

BREAKTHROUGH

Happier, More Fulfilled Lives Together



More Deeply Loving Relationships

A lot of men have said they feel isolated and overwhelmed by today's challenges. Relationships are conflicted. They are stuck, and their life just isn't working. They've become numb and unavailable. They'd like to be better dads, better partners, or better men but they're just not sure where to start!

With elements from David Richo's 5As and Richard Schwartz's Internal Family Systems plus others in a unique curriculum, the Breakthrough for men program has helped thousands of men in its 30+ years gain more deeply loving relationships and live happier, more fulfilled lives.

"Most men coming to Breakthrough are facing a big life and/or relationship challenge, but many others aren't in crisis and are just looking for deeper more meaningful lives and friendships, or a sense of community," says Fitz, who emphasizes that Breakthrough isn't geared just to men who may feel broken in some way. "At Breakthrough, we believe every man can benefit from the program."

A major tenet of the program, says Fitz, is that men need the support of other men to heal and regain the humanity that has often been socialized out of them. Another emphasis of the program is that experiencing emotions is a good thing, and it seeks to emulsify the oil-and-water-like relationship between vulnerability and traditional male culture.

"We are brought up to believe that boys must sacrifice their humanity to be real men: and that the only way to relate to other men is to compete with them. Because of the way we're raised, there is a lot of distrust in other men." says Breakthrough executive director Chris Fitz.

About 40 percent of participants are referred by their therapists, with the other 60 percent being referred by word-of-mouth. Fitz adds that many of these referrals are given by women, who, he says, have a more instinctual understanding of the benefits that a support community can provide. "Women get, right away, what we're all about," says Fitz. A similar program called Breakfree was subsequently created for women.

Fitz says program graduates include men from all walks of life - their backgrounds, educational and occupational pedigrees are as diverse as their various ethnicities, religions, and sexual orientations. He says the average attendee is between 40 and 45 years old but adds that there have been graduates as young as 18, all the way up to men in their 70s. Each year, 70 to 130 men participate in the workshops for men. The course's teachings come from a variety of approaches and disciplines. "We are not affiliated with any religion, but participants often say that the teachings fall in line with their own spiritual beliefs," says Fitz. Fitz says that participants of Breakthrough usually find it to be a very compelling, profound experience. He says that the most common feedback he hears from graduates is that Breakthrough "saved my life, saved my marriage, saved my relationship with my kids, or helped me through a painful divorce."

A Blue Shield study on the Breakthrough program confirmed these sentiments in 2008, finding that the word "transformative" best described the Breakthrough experience, and that 91 percent of survey respondents used the words "enormous" or "considerable" to describe the impact that Breakthrough had on their lives.

Such transformation comes with a level of time commitment that sets Breakthrough apart from other programs of its kind. For the men of Breakthrough, it is a hero's journey that cannot be completed in a long weekend. Instead, the program is 21+ weeks long, which is broken up into two sessions. Each of these sessions has 10-12 evening classes, two all-day Saturday courses, and one weekend retreat. Most of the work is done in small groups, where participant learn to put the lessons into action. "Practice leads to perfect, and it takes time to rewire the neural pathways, so we can live our lives differently," says Fitz. He emphasizes the importance of taking one's time and going slowly, providing men with the support to practice new tools like affirmations, supporting parts, identifying triggers with issues like anger addiction, and taking time and space to contemplate and reflect.

Breakthrough is a nonprofit organization, and tuition is done on a sliding scale. "No willing participant has ever been turned away for financial reasons in 30+ years," Fitz says.

*The Santa Cruz introductory evenings will be held at the Monterey Coast Preparatory School in Scotts Valley on **May 23, May 30, June 13, 7-9pm.** Visit breakthroughformen.org to register.*

Breakthrough Men's Community

At the Monterey Coast Preparatory School, 125 Bethany Drive, Scotts Valley 831.375.5441 | breakthroughformen.org

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