

## Depression

Peter Watt, Psychologist & Psychotherapist

We all get down from time to time. Relationships can throw up challenges, work life can get on top of us or grief can turn our life upside-down – there are many ways it can happen and a lot of them can lead to what looks like depression, or even turn into depression, but in themselves they aren't.

Depression is much more complex but easier to treat the earlier it is recognised. Currently, over one million people Australians are dealing with the effects of depression and, even more concerning is that suicide – the tragic end point of some depression journeys - is now the leading cause of premature death in Australia. So how come some people's challenges lead to depression? What's actually going on in a depressed person's mind and, most importantly, what can we do about it?

The most important thing to understand is that depression manifests as an extended change to mood or habits which affects that person's perception of reality. Often their external conditions have changed and the person now sees themselves as completely without freedom, with their circumstances actually deciding their outcome. In short, something changes in their lives and they see themselves as no longer in control of their situation, and their life as meaningless.

This can be the start of a downward spiral. Usually the person has a tendency to view their reality negatively through a lens of self-blame – the person becomes stuck with internal discouragement and self-criticism and eventually starts 'cooperating' with their negativity. Because their perception of reality has changed, they 'partner' with despair, which prevents them from seeing any alternatives to their current situation, even pushing away well-meaning people.

Often the depressed person finds it hard to tolerate their own natural reactions to situations, for example their anger towards someone who has done them harm. This creates unconscious anxiety, so, in an act of self-punishment, these feelings become repressed or turned inwards instead. This means that rather than react adaptively, the person remains caught in what has happened to them and are unable to find an appropriate response.

So the big question is; if depression is actually a change in perception of reality, what can you do about it?

The most important starting point is for the depressed individual to begin to see what is happening. The self is often 'swallowed up' by depression and needs to be separated from it – they need to see that they are in the midst of a negative cycle, allowing them to enlist in-built healthy strivings and recognise there are alternatives to their situation. Once this is 'on the table' they are in a position to consider how fair they have been with themselves, start to develop positive goals and, ultimately, turn against the destructive part of their mind by choosing to 'partner' with positivity, and find meaning to their life.

Particularly where the depression stems from relationship issues, the person also needs to face their true feelings towards the issue so they can put things back in their proper order. This process is self-perpetuating; dealing with their issues leads to the person freeing up energy designed for life and living, which leads to more positivity and so on.

In fact, often people emerging from depression report that they are coming out of a fog and can finally see their place in the world correctly again.

It can be disheartening if you are trying to help a depressed person, and it must be remembered that the process is primarily a personal one where the responsibility rests with the individual. For those trying to help a depressed person, simply providing another perspective can be helpful. Even if it is initially dismissed, it provides counter evidence that can be returned to in time. A hands-on approach conveying hope and offering kindness should also never be underestimated – quite often support and encouragement is key in helping a depressed person get the help they need to recover.

At the same time, it's important to recognise the limitations of dealing with a complex disorder and often unwilling object of your care, so you should never feel like it is 'too soon' to leave it in the hands of a trained professional, and perhaps consider getting some support for yourself.

There are a million Australians who could do with some help right now. If you or a loved one is suffering from depression, why not reach out for all the help that is available and let's look out for one another.

For individuals in crisis, take action by calling Lifeline on 13 11 14 or presenting to your nearest public hospital or nursing post.

<b>CRISIS SUPPORT</b>	<b>ALL HOURS</b>
RURAL LINK	1800 552 002
SUICIDE CALL BACK SERVICE	1300 659 467
LIFELINE	13 11 14
POLICE	000 or 131 444