



Overcoming Depression

Using a Personal Growth Model

by Phil Golding



Some symptoms that are common to sufferers of depression:

- All-pervading feeling of hopelessness.
- Frequent negative thinking.
- Feelings of emptiness.
- Loss of energy.
- Feeling heavy and lethargic.
- Loss of motivation.
- Joylessness.
- Tendency toward isolation.
- Feeling trapped, stuck, blocked in all directions.
- Can be moody and irritable

Causes of Depression

Some Typical Scenarios

Depression has a number of causes. Most commonly, depression occurs when we are cut off from our important sources of fulfilment, and usually without being aware of it, we place a meaning on this situation that devalues oneself. The sources of fulfilment can be different for everybody, but they all point to our need of feeling loved and worthy. Some examples are:

A woman loses her husband to disease or accident. She may have devoted her life to caring for him. Her identity and worth as a person over the years has become closely linked with this role. Now that he is gone she is at a loss to know how to define herself and find meaning in life. A similar scenario is when the children leave home. She struggles to define herself beyond her role as a mother. Another situation is finding herself in a life of responsibilities – work, children, endless chores – and a husband who she hardly connects to because he is always

at work or when at home is asleep in front of the TV. When she tries to talk about it they only seem to argue.

A man has worked long and hard all his married life to build the material dream for his wife and children. He has successfully established himself and his family in a good house in a good suburb, only to find his marriage has fallen apart. He has devoted so much of himself to his work, he is now at a loss to know how to save his marriage. All that he worked for has gone, along with his meaning in life.

A man in his mid forties, who has worked happily for many years in the one job may find himself suddenly made redundant due to technological changes perhaps. His skills, once important, may now not be sort after and his age makes it doubly difficult to find work. His job loss may come at a time when he was starting to build up resources for retirement and support his children with their higher education. All this is now put into jeopardy. His identity and self-worth as a man and provider is now shattered and he struggles to find a way out.

A young man may have suffered a difficult childhood due to a break down in his parent's marriage or a lack of connection with his parents due to their



personal struggles. He may have been unavoidably caught up in their emotional difficulties. As a result, self-worth issues are a problem right from the start, which affects his performance at school. He starts feeling marginalized from the mainstream and drops

out of school. He doesn't feel confident in himself to catch up on his education and he is too out of touch with himself to know what he wants to do. He has lost too much trust in people to reach out for help. He feels deprived from the “good” things in life that “normal” people take for granted.

A young woman has suffered in childhood due to having preoccupied or overbearing parents who she can't emotionally connect to. At one point in her childhood she is sexually abused by someone close to the family. She feels she has no one she can reach out to. The experience is buried in her mind and forgotten about, but her feelings of abandonment, shame and worthlessness pervade her mind. By the time she reaches young adulthood she is caught up in self-abuse and destructive relationships. She knows she keeps harming herself but she doesn't know why and she can't seem to stop herself.

When we are suffering depression, our motivation to help ourselves, and our ability to think positively and constructively, can be severely depleted. Ultimately, self-worth and feeling loved, which is really the same thing, is the

determining factor, although not everyone with difficulties around self-worth will suffer from depression.

Treatments for Depression

Treating Depression using anti-depressant drugs

A common reason given for depression is that we suffer from a “chemical imbalance in the brain”, and the treatment given is usually mood-altering drugs. I find this diagnosis and treatment from this basis very problematic. Despite our many advances in medical science, our knowledge of the brain is still rudimentary at best. Despite what we assume, diagnoses of this nature are not backed up by hard conclusive evidence. For instance: the question; “Does a chemical imbalance in the brain cause depression or does depression cause the chemical imbalance in the brain?” has not been properly researched. This is just one of many questions on this matter. The brain's chemical balance is changing all the time and we are a long way from knowing conclusively what this means.

What the evidence does show is that anti-depressant drug treatment can be helpful in the short-term for some severe forms of depression, but in all other cases it is no better to far less effective than psychotherapy. Drug treatment is best used as a short-term solution while other forms of treatment are sort. Using it as the only treatment is problematic for such reasons as:

- It is too often used as a quick fix to a complex problem.
- There are frequent adverse physical side-effects such as weight gain and memory and cognitive impairment.
- Some of the medications can be highly addictive.
- If drugs are used as the sole treatment, there is little motivation to gain the self-awareness and life-skills that will enable the individual to grow to permanently overcome depression through their own personal resources.
- Mood-altering drugs reduce our ability to fully function, mentally, emotionally, and physically.

Physical exercise is also used to combat depression. This has also proven to have a positive effect, as does any positive activity, but when it comes to fully overcoming depression in the long-term, it is only part of the solution.



Counselling and Therapy

Depression is predominantly a mind problem. The mind is something that needs looking after, just like our body, and we all have the ability to do this.

Everyone gets confused and has emotional issues.

We can all benefit from a greater awareness of how to look after own mind. Suffering depression is an opportunity to recognize that our mind is in need of some tender loving care. Reaching out for help from a counsellor/therapist is an essential part of learning how to care for your mind. In my experience, depression is more effectively treated if the counselling uses a treatment program.



The main features of such a treatment program could be:

- 1. One-to-one counselling and therapy.**
- 2. Group therapy.**

1. One-to-one Counselling and Therapy.

Where depression is concerned, there needs to be a commitment to long-term counselling. This may not be needed, but such a commitment should be taken seriously if we expect to get sustainable results, because depression points to the need for some fundamental shifts in the way we regard ourselves. We need to reprogram our mind in some important ways so that our self-esteem is no longer in danger, regardless of life's circumstances and conditions. Serious emotional imbalances such as depression rarely respond to “quick-fix” treatments. There may be some quick results, but the relief is often temporary because the treatment did not reach the required depth.

Often we have an expectation that the “cure” should be quick and assume the treatment is not working if it isn't. Because of this our doubts and anxiety caused by the depression's persistence may interfere with the therapy. As a result, we may jump from one treatment to another without giving any of them the required time and commitment needed for them to work, or worse still, we may just lose hope and give up.

In fact, your commitment and persistence with a particular therapy is as important as the therapy itself. After all, it is your mind and body. Your attitudes/beliefs/conditioning belong to you. In our Australian culture we have an unhealthy tendency to not reach out for help because we feel shamed if we do, as though we have failed in some way because we can't do it alone. When

we finally do reach out, we expect the therapist to do all the work. The “expert” can't be with us 24 hours a day.

Counselling is most effective when counsellor and client come together as a team, to work together on moving you, the client, through your emotional low and back functioning the way you want to be, equipped with the life-skills to keep you moving forward.

Just having someone to talk to, who is detached but caring, accepting, and objective is therapy in itself. However, depression also needs a pro-active approach if it is going to be overcome for good. Therefore, an active strategy to tackle your negative thought patterns and clear your stuck emotions is important. Such a strategy enables you to gain awareness of these thought patterns and then learn how to replace them with ones that work for you. This gives you the life-skills to grow beyond depression and to better deal with life in general. With the right approach, a personal challenge such as depression can be turned to your advantage. Such a strategy is often called a “process”. I use what is called a Five Step process.

2. Group therapy.

Group therapy is another important tool in our personal growth kit bag. Such self-awareness/self-care groups are generally formed to personally share about issues in our lives, such as depression. The benefits of attending such as group are many. For a start, we discover that we are not alone in our problem and that many other people feel just like us. This helps to break down the barriers of isolation that we commonly share as sufferers of depression and other emotional issues. Isolation is one of our greatest dangers.



Finding a personal sharing group to participate in enables us to be in a group of like-minded people who are making the effort to accept themselves and one another.

This is good depression busting work. However, such a group needs to do more than just talking about the problem. It also needs to focus on the solution. Therefore, including a strategy such as the Five Step Process adds healing power to the group, and gives the members more opportunity to learn to put these principles into practice in their lives. As we progress in the group, we learn from one another as each person grows in understanding. Therefore, group members are able to grow quicker by regularly attending such a group and being a part of such a supportive community.

Attending such a group is also a cost-effective way of re-enforcing and expanding on what is gained from personal counselling. The members of such a group help each other stay positive, and long-lasting personal friendships often result. I run a weekly self-awareness group for this purpose that can be joined at any time. Once a solid personal growth is established, my clients often use the group to maintain their wellbeing.



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