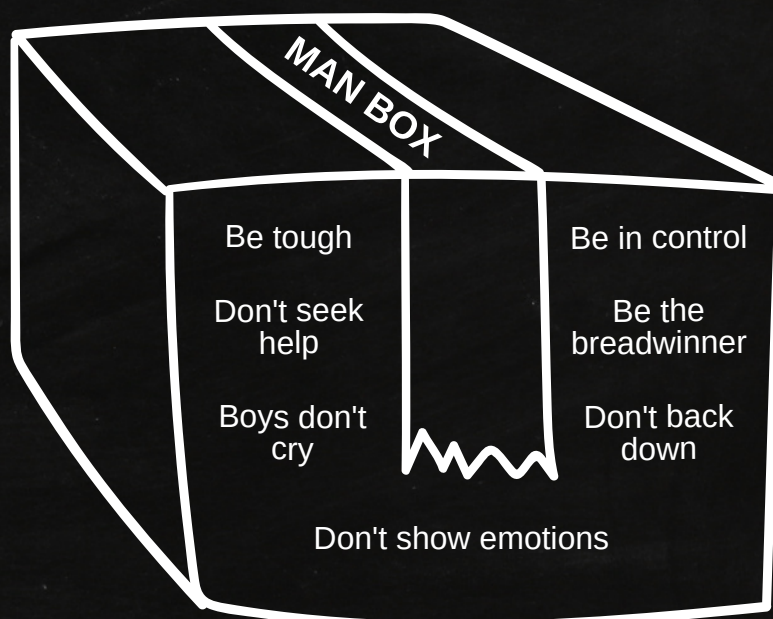
WHAT IS THE UNDERCUT?

The Undercut is all about breaking down the stereotypes of the "Man Box", which is the invisible set of rules that a lot of men think they need to follow in order to be a "real man". Those rules are things like always needing to be in control or in charge, not showing emotions except for anger, always looking tough, and not asking for help when you need it. A lot of men believe they need to follow these rules if they want to fit in. Some men enforce these rules with messages like "toughen up" or "man up".

The Man Box rules are rigid – they push you to fit into a narrow definition of what being a man is instead of letting you be your whole self. This hurts not only you, but also the people around you.

Without even knowing it, there's a good chance you soaked up Man Box messages from a lot of different places as a kid. These messages might have been from your dad, your mum, your mates, your footy coach, advertising, movies, school, or in the music you listen to. But you're never too young to break those messages down.

You aren't alone in this. In 2018, Jesuit Social Services did a study of 1000 young Australian men to see the impact of the Man Box on our society. They found that the pressure to be a "real man" is strong, and most young men are impacted from a very young age. Two thirds of young men said that since they were a boy they had been told a "real man" behaves in a certain way. The Undercut will help you break down the Man Box messages.



WHY BREAK OUT OF THE MAN BOX?

The most important reason to break out of the Man Box is that **you'll be happier**. When you stop thinking about who you're supposed to be, how you're supposed to act, and what you're supposed to say, you'll instead be able to focus on who you really are. The Man Box sets an impossibly high ideal that no one can ever achieve. It's a real relief to give this up and to be yourself. Breaking out of the Man Box means you're still a man, but a far better, happier, more peaceful version of yourself. **You're still a man, but a far better man**

You'll also have **better relationships**. Whether it's your relationship with your partner, kids, parents, or mates, when you stop limiting yourself to actions you think make you a real man, you can connect better with the people around you.

You can **get more support**. Sometimes we all need help, but embedded in the Man Box messaging is the idea that men shouldn't seek help or reach out when they're struggling.

IF YOU'RE HESITANT

You might be reading this and feeling a bit defensive, dismissing this as crap, or thinking it doesn't apply to you. It's understandable to feel hesitant. After all, this is breaking down concepts you've likely been exposed to since childhood. But living your life without the pressure to act how a 'real man' should has so many benefits.

It's also hard to break out of the Man Box if you think it's what society wants from you. The Jesuit Social Services study showed us that while the pressure to fit inside the Man Box is strong in Australian society, the attitudes of the Man Box aren't actually attitudes most young men hold. In fact, there wasn't one Man Box rule that a majority of young men agreed with. More than 75% of the young men surveyed disagreed with the Man Box rules on hypersexuality, rigid household roles, and using violence to get respect. **This means that while men feel the pressure to conform to the Man Box, they shouldn't as most men disagree with the Man Box rules.**

Knowing this, try to keep an open mind as you read through this resource. If you feel yourself getting defensive or dismissive, just ask yourself - What's the point of holding on to old ways, if they aren't working that well? Hey, what's the worst thing that could happen from reading this? And what's the best that could happen?

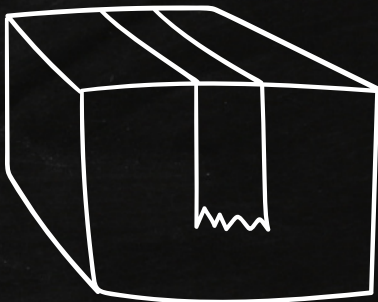
WHAT IS A MAN, ANYWAY?

Your gender is about what you think being a man is. It's all the social stuff you've been learning since you were young – roles, relationships, and what you think "normal" is. But normal changes all the time – it's different between cultures, and what we thought was normal last century is not that way now. The Man Box is about perceptions of "normal" for Aussie men. It's nothing to do with biology.

IN THE MAN BOX

In front of other men, I will:

- Always appear onto it and in charge, especially over women
- Not show emotions, except for anger, and being aggro towards others
- Not admit to mistakes or backing down
- Appear staunch, not needing others
- Keep proving I'm "manly" by mocking behaviour outside the Man Box.



BREAK OUT!

I'll choose my own identity and behaviour, because I want to:

- Listen to others, share decisions, and value women as my equals
- Be real, show all my feelings, not just anger, and always treat others with respect
- Admit my mistakes and learn from them, and from others
- Ask for help when I need it and value other people and their strengths
- Avoid the idea that males are superior, and not put down women.



SO, WHAT DO I DO?

How do you want to be?

No man can avoid the Man Box, but we all get to decide what we do about it.

Think about all the Man Box messages you've had in your life. Really, how helpful have they been to you? What messages would you have appreciated hearing when you were growing up? Now's the time to give these to yourself.

And remember, it's OK to think outside the Man Box.

You're already breaking out.

You already know that you don't always feel tough or have the answers. That might be something that you find confusing or shameful, but it's actually a good sign. You're being real with yourself and hopefully realising that there's life outside the Man Box.

Think about talking to others about this. You'll likely get encouraged to be yourself, and maybe some new ideas. It's helpful.

What will get you going? What are you most concerned about? Maybe it's that you want better relationships with your partner or kids. Maybe the Man Box doesn't fit your values. Maybe you just want to be happier.

Whatever it is, use it as your motivation to change. Do some maths – the pros and cons of how things are, and how they could be better.



START SMALL

It's easiest to start with a simple, small action. **Commit to doing just one new thing by the end of today.** Or to react to an old event in a different way. You'll know the right thing to do that day. Take another small step tomorrow, then the next day, until you get into the habit. Just do it, even if it feels a bit strange at first. It'll soon start to feel right.



Listening more



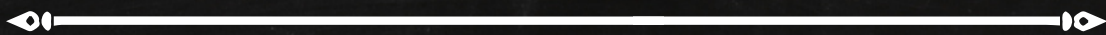
Tell someone how you feel



Show your appreciation for someone



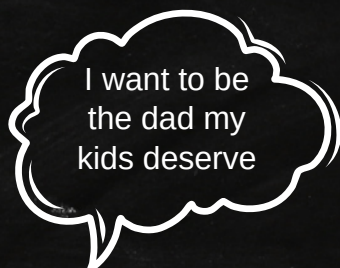
Ask for help when you need it



ONE OF THE BOYS?

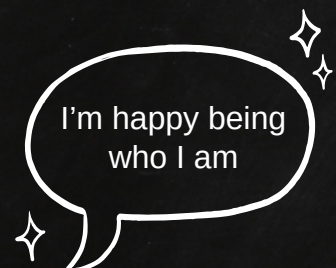
There's a chance that some of the men you know would be resistant to the idea of leaving the Man Box. Why? Because it makes things easier for them. Remember that part of being seen as "tough" is resisting anything new rather than having an open mind.

If you start doing things differently, or caring less about what other guys think, there will be pressure to get back into the Man Box. This is typically with "man up" type comments. Stay strong. You can counter those comments with some of the replies below.



Just keeping it real mate

I'm being a good partner

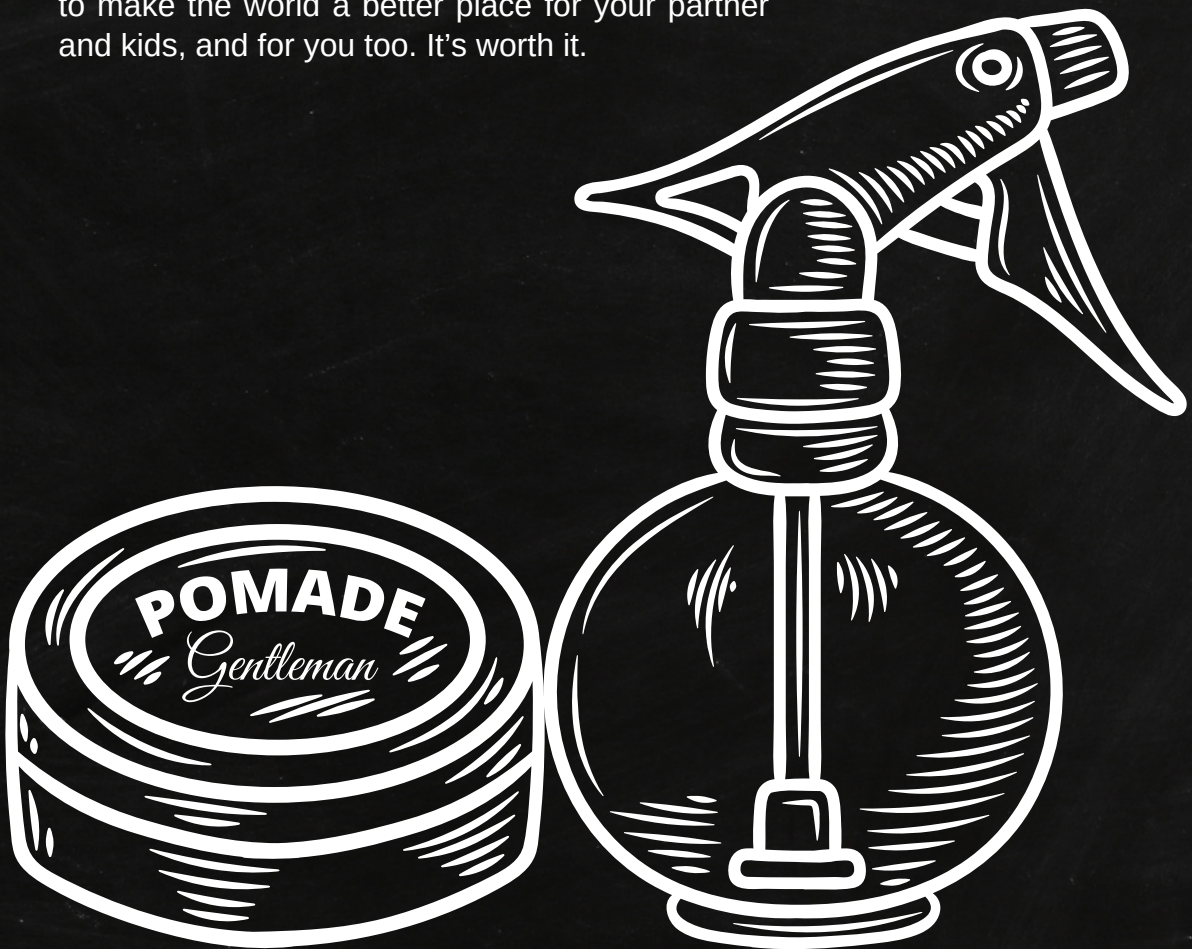


But also remember that there's only so much you can do to change other people. If they keep pushing you down when you're trying to get up, ask yourself – do you really want to be one of those boys?

REMINDE YOURSELF

Change isn't easy, so here are some things to remind yourself for when you need some motivation:

- Most men are actually faking the Man Box. Remember how earlier we said that most men don't actually believe in the Man Box values? When they're away from other guys, most men are more expressive and respectful, and treat their partners as equals. So, breaking out of the Man Box is what most guys are already doing, in private.
- Find some heroes that you respect for their flexible behaviour, or who live by respectful values. They might be real guys you know, or from a favourite TV show, or in a movie. Be inspired by them.
- Don't be too hard on yourself – no one's perfect. Sometimes falling back into old, ingrained patterns is part of change. Just regroup, learn what to do differently next time and keep going.
- The whole point of breaking out of the Man Box is to make the world a better place for your partner and kids, and for you too. It's worth it.





A huge thank you to White Ribbon New Zealand, who allowed us to adapt this resource for the White Ribbon Australia Barber Shop.

White Ribbon New Zealand. (2020). Break Out! of the Man Box. Retrieved from <https://whiteribbon.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Break-out-of-the-Man-box-White-Ribbon.pdf>

The Men's Project & Flood, M, (2018) The Man Box: A Study on Being a Young Man in Australia. Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne.