



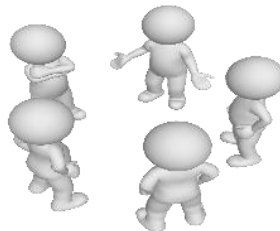
Understanding and Coping with Depression

Background:

First of all, there are many factors that may (or may not*) contribute to depression such as:

- **Genetics** – Research supports that depression, like many other diseases, tends to run in families so there seems to be a genetic tendency toward depression for some people more than others
- **Trauma** – As one would expect, traumatic life events such as abuse, neglect, significant loss, etc. can contribute to depression
- **Life Situations** – Obviously during difficult times in life (such as unemployment, financial problems, sickness, divorce, etc.) people may be more susceptible to depression
- **Other Conditions:** Having another psychological, physical or medical condition can contribute to depression. For example, struggling with a serious anxiety disorder can in itself also be very depressing. The same goes for medical conditions. When someone is struggling with poor health, injury, disability or pain that can trigger feelings of depression
- **Substance Use Issues** – When substance use gets out of control, depression may follow.

***This is not to say that everyone who experiences these types of situations, factors and issues automatically gets depressed, it's just that these risk factors increase the chances of depression**



GROUP DISCUSSION: Can anyone identify any of the above depression risk factors in their own life?



Background (Continued)

This activity is focused on coping with depression in a *general* sense. There are many types of depression including what is often referred to as:

- “Clinical Depression”: A mood disorder characterized by the inability to experience pleasure, difficulty in concentrating, disturbance of sleep and appetite, and feelings of sadness, guilt and helplessness (www.dictionary.reference.com)

Going forward in this activity, however, we will consider depression more in terms as a general condition, defined as:

- **“A condition of general emotional dejection and withdrawal; sadness greater and more prolonged than warranted by any objective reason”** (www.dictionary.reference.com)

In other words, everyone gets sad from time to time and there are specific life events where being sad is “normal” (such as after the loss of a loved one). For the sake of this activity we are talking about sadness that is in excess of what is expected for a given situation or that lasts longer than we would like it too. (For example, “I know my I broke up with by girlfriend/boyfriend over six months ago but I still feel just as bad about it today as I did then and I am not getting better”)

There are many symptoms that go along with depression but for the sake of this exercise, consider one general question that means a lot:

When I am feeling depressed: Do my feelings and symptoms of depression affect my ability to function and move forward with my life and to live up to my full potential?

- ★ If your answer to this question is **YES** then regardless of whether or not you are clinically depressed, it would be helpful to work on some basic coping skills for depression
- ★ If you did not answer **YES** to this question, this activity is still not a waste of time for you. Look at the following information and coping skills to follow so as to stay on the positive path you may be on. Also, you may know others who are depressed who you can help with this information.



Gaining Insight into How Depression Affects You as an Individual:

Not everyone experiences depression in the same way and you may not experience it the same way at different points in your own life. Consider the following more detailed depression checklist.

(Keep in mind, there may be a lot of overlap with each section below)

Directions: If you think you suffer from depression, **check all that you think may apply** to how you feel when you are depressed. If you do not yourself suffer from depression, based on what you know about yourself, **check off all the items below** that you think would be the most difficult for you to deal with

Helplessness: Feeling unable to help oneself, lacking support or ability

- “So far, I feel like I have tried just about everything but nothing seems to work”
- “I feel like I have little or no control over my life situation”
- “I don’t feel like I have nearly enough help or support that I need to get better”
- “At times I feel like I have no positive way to escape my problems”
- “I just don’t have what it takes to get better”

Hopelessness (Internal Focus) - (Similar to helplessness but focused more on intrinsic loss of hope for things to get better) – When depressed, do you find yourself thinking any of the following thoughts?

- “Sometimes I don’t feel like trying any more, what’s the point”
- “I wonder if I will ever get back to the way I once was”
- “At times it’s hard to see things ever improving with me”
- “I think I may never get over what happened to me”
- “When I am at my lowest I feel like I may never be truly happy again”

Hopelessness (External Focus) - A loss of hope based more on a negative view of factors outside oneself such as the condition of one’s surroundings or an overall sense of despair based on world conditions

- “I have found myself thinking that there is no way I can ever really make it in this lousy world”
- “No matter how hard I try, life just keeps kicking me back down”
- “With the way this world is headed, I sometimes just don’t see the point of trying anymore”
- “At times, I have nothing to look forward too, the future looks empty”
- “Other people keep pushing me back down whenever I try to stand up again”

Worthlessness – Poor self-esteem and low self-worth. A pervasive feeling of not being good enough. This often is linked with strong feelings of shame and guilt

- “I just don’t feel like I am a good person and as a result I may never truly be happy”
- “There is something wrong with me”
- “When things get bad I feel like I am not worth loving or caring about”
- “I don’t deserve forgiveness for all the bad things I have done”
- “I simply do not like myself”

Pretty depressing, huh? – Nevertheless it is important to understand how depression may be affecting you personally, so that this information can be a guide in your recovery and self-improvement. The good news is that after this we will focus on what it takes to get better

GROUP DISCUSSION: What areas from the above checklist stood out to you?



Overcoming Depression: Starting the Process of Getting Better

BASIC COPING SKILLS LIST FOR *DEPRESSION:

*As stated earlier, these skills are for a more general or situational depression. More serious or clinical depression may require more intensive action, therapy and possibly medication – See below: **Should I Consider Medication?**)

1. **Time and Acceptance**– It may seem to say odd to say that time is a coping skill but in many cases, depression can occur in episodes. Quite often simply because of the passing of time, a milder episode of depression can go away on its own. For some people, depression can “flare up” kind of like a cold and then go away after a few days. If you know this to be the case with you, the next time you feel depressed, remember, that if you are patient, with time it will pass. (Of, course, with more serious forms of depression, this may not be the case at all)

“This too shall pass”

2. **Cognitive Reframing/Positive Self-Talk** – Often depression is accompanied by negative thoughts such as what we reviewed in the previous section when looking at thoughts of helplessness, hopelessness, and worthlessness. Negative thoughts are usually distortions of the truth. Our thoughts may be partially true but when depressed we may blow them out of proportion. When that is the case it is important to reframe negative thoughts in a way that is more positive and realistic. Consider an example below:

- ★ **Negative Distortion:** “I am going to be completely miserable now that she dumped me, my life is over!”
- ★ Same Thought **Reframed** in a Realistic but More Positive Light: “I am going to be sad and lonely for a while since the breakup but eventually I will move on and get better just like everyone else does”

Positive Self-Talk simply involves getting in the practice of telling yourself your reframed positive self-statements on a regular basis. With time and practice, positive self-talk is extremely effective in alleviating depression

“Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t – you’re right”
– Henry Ford

3. **Goals** – Sometimes depression can feel like being in a “goal-less state” If life seems meaningless or mundane it is important to get back to setting some basic goals. Life is so much more meaningful when we have something to strive for. Sometimes you have to start small but once you start making small strides in a positive direction that can be a real boost to your mood. If you are unemployed, getting a small part time job or even volunteering can be a difference maker when it comes to getting through depressive periods and preventing them from coming back.

“What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals” – Zig Ziglar

4. **Keep Hope Alive** – Similar to having goals, it is important to have things and events to look forward to in life. Plan a vacation, get some concert tickets, set a date to get together with someone you enjoy, save up for something special for yourself, etc. These types of things can be a difference maker during “darker” periods in life.



**“Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird, that cannot fly” –
Langston Hughes**

5. **Spirituality and Purpose** – Regardless of what you believe or don't believe in, it can be so helpful to increase your sense of purpose in life. Something as simple as helping other people or even helping animals can feel purposeful and give you an improved outlook on your own life. If you do have spiritual beliefs or even just some questions, consider looking deeper into those beliefs and questions as part of your own journey out of the day to day ruts and routines of life.

“If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything”

6. **Exercise and Self-Care**– Exercise benefits you physically for sure, however there is so much research out there showing how much exercise does for you in a positive way mentally. In addition to that, if you are depressed and oversleeping that is a recipe for increased depression. Practice forcing yourself to get up earlier, little by little. Also, diet can play a role in your mood as well. Burying your feelings in junk food or starving yourself and smoking cigarettes all day is bound to make things worse, while making an effort to eat better will eventually help you feel better.

“Happiness is not a fitness goal it's the consequence of living a healthy lifestyle”

7. **Avoid Isolation** – If you find yourself avoiding others because of depression it can be important to actually try to force yourself to get back into positive social situations. A little alone time in life usually can't hurt but extended periods of isolation usually is not a good thing when it comes to mental health

“You are confined only by the walls you build yourself.” – Andrew Murphy

8. **Guard against Negative Contagions and Increase Positive Exposure:** “Negativity is contagious” as the saying goes. There are often negative-minded people in life who are unavoidable. You may work with them, or live near them or even live with someone who is very negative. Even if you can't avoid those people who bring you down, you can practice avoiding letting them get to you. It's not easy but by learning to be assertive and how to avoid getting bated into arguments or drama, you may be able to save yourself a lot of UNG (Unnecessary Greif). Along the same line of thinking, if you know of anyone who is up building, encouraging, and supportive, do your best to get yourself increased exposure to those people particularly during times of stress and depression.

“If you hang out with chickens, you're going to cluck and if you hang out with eagles, you're going to fly.” - Steve Maraboli

9. **Use Your Group** – If you are doing this in group therapy, there is often a wealth of experience and wisdom surrounding you in the room right now. **What are some additional suggestions the group can come up with that are helpful for depression?**

“I love teamwork. I love the idea of everyone rallying together to help me win.” - Jarod Kintz

GROUP DISCUSSION: What skills from the list above, or additional suggestions from #9, do you think would work best for you if you are (or ever do) experience depression?

Pick at least one or two



Should I Consider Medication?

If you are not on medication already and you feel like you are struggling with depression, yet you are unsure if you should consider medication, then consider some of the following questions (Yes or No)

- Is my depression continuing despite my efforts to get better?
- Are depressive feelings and symptoms impacting my ability to function? (For example, difficulty getting up to go to work or school, neglecting responsibilities, neglecting or avoiding loved ones, letting important things go such as paying bills)
- Am I still having trouble setting and achieving goals? (Even small ones)
- Are people that care about me complaining or expressing concern about my moods?
- Am I having ongoing discouraging or negative thoughts? (Such as “what’s the point in trying any more, or I don’t see why I should go on living, or I just don’t have any joy in life. Thoughts such as these are very serious, so if you are having them you should speak with a doctor, counselor or other mental health professional immediately)

If your answer to any of the above questions is yes, you really should consider seeing a qualified doctor or psychiatrist to consider medication. Sometimes people are afraid to take medication because they think it means that they will have to take it for the rest of their life. That is not always the case. Sometimes it is a good start to just consider taking medication to get through a tough time for now, and then as time goes by with your doctor you can decide where you may need to go from there.