

Five Lessons I Learned From Dealing with Depression



Depression is a hard topic to talk about. It's an even harder thing to live through. I've lived with depression for more than two decades. After a while, there were a few things I learned about how to get by without giving up.

I want to start off with a disclaimer: these are my personal experiences. I am not a doctor, nor am I qualified to diagnose or treat any given stranger. I've learned as much as I can about my own situation as well as how depression works in general, but always seek out professional counsel for your personal situation. That being said, here are some things that helped me. And if you're on the other side of the fence and want to help a friend who seems depressed, our guide here can help with that.

Your Self-Perceptions Are Frequently Wrong

The central problem with depression is that it distorts your reality. Not only do things you normally enjoy seem less fun, but you have a hard time seeing the good aspects of yourself. Depression tends to latch on to and cycle through negative thoughts over and over again until you become convinced that the worst must be true.

"I'll never get out of this rut."

"I'm worthless."

"No one really cares."

"I'm not good at anything."

"There's no reason to keep going."

The voice that says to give up is a strong one. It's difficult to challenge those beliefs—not only because they feel true, but because you might even be in a situation where they seem true. The key thing to remember is that perception doesn't equal reality.

Set aside depression for a moment. Even among successful people who don't suffer from depression, the disconnect between perception and reality is relatively common. To use an example we've discussed before, imposter syndrome occurs when you feel like everyone around you is more talented and successful, while you're just faking. It also occurs no matter what level of success a person achieves. This is just one of many tricks your brain plays on you.

The problem is that depression takes away a lot of the motivation you need to fight these inconsistencies. Someone who doesn't suffer from depression may feel like a fake, but remind themselves that it's all in their head and everyone else feels the same way. A person with depression, by definition, has a hard time doing this. In my personal experience, I found that even when circumstances changed and I had evidence to the contrary, I still believed the worst about myself simply because that was what my brain did. It didn't matter how much external validation I got.

It's a hard fact to keep in mind. Depression says that you're different and no, really, you're the exception to the rule. For this reason, it's so very important during those high(-ish) moments to remember that just because you think something about yourself doesn't mean it's true.

How You Feel Is Completely Valid



Given the above situation, it's understandable that the natural reaction would be to tell someone suffering from depression that how they feel is irrelevant and to disregard their emotions. After all, you're not really a loser, right? So buck up! Get your happy face on. You don't have a factual argument for why you should be sad, ergo the sadness should obviously disappear, right?

Except that's not how it works. Your emotions (and everyone else's for that matter) are not inherently bound to facts. Even if you know intellectually that you have valuable traits, a promising future, or a pretty good present life, that doesn't guarantee you feel good about it. That's the whole point. Depression isn't about having perfectly justified sadness. It's about being unhappy despite your circumstances.¹

How you feel with depression is valid. You don't have to justify your feelings or defend them. As long as your actions don't harm yourself or others, you can feel whatever you need to feel. Everyone feels things that aren't perfectly reflective of their situation. Suffering from depression doesn't mean you're in a special category where you and you alone aren't allowed to feel certain things. It just means you need to deal with your emotions in a different way. Where others might be able to instinctively separate feelings from reality, you need a few extra steps, and maybe some help.

You Need Other People



Depression is isolating. It actively undermines your relationships and encourages you to break down connections by telling you that people don't care, they don't understand, and you don't need them. The truth is, you do. Because depression makes it difficult to accurately assess your situation, other people's input becomes more important.

The scariest part about depression is that it's in your head. With a cold, you can point to the part of the body that's afflicted. With depression, you can't always know which feelings are based in reality and which are over-reactions. Talking with other people is one of the most important ways you can learn to distinguish between the two.

Talking with other people about your depression is uncomfortable. Some people with it may be lucky enough to have trusted friends who are willing to listen and who understand. Others may not be so fortunate. If you don't have a friend you can talk to (or if they're unable to provide the listening you need), there are always avenues you can explore to find some help. More importantly, there's nothing wrong with doing so.

It's Okay to Seek Help

There's a tendency to believe that suffering from depression means you're flawed. We're bombarded with news stories and statistics that tell us how fundamentally any mental illness makes us broken (like "Depression causes suicide" or "Autism causes mass murders"). But the reality isn't so simple. And depression doesn't mean you're broken.

Depression is a maladjustment. The way we react to emotions when we're depressed isn't calibrated the same way as other people. It becomes habit to be negative and it's difficult to learn the proper way to react or how to feel certain positive emotions. That doesn't mean you can't. You're not missing a happy gland. You're just out of alignment.

Seeking help for depression is no different than going to a doctor for a cold, a sprained wrist, or even just a check up. We all need to check in on our physical health once in a while. It should be just as natural that we consult experts on our mental health. There's no shame in it and no reasonable person should make you feel bad for wanting to get help. Not only that, but help can work.

It Doesn't Always Have to Be Like This

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3yqXeLJ0Kg> لینک ویدئو :

Depression doesn't have a "cure." Unlike a cold, or chicken pox, or even cancer, there's not a thing you can point to in the body and say "Once this is gone, you're all better!" Depression is in your mind. Depression is, in some ways, part of your personality. Even if you stop being depressed, how it felt shapes who you are. You can't necessarily be entirely separated from it.

You can feel different, though. We've touched on the subject of neuroplasticity before, but the basic idea is that the brain is capable of changing. The way we behave, the habits we form, and even the environments we expose ourselves to can affect how we think. As recently as the mid-20th century, it was commonly believed among neuroscientists that the brain doesn't change after childhood. That notion is no longer accepted fact.

Neuroplasticity, aside from having a broad range of scientific impacts, means that the habits and brain patterns you have now don't have to stay the same forever. It's not an easy process to change. It may take a lifetime of adjusting. You may adapt and deal with it, but keep the ghost hanging out in the back of your mind. Everyone's different and there's no perfect solution that everyone experiences the same way.

It does mean, however, that when your friends tell you there's hope, they're not wrong. Even if you've been miserable for years (which more than aptly describes my personal story), there's a chance, so long as you don't give up, that you can adjust. There's a chance that things can get better. And when you're fighting depression, that sliver of hope may just be the difference between life and death.