

I'M NOT THE SAME PERSON I WAS



By Joy Grimsley Grimsley, LMFT, EMDR

So often the word depression is used to express the fact that we just don't feel as happy as before. One time a young girl entered my office and said she was depressed. After exploring the 'problem', I realized she was struggling with homework, and her best friend spent less time with her. She soon learned to ask for help, and used different words to describe her feelings. She learned new social skills, gained self-confidence, and bounced back into being a fun-loving young girl. Things aren't always so simple. For example, one teen said he was depressed, and as it turns out, was Googling how to kill himself. His distress over parental conflicts were overwhelming, and he felt disconnected from his father. Studies show that approximately 15% of children and teens suffer at least one depressive episode before they reach adulthood. Being a mindful, informed and involved parent is essential in keeping your child safe and mentally healthy.

An estimated 17 million Americans adults have at least one depressive episode in life. After a pandemic year which handed us incredible losses including our sense of normalcy, many more feel depressed. Negative experiences pile up and seem to shove us into feeling depressed and anxious. Depression can be expressed differently, depending on age and gender. Men often become irritable and manage symptoms by working or drinking more. Children can refuse to go to school, have tantrums or withdraw. Women's symptoms can include feelings of worthlessness, sleeplessness, and sadness. Symptoms aren't exclusive to a gender or age.

Relationships can bring us joy and fulfillment, but when there is conflict, it can be a big source of depressive symptoms, especially if the conflicts don't seem to resolve. A family history of depression may mean a biological vulnerability and risk of depression, however, it is not simple and straightforward. Unresolved traumas, chronic pain, and illness can also increase your chances of depression. Members of the LGBTQ+ community experience depression when they don't receive the support and connections they need. Even medications



can increase your risk of depression, so talk to your doctor about your side-effects. Even seemingly positive events, such as marriage or moving to a new city, can lead to depression. Depression is not simply sadness, but a combination of symptoms that affect self-esteem and self-confidence.

Work through your feelings and have them acknowledged by someone else. Seek out your partner, a friend, or therapist who can give you a safe place to share your story and feel validated and cared for. Alternatively, if you're doing well, let empathy and compassion lead you to being a source of comfort and understanding to someone who struggles more than you do.

How to help someone with symptoms of depression:

Stay informed. You may be the first line of defense against depression in family and friends, so get to know the symptoms. You may notice that they don't seem to care about anything anymore, complain of physical symptoms, or are chronically negative, sad or irritable. They may withdraw from others, and abuse drugs/alcohol or pills. Sleep and eating problems can arise, and they may seem out of it.

Reach out and listen compassionately. Start a conversation with them

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by expressing your concern and desire to listen. Be gentle, not intense. Try again later, when the attempt goes nowhere. If someone shares their pain or sadness with you, be assured they are seeking empathy and understanding.

Don't judge or instruct. Feelings are neither right or wrong, so listen without judgment. It's better to be a compassionate listener than an advisor. Avoid saying things like, "Look at the bright side..." or "It's not that bad!" or "Cheer up, it could be worse." Minimizing or rejecting someone's feelings is invalidating. You can't fix someone else's depression, and you're not responsible for their happiness or lack thereof. Just hold a safe place for them to share their troubles.

Be Supportive. Being supportive includes offering hope and encouragement. You can remind them that they are not alone, and how important they are in your life. Ask them what you can do to help them right now.

How to help yourself when you feel depressed:

Connect with someone you trust. Holding your sadness and melancholy inside, can lead to a jumble of emotions that can be overwhelming and deepen depression. In a marriage, sharing your feelings about what is going on helps your partner understand what's happening to you. If depression makes you isolate, the emotional intimacy with your partner will suffer. If you tend to be irritable, your fights will escalate. Get into the habit of sharing your underlying feelings, and not what's on the surface.

Expand your use of words. For example, you may say you feel hopeless, disillusioned, useless, empty, adrift, invisible, or forgotten when you're sad. When you're hurt, you may feel small, disrespected, disregarded or unimportant. When you're sorry, you may say that you're ashamed, guilty or regretful. This will help others understand you.

Understanding each other's emotional needs leads to deeper intimacy. I find that unhappy marriages aren't so much for the lack of love, but for the lack of deep intimate communication and friendship. Sometimes the loneliest person is someone who is emotionally disconnected with a partner. Soon couples become roommates with occasional benefits. If you don't interrupt that pattern, you'll drift further apart.

Reign in your bad behavior. Feelings aren't to be judged, but bad behaviors are unacceptable. Irritability, a symptom of depression, can generate unkind words and actions. It is also not helpful to sulk and be silent in order to send a signal to your partner. Your partner cannot read minds, and may not know what to do with your 'negative vibe'. Each of us has to ultimately demonstrate self-control. Give words to your feelings of sadness or irritation.

Know the difference. Emotions are chemicals that release in response to a mental reaction to something (anger, joy, fear...). Our brain recognizes an emotion and we begin to have a feeling. Feelings are often fueled by a mix of emotions, and last longer. A mood is influenced by the environment (people, weather...), our body (food, exercise, sleep...), and our state of mind (emotions). Recognize that emotions/feelings can come and go and change. A mood is sustained/prolonged within us. Your depressed mood must be addressed, especially when it worsens or you think of death or harming yourself. Talk to a therapist, and explore why you can't shake the symptoms.

The reward. Being more aware of your mood requires self-exploration and that has a reward. Self-reflection increases your understanding of what is out of balance and needs your attention, love and care. It's possible to heal the wounds that have caused sadness or have tempted you to embrace victimhood. You can learn from your pain, because it can give you cues towards healing. Self-honesty will stop you from blaming others for your own unhappiness. Learn to love your own company, and bring happiness into your life. Your relationships will feel more meaningful and fulfilling, because you will rise out of the depressed mood. Decide today to live a happier and physically healthier life.

Resources:

Crisis Support Services of NV 775-784-8090

Childhood/Teen Depression handbook for parents: ericaslighthouse.org

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273 TALK

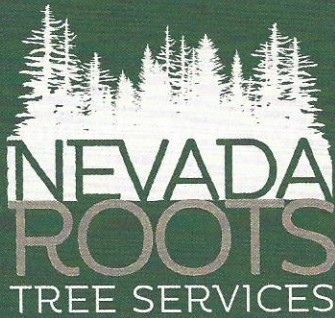
Children's Mobile Crisis Response Team 775-688-4970

Mobile Outreach Safety Team (adults) 775-334-2677

Trevor Project: LGBTQ+ crisis intervention 1-866-488-7386

Personal information was altered to protect privacy.

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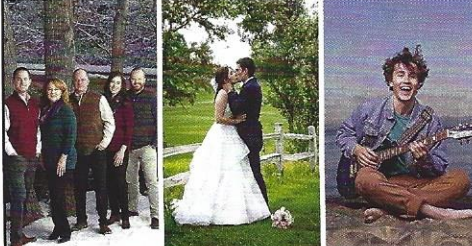
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