

DEPRESSION

Just reading or hearing the word depression causes many of us to feel anxious. It can bring to mind fearful memories of a past condition which we do not wish to repeat. But this is not a reason to avoid doing something about our depression.

What is depression?

Depression has been referred to as feeling sorry for ourselves (self-pity), frozen rage, a learned helplessness, or a defense mechanism used to hide from conflict. It affects the entire body, including moods, thoughts, and behaviors. Depression causes an inability to respond to all or selected stimuli. It affects the way we eat and sleep, how we feel about ourselves, and how we think about things. It also affects our job performance, our appearance, and how we handle the everyday pressures in our lives. We might feel continuously sad and cry often, but not know why. Depression causes loss of our sense of humor and our sex drive. We might be incapable of joy, unable to make decisions, to concentrate, or to remember things. We can feel anxious, angry, irritable, apathetic, empty inside, guilty, helpless, hopeless, and our judgment might be impaired. We might be very fearful and believe no one else cares. We isolate ourselves. Depression can be mild, lasting for a short time, or it can be deep and seem irreversible. We might feel our pain and our struggle are too great, and the world would be better off without us. We might turn to destructive behaviors and think about or attempt suicide. If you are looking for an alternative, keep reading!

It is very important to note that depression is not a sign of personal weakness. It is not a condition which can be willed or wished away. While well-meaning friends sometimes tell us to "pick ourselves up," or "just snap out of it," recovery is not that simple. Visits to a medical doctor and/or use of medication can at times be necessary. Emotions Anonymous can also be a means to recovery.

Why do we become depressed?

Not expressing our feelings, especially anger, is the reason for our suffering. We do not accept ourselves, our situations, our past, or our mistakes in life. Our depression is the defense mechanism we use to hide when we do not want to deal with conflict. Depression is our way of not facing reality.

Some people have an inherited risk for depression. A chemical imbalance or some other medical reason can also make us prone to this condition. Others become depressed when overwhelmed by situations in their lives. Having low self-esteem and viewing ourselves and our world with pessimism also causes depression.

Expressing our emotions

We might have learned early in life that it was not okay to express to others what we felt. We might have been severely criticized for temper tantrums or expressing anger to those who we felt made us feel that way. "Stop that crying, or I'll give you something to cry about" might have been said to us often when we were young. •

It may not have been acceptable to express our fear in certain situations. Perhaps we learned not to outwardly show these feelings. "Be brave; big boys and girls aren't afraid."

If we did not feel secure in expressing such emotions outwardly, we may have turned them inward toward ourselves. It was safer and easier to avoid conflict and to stuff the feelings down inside ourselves. If we did or do this often, we become filled with unexpressed emotions.

This "frozen rage" makes us immobile. Soon we are not even aware of situations which cause us to feel sad, angry, hateful, fearful, or joyous. We can falsely believe we are essentially happy individuals because we seldom feel anger or fear. Actually, we are just denying these emotions. On the other hand, seemingly innocent comments or small events might make us over react and feel very angry. Depression can result when we become this out of touch with our feelings.

EMOTIONS ANONYMOUS CAN HELP.

Depression can put us at our emotional bottom, so we begin attending Emotions Anonymous meetings. Many of those who attend meetings have had symptoms of 'depression one or more times.

In a state of depression we feel so miser-able. We believe pouring out all our problems at meetings would be helpful. However, we find EA meetings are not where we continually review our miseries, but where we learn to find ways to cope with life. By focusing on the solution, not the problem, we find help. On the other hand, at meetings depression can have such a tight grip on us that we can barely talk at all.

We often feel ashamed and guilty that we are depressed, as if becoming depressed is a personal weakness. When we learn EA members have "not found it helpful to place labels on any degree of illness or health," we feel relief and acceptance. It is easier for us to share our thoughts and feelings when a meeting has an atmosphere of love and acceptance.

We read, "Just for Today I will take care of my physical health...." But when depressed we most likely have very little energy and it takes great effort to do anything at all. We would prefer to rest or stay in bed. This "Just for Today" reminds us of a better way.

Admitting and believing we are powerless over our depression, which is Step One, will allow us to stop denying it, trying to control it, or willing it away. This honest admission is not a sign of defeat, but one of hope. It allows the principles of the EA program and the people in it to begin to help us.

Next we begin to believe there is a Power greater than ourselves which can restore us to sanity. This is Step Two. We certainly know when we are depressed we are not living in a sane and rational way. During such times we can feel unlovable and not worthy of another's help. Asking the group for help is a step in the right direction. Although it might be difficult for us to ask a Higher Power for help, this is one time it is necessary for us to do so.

Many members of Emotions Anonymous have found relief from depression. They have done this by working the Twelve Steps and by sharing the principles of this program with others. It is through sharing that we get in touch with our emotions and

Move out of our self-centeredness. A paradox of this program is that in order for us to keep what we learn, we must share this knowledge with others.

As we work the steps we slowly begin to know ourselves better. As we do, we find it easier to accept ourselves, those around us, and our situation. Through acceptance we can begin to change.

The program reminds us, "Just for Today I will accept myself and live to the best of my ability." Because depression is often a symptom of anger turned toward ourselves it might take quite a while for us to learn to accept ourselves and our situation. Nevertheless, it is important that we do accept ourselves just as we are if we want to begin our recovery.

Through Emotions Anonymous we learn it is necessary to express anger and other emotions in an appropriate way. Such expression can be difficult, but when something is difficult to do it must be practiced. When we were younger, riding a bike might have been hard at first. However, if we wanted to ride that bike we kept trying, we practiced. When a situation which makes us angry arises, we admit to ourselves that we are angry. We do this even though we might not be feeling our anger. It might not be appropriate to directly tell the person(s) who we believe made us feel this way so we talk to a neutral person. We describe the incident feeling as much emotion as we can. In this way we are able to release our anger and not stuff the feeling down inside ourselves. We keep practicing each time it is appropriate, and we begin to get more in touch with our feelings.

Talking is beneficial for us, especially when signs of depression are evident. Sharing with an understanding person on the telephone and at meetings keeps us in touch with what we are feeling. At such times we might not feel like attending an EA meeting, but this is probably when we need to be there the most. We can always listen if we are not up to sharing. Attending a meeting forces us to stop thinking exclusively about ourselves as we focus on others. We might discover we do, in fact, have something to share. We usually leave the meeting feeling more hopeful.

We gain the ability to turn our will and our lives over to the care of our Higher Power (Step Three) because we realize our Higher Power is now doing for us what we were not able to do for ourselves. We begin to realize a new freedom and happiness as we learn depression does not have to be our fate.

As we become aware of our feelings and express them more easily, we will experience depression less. Our self-esteem and self-confidence rises, and we are less fearful sharing at meetings. With continued practice of the Twelve Steps, the promises of this program come true for us. We even begin to realize our past experience and subsequent recovery can help others.