

Daily Union Article
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Combating the Blues

As one of the most common mental health problems people face today, depression touches everyone's life in some way. It could be that you have a co-worker coping with depression, a friend, or even a family member. Although few of us are mental health professionals, we need to be aware of the impact depression can have on families, relationships and the work place. More importantly, we need to know how to deal with it in a healthy, respectful, and caring way.

Depression is an emotional state of feeling sad, lonely, and dejected; a state that can be either a temporary "down" mood or a lingering, debilitating, unshakable feeling that life is futile. The body communicates depression in a variety of ways. It is commonly accompanied by fatigue, headaches, and other physical symptoms. If you or someone you know is suffering from mild depression, this article is geared toward helping you cope with the daily challenges depression can cause in the home or work environment. But if you or someone you know is despondent or despairing, professional help is needed!

Not all depression is created equal. In the publication "Beating the Blues" from the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, depression is identified in the following three levels:

1. Discouragement – This is described as a mild form of depression that the majority of people experience from time to time, often referred to as "the blues."
2. Despondency – This is a more serious form of depression that may last for long periods of time. It is accompanied by a sense of apathy, sorrow, and distress and perhaps a great deal of self-pity. People with this level of depression may cry a lot. It is strongly recommended that people who struggle at this level of depression seek professional help.
3. Despair – This is the most serious level of depression. It is an ever-present part of a person's life. Any sense of joy or happiness is completely gone and a sense of total hopelessness and loneliness sets in. Those suffering from this level will likely withdraw from others and people become very passive. People who seem to be suffering from depression this severe should see a doctor or health-care professional. Their condition could be dangerous to themselves and others. Additionally, prescription drugs and treatments are available that may relieve some of their suffering and can likely help them overcome it.

Because of its prevalence, it is important to both understand and learn ways to cope with depression. More importantly, it can help us realize when we, or someone we know, need to find professional help.

Everyone feels depressed or "the blues" at times. It is an emotional reality for all of us. How do you know if you are depressed? The National Institute of Mental Health offers the following:

- *Unhappy feelings* – Feeling sad, hopeless, worthless, discouraged or listless.
- *Negative thoughts* – "I'm a failure!" "I'm no good!" "No one cares about me."

- *Reduced activity* – “I just sit around and mope.” “Doing anything is just too much effort.”
- *People problems* – “I don’t want anybody to see me.” “I feel so lonely.”
- *Guilt and low self-esteem* – “It’s all my fault.” “I should be punished.”
- *Mental agitation* – Hostility, irritability, fear, worry, and an inability to concentrate.
- *Appearance* – Sad face, slow movements, unkempt look.
- *Physical problems* – Sleeping problems, either too much or not enough; weight loss or gain; decreased sexual interest; headaches
- *Suicidal thoughts or wishes* – “I’d be better off dead.” “I wonder if it hurts to die?”

At least some of these signs will be present if you or someone you know is even mildly depressed. Keep in mind, though, that some of the same signs can accompany an illness or an injury. If you are ill or hurt, it is important to see a health-care professional to address the physical ailment while also aiding your mental well-being.

We can be intentional in making a change in our mood when we feel blue and let go of our unhappy thoughts.

You first need to determine if you really want to change. Having a mindset that you want to improve your mental health is key to a successful change.

You can also find one thing you like about yourself and focus on that positive quality. Give yourself credit for the things you are doing right. This will help counteract the negative thoughts you may have allowed yourself to begin reciting. If you are living with or working with a person who is depressed, help them self-identify their positive qualities. Ask them to help you with projects that play to their strengths and encourages them to move forward with their life.

Rekindling a hobby that you enjoy is another helpful tool. Perhaps you have a friend that you enjoy spending time with. Ask them to take walks with you or to go out for a meal together.

Make yourself a “sunshine” file or folder. It is almost certain that at some time in your life, people have said they like something about you. Jot down that positive comment on a piece of paper and add that to your file or folder. If you have a co-worker struggling with depression, give them a thank you card for the work they do. You can then suggest they start their own “sunshine” file.

Life is too short to be unhappy, and the good news is that we don’t have to live this way. Find ways to brighten your own life or to be a bright spot in someone else’s. For more information about health and wellness, contact me at the Geary County Extension office 238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!