



WHAT IS.....

DEPRESSION

What is Depression?

It is natural to feel sad or down every now and then, it is a fundamental part of being human. If, however, you have persistent or overwhelming feelings of emptiness, despair, sadness or hopelessness, coupled with disinterest in things you used to enjoy, this could be depression.

The word 'Depression' is used a lot but true depression is more than feeling a bit low and sad. Serious depression is when all enjoyment in life has gone and is usually accompanied by feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, worthlessness and great difficulty in getting through each day. Everyone's depression will be experienced differently, but there are some commonalities which can help you recognise the condition. The stronger or more overwhelming the symptoms are the greater the chance that you are experiencing depression as opposed to a normal response to life events. When depression gets really bad it may lead to someone thinking that life is not worth living and that suicide is a rational solution. Knowledge about the symptoms of depression can therefore help you recognise problems in yourself or others you work with or care about.

Why might someone be depressed?

There is no single cause of depression. It is triggered by different things in different people. Some people will have a genetic predisposition to anxiety or depression, but for many, important life events such as problematic relationships, work change and bereavement are felt to be triggers for depressive symptoms, although in reality it is usually a combination of external and internal factors. Sufferers often describe lots of things going wrong progressively, which of course adds to the symptoms of depression and unhappiness.

Our thinking and interpretation:

Very few people think about thinking. The way we think is a very important cause of depression.

Meaning:

Negative thinking and interpretations are potent ways of lowering mood. The key to whether something makes us miserable or happy is its meaning to us. Meaning is unique to each and every individual and develops from personal experience and knowledge. It is unlikely that the meaning of a single event will be the same for any two or more different people.

Unhelpful thinking styles:

It is very easy to fall into unhelpful patterns of thinking without realising it; we all do it. Frequently, these unhelpful patterns become automatic and we accept them as normal for us. But they are just habits which can be changed. The first step is recognition, which is why we need to be aware of the symptoms.

Symptoms

When you are depressed, it affects your thinking, feeling, physical health and how you relate to the world. The way you feel about yourself is also likely to change in a negative way. The following is a list of symptoms found in depression.

Emotional changes:

- Getting less pleasure from the things you usually enjoy
- Feeling irritable or impatient
- Feeling isolated and less able to relate to other people
- Decreased motivation and drive
- Lowered or loss of libido
- Feeling restless and agitated, unable to settle
- More emotional, more easily tearful
- Feeling numb
- Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness

Behaviour changes:

- Not participating in hobbies or the things you normally enjoy
- Avoiding social events and avoiding contact with friends
- Disengaging at work
- Smoking more
- Using alcohol or other drugs more than usual
- Self-harming

Changes in our thought processes:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty making decisions - indecisiveness
- Rumination and excessive worry
- Negative focus on self, others and the world
- Feeling bad about yourself (even to the point of self loathing)
- Guilty thoughts
- Suicidal ideation

Physical changes:

- Change in appetite or weight (usually decreased, but sometimes increased)
- Disturbed sleep, particularly waking up in the early hours and being unable to get back to sleep. As well as having problems getting off to sleep because of excessive worry
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Feeling tired and without energy
- Racing heart and dry mouth
- Feeling slowed down, generally in the things you do and the way you do them