



5 things that help when a man won't talk

How to stay connected to the man who goes quiet - without pushing him further away.

Written for the people on the other side of the silence. His quiet is rarely about you, and there is more you can do than wait - just not the things most of us try first.

The silence is not rejection

When a man you love goes quiet, it is easy to read the silence as a verdict on you - that he does not trust you, does not care, or is hiding something. Sometimes that is true. Far more often, the silence is about him.

Many men were taught, early and thoroughly, that talking about a struggle makes it bigger, that being a problem is worse than having one, and that the people they love are to be protected from what is going on inside them. On that logic, going quiet is not withdrawal. It is what protecting you looks like from the inside.

That does not make the silence healthy, and it does not mean you have to like it. But it changes the job. The job is not to extract the conversation. It is to make talking feel less dangerous than staying quiet - and that is built slowly, through how the small moments go, not through one big talk.

WHAT THE QUIET OFTEN IS

OVERWHELM	He does not have words for it yet. Pressure to talk adds load, it does not lift it.
SHAME	He believes the struggle says something about who he is. Saying it out loud feels like confirming it.
PROTECTION	He thinks he is sparing you. Silence feels like the responsible option.
HABIT	Decades of managing alone. Not talking is the default, not a decision.

The five things that follow are practical. Each one comes with something to try this week and a little space to think it through for your situation. None of them requires him to cooperate first. That is the point.

Change the setting, not the man.

01 Go side by side, not face to face.

Eye contact plus a direct question reads as an interrogation to a man who is already braced. The conversations that actually happen tend to happen sideways - in the car, on a walk, fixing something, washing up. Shared focus takes the spotlight off him and gives the words somewhere to land.

TRY THIS

This week, create one side-by-side situation with no agenda at all. A drive, a walk, a job that needs two people. If nothing gets said, that is fine - you are building the setting, not forcing the scene.

What side-by-side moments already exist in your week, or could with little effort?

Write here...

02 Ask about the thing, not the feelings.

'Are you okay?' invites 'fine'. 'How are you feeling?' can slam the door entirely. Specific, concrete questions are easier to answer - about the job, the mate, the match, the thing he mentioned three weeks ago. Men often talk about what is going on long before they talk about how it feels. The facts are the door; the feelings follow later.

TRY THIS

Swap one 'are you okay?' for something specific you genuinely want to know - 'What ended up happening with the contract?' - and then actually listen to the answer without steering it anywhere.

What specific things could you ask him about that are real, not fishing?

Write here...

Hold the space open.

03 Leave the silences alone.

When he does start to say something, the pause that follows is where the real sentence is being built. Filling that pause - with reassurance, advice, or your own story - tells him the window has closed. Silence that is allowed to sit says the opposite - there is room here, take your time.

TRY THIS

Next time he trails off, count slowly to ten in your head before you say anything. If you must speak, try 'go on' - and nothing else.

What do you tend to do when a conversation goes quiet - and what would leaving the pause feel like?

Write here...

04 Say what you see, once, without a verdict.

Pretending you have not noticed helps nobody, but neither does diagnosis. There is a middle path - name what you have observed, plainly and once, and leave the door open. 'You've seemed flat for a few weeks. I'm not going to push it. But I see you, and when you want to talk, I want to hear it.' Then genuinely let it go. Repetition turns care into pressure.

TRY THIS

Write your version of that sentence below, in your own words, for your situation. Keep it under three sentences - one observation, no verdict, one open door.

Your version -

You've seemed... I'm not going to push. When you want to talk...

Look after your side of it

05 Keep your own tank full.

Living next to someone's silence is draining, and you cannot pour from an empty tank. Your own support - friends, family, your own counselling if it comes to that - is not a luxury and it is not disloyalty. It also quietly models the very thing you are hoping he will do - taking a struggle to another human being instead of carrying it alone.

TRY THIS

Name one person you could be honest with about how this is affecting you, and make contact this week. Not to talk about him - to talk about you.

Who is in your corner, and what do you actually need from them right now?

Write here...

WHAT TENDS TO MAKE IT WORSE

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| THE AMBUSH | Sitting him down for The Big Talk he did not see coming. Braced men do not open up. |
| THE ULTIMATUM | 'Talk to me or else' gets compliance or distance, never honesty. |
| DIAGNOSING HIM | Telling him what he has ('you're clearly depressed') hands him something to argue with instead of something to say. |
| COMPARING | 'Other men manage to talk' confirms the exact shame that keeps him quiet. |
| MIND-READING OUT LOUD | Guessing his thoughts and stating them as fact teaches him that silence is safer than being misread. |

When quiet needs more than patience.

Most silence is slow, ordinary struggle. Some is not. Take it seriously and act sooner rather than later if you notice him giving away possessions that matter to him, saying goodbyes that feel like endings, talking about being a burden or about everyone being better off without him, a sudden calm after a long low period, or any mention of ending his life - even framed as a joke.

If you are worried right now

Ask him directly - "are you having thoughts of ending your life?" Asking does not plant the idea; it opens the door. In immediate danger, call 999. For free support any time, Samaritans are on 116 123, day and night. You can also call them yourself, about him - many people do.

And if he is willing to talk to someone - even reluctantly, even "just one call" - that is enough to start. The free 15-minute call at Mettle is a low-stakes first step built for men who do not do therapy. Partners and family book it on someone's behalf more often than you would think, and a conversation about how to support him is a legitimate use of it too.

BOOK A FREE 15-MINUTE CALL

mettletherapy.co.uk/contact, 01704 660167, info@mettletherapy.co.uk

Local, free and peer-based options are listed at mettletherapy.co.uk/local-support - including Andy's Man Club, open to any man, no referral needed.