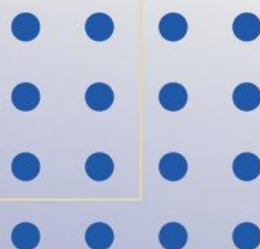




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TIPS AND IDEAS FOR STARTING A MEN'S MINISTRY



Why invest in men's ministry?

Men face heavy pressures

Many Australian men are running on empty. They carry the weight of work, finances, relationships, and the constant pressure to keep it all together. Behind the smiles, many are fighting private battles with stress, grief, addiction, loneliness or disappointment. Some feel stuck. Some feel lost. Many are searching for purpose, real connection and a place where they don't have to pretend everything is fine.

Mental health concerns are growing

Research shows that up to 25 per cent of men experience a diagnosed mental health disorder in their lifetime.¹ Men are more likely than women to die by suicide,² and only one in four men say they have close friends.³

Men lack safe spaces for support

Many men lack safe spaces for honest conversation, meaningful friendships and real support without judgment.

Men's ministry can change lives

Men's ministry and men's connection spaces show men that they are seen and valued. It also can provide them with purpose and a place to belong.

When men feel supported and included in the Salvation Army community, they are more likely to grow and contribute. Investing in men helps build healthy individuals, families and communities.

Key purposes of men's ministry

Authentic connection

Men need authentic connections with other men. Small, informal groups help men build trust. This helps them to move beyond surface talk into deeper discussions of life, family, health, work, faith and struggles. For men, especially in recovery or

¹ <https://aifs.gov.au/tentomen/insights-report/mental-health-australian-males-depression-suicidality-and-loneliness>

² <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/causes-death/intentional-self-harm-suicide-deaths/latest-release>

³ https://www.amhf.org.au/is_australian_mateship_in_crisis

support settings, being heard without shame is deeply healing. Often, trust and connection need to come before faith conversations.

Purpose and ways of contributing

Men need purpose and ways of contributing to life. The Salvation Army can provide opportunities for men to get involved in serving their community or church, leading others, and outreach. Seeing their contributions builds ownership, dignity, and a sense of belonging.

Spiritual and self-development

Men need spiritual and self-development that connects with their daily life. Common questions include identity, responsibility, integrity, forgiveness, fatherhood, relationships, resilience, recovery, and balancing faith with daily pressures. Discussions, mentoring, retreats and recovery groups can address these big topics practically.

Good role models and mentors

Men benefit from good role models and mentors. Intergenerational mentoring helps men develop healthy masculinity, stronger relationships, better parenting, and greater community involvement.

"If you are reading this today, you clearly care about the lives of the men you encounter in your corps, community or recovery service. I hope this resource inspires and equips you to invest in the lives of men in ways that bring lasting impact."

-Lieutenant Keven Williams

10 recommendations for starting a men's ministry or men's connection space

1. Gather like-minded people around the vision

If possible, find a few like-minded men from your corps, service, program, recovery setting, workplace or local community to meet with, pray and discuss your ministry's vision. If this is not possible, you can begin alone, but shared ownership creates greater sustainability and momentum.

"Find your allies in the community... other corps... other community organisations."
– Major Peer Cathcart

2. Decide who you are hoping to reach

Clarify your intended audience or demographic. Is the group primarily for men connected to a corps or faith community? Is it aimed at men from the broader community, men in recovery, fathers, young men, retirees or men experiencing social isolation?

Understanding who you are trying to reach will shape the group's activities, language, structure and style.

"It does need someone to text, call and follow up with men to build momentum. Men don't respond to signs and announcements. Personal invitation is everything."
– Major Ben Johnson

3. Create a safe and respectful culture

Be intentional about the group's culture. Establish a few simple values that help create emotional and psychological safety.

For example:

- We listen without interrupting
- We encourage rather than tear down
- We respect confidentiality
- We don't try to fix everyone's problems
- We create space for honesty and respect

Simple, consistent group values help newcomers feel safe and welcome.

As a team, discuss how you will address behaviour that doesn't line up with these values.

4. Food matters

Food creates connection. Whether it is a BBQ, breakfast, pizza night, recovery meal, coffee catch-up or shared cooking experience, eating together helps build relationships naturally.

It doesn't need to be expensive. Simple meals often create the best atmosphere.

"There's a reason guys stand around a BBQ and chat – it's less confronting than face-to-face conversations."
– Captain Matt Pethybridge

5. Choose accessible times and locations

Think carefully about when and where the group will meet. Weekly or fortnightly gatherings during the day, in the evening or the weekend may suit different groups of men.

Choose spaces that feel welcoming, relaxed, and accessible – particularly for men who may feel uncomfortable in formal environments.

6. Have a simple plan for gatherings

Structure helps men feel comfortable. Include time for:

- Food and informal conversation
- Practical activities
- Icebreakers or storytelling
- Discussion or reflection
- Faith conversations (where appropriate)
- Encouragement and connection

Shared activity often creates natural opportunities for deeper conversation over time.

7. Model honesty and authenticity

Leaders set the tone. When appropriate, honesty, vulnerability and authenticity create a sense of permission for others to open up.

If leaders are willing to speak honestly about challenges, struggles, failures, growth, recovery or faith, others are more likely to feel safe doing the same.

“Be authentic, honest and real. Don’t pretend your life is better than it is, even if you’re a leader.”

– Lieutenant Keven Williams

8. Create natural opportunities for faith conversations

Faith conversations will look different in every context. In some settings, there may be Bible studies and prayer. In others, conversations may emerge gradually through relationships, recovery journeys, shared meals and trust.

The goal is not to force conversations. Instead, it is to create environments where hope, spirituality, faith, purpose and the person of Jesus can be explored naturally and respectfully.

"My heart is to see the men grow in Christ through discipleship and the power of the Word."

– Geoff Pyke

9. Build relationships through shared experiences

Many men connect more naturally side-by-side than face-to-face. Shared experiences create trust over time.

This may include:

- Sport
- Fishing or camping
- Recovery activities
- Men's sheds
- Service projects
- Community meals
- Music
- Watching football
- Gardening
- Volunteering
- Mentoring
- Practical projects

"Side-by-side environments... reduce pressure, create shared purpose, and provide a natural pathway for trust and deeper connection."

– Major John Viles

10. Celebrate men and affirm their value

Celebrate birthdays, milestones, recovery progress, acts of service, personal development and participation.

Many men rarely receive encouragement or affirmation. Simple recognition and appreciation can greatly strengthen trust, belonging and connection.

"Men shouldn't be treated as broken or weak. Tap into their strengths and interests."

– Major Peer Cathcart

Ways to help men feel valued and included

Invite men personally

Personal invitation matters. Men are far more likely to attend when directly invited by someone they trust.

Offer different ways to connect

Not all men connect in the same way. Some prefer discussion groups. Others prefer practical service, sport, mentoring, music, recovery programs or informal social spaces.

A variety of connection points allows more men to feel included.

Be flexible and practical

Consider family responsibilities, work schedules, recovery commitments and accessibility. Address practical issues affecting men's everyday lives, such as stress, relationships, finances, parenting, purpose and wellbeing.

Create psychologically safe environments

Warmth, respect, honesty, confidentiality and consistency are essential. Men need environments where they can be themselves without fear of shame, ridicule or judgment.

Affirm men publicly and privately

Recognise and celebrate the contributions and presence of men within your community, service or ministry setting.

Sometimes, simply thanking a man for showing up can create a sense of dignity and belonging.

Encourage ownership and leadership

Invite men to shape activities, contribute ideas, lead projects, mentor others, share skills and participate meaningfully.

When men are trusted with responsibility and encouraged to contribute, engagement and ownership will grow naturally.

Contact information

The following contacts are Salvo leaders with experience in men's ministries who are willing to offer support to others, and share their experiences and insights.

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