

Some days are great, while some...well, they just aren't. It's part of life. School, work and relationships can put a lot of pressure on you and you can feel tired, isolated or simply not up to it. This is normal and there are various ways to deal with it – spend time with friends, go to parties, watch TV or just relax.

But for some people, the feeling that “I can't cope!” just doesn't seem to go away. No matter how hard they try, they can't shake the feeling that they're overwhelmed by life and everything in it. If you've felt like this; if the feelings are there for more than 2 weeks; and if they affect your ability to function, you could be depressed.

1. What Is Depression?

Depression can result from a chemical imbalance in the brain, poor general health or substance abuse. It's a 'whole-body' illness - involving mood, mind, body and behaviour. It's not the same as a passing case of the blues or a bad mood. People with depression can't just 'pull themselves together'. Depression is a serious illness!

What Can I Do?

Many people deal with depression without ever getting help. They think their condition is unique; that no-one will understand it. And because ups and downs are common in adolescence, moodiness is often considered a normal part of growing up. But clinical depression is serious - affecting 5 in every 100 teenagers.

Luckily, it's treatable. Treatment can come in the form of medication, counselling (talk therapy) or a combination of the two. With appropriate treatment, 80-90% of cases can be effectively handled. A visit to your doctor or healthcare provider is usually the best place to start and the next step may be to a psychiatrist, psychologist or social worker.

For support or information, phone The South African Depression and Anxiety Group on (011) 783 1474

Certain symptoms (signs) can indicate that you - or someone you know - is depressed:

- Sad, anxious or 'empty' moods
- Hopelessness or pessimism
- Guilt, worthlessness or helplessness
- Loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyed
- Feeling isolated or alone - even with friends or family
- Insomnia, early-morning awakening or oversleeping
- Appetite and weight loss/weight gain
- Decreased energy or fatigue
- Restlessness and irritability
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Thoughts of death or suicide and/or suicide attempts
- Persistent physical symptoms like headaches, digestive disorders or chronic pain

**Not everyone experiences every symptom. Some people experience a few; others many.
The severity (harshness) of symptoms also varies from person to person.**

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Depression isn't an indication of personal weakness or a sign that you've failed in some way. It's an illness that must be taken seriously. It can be treated!

2. What Is Suicide?

Suicide is the act of killing oneself. Some suicides occur without warning but most don't, so the most effective way to prevent suicide is to recognise the signs of someone at risk, take them seriously and respond to them.

NOTE Risk Factors:

- Previous suicide attempts: Many people who kill themselves have previously attempted suicide. Those who 'cry for help' are at much greater risk of actually taking their lives.
- Talking about death or suicide: People who commit suicide often talk about it directly or indirectly. Be alert to statements like, "My family would be better off without me". Sometimes those contemplating suicide talk or act as if they're saying goodbye or going away.
- Depression: Although most depressed people aren't suicidal, most suicidal people are depressed. Depression can result from the death or terminal illness of a relative or friend; a broken relationship; family stress or trauma; loss of health (real or imagined); or loss of a job, home, money, self-esteem or personal security.
- Alcohol or drug abuse: Drinking, drug use or both may reduce inhibitions and harm the judgment of someone contemplating suicide - making the act

What Can I Do?

If you think a friend or family member may be suicidal:

- Begin a dialogue. Ask, "Are you thinking about suicide?" If you ask a despairing person this question, you're showing them that you care, that you take them seriously and that you're willing to let them share their pain with you. If the person is having thoughts of suicide, find out how far along the idea has progressed. Ask, "Do you know what you would use?"
- Don't try to minimise problems or shame a person into changing his/her mind. You can't assume that because you feel something isn't worth being suicidal about, the other person feels the same way. It's not how bad the problem is, but how badly it's hurting the person who has it. Assure the person that suicidal feelings are temporary: depression can be treated and problems can be solved.
- Never keep a plan for suicide a secret. Don't worry about endangering a relationship if a life is in danger. It's better to regret something you did than something you didn't do to help a friend!
- Act sooner rather than later. Unfortunately, suicidal people are afraid that trying to get help may bring more pain: being told that they're stupid, sinful or manipulative; rejection; punishment; suspension from school or work; written records of their condition; or involuntary commitment. So do everything you can to reduce their pain. Constructively involve yourself on the side of life to reduce the risk of suicide.
- Acknowledge the pain as legitimate and offer to work together to get help. Make sure you follow through! Look for professional help, participate in the first phone call or go along to the first appointment. Don't assume that your involvement is unwanted or intrusive.
- If the person is acutely (severely) suicidal, don't leave him or her alone. If the means to commit suicide are present (a gun, sleeping tablets), try to get rid of them!

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If you're feeling suicidal:

If you're reading this, perhaps you're a tiny bit unsure about whether or not to end your life. People often feel that way - even in the deepest, darkest despair. And it's okay and normal. It means that even while you may want to die, some part of you still wants to live. So let's hang on to that and keep going.

Start by considering the fact that "...suicide is not chosen; it happens when pain exceeds resources for coping with pain..."

That's what it's about. You're not bad or crazy or weak or flawed because you feel suicidal. It doesn't even mean that you really want to die - it only means that you have more pain than you can cope with right now. If someone starts piling weights on your shoulders, you'll eventually collapse - no matter how much you want to remain standing. Willpower has nothing to do with it. Of course you would cheer yourself up if you could.

So when pain exceeds pain-coping resources, suicidal feelings are the result. But you can survive suicidal feelings if you do one of two things:

- 1) find a way to reduce your pain or
- 2) find a way to increase your coping resources. Both are possible.

To Start With, Think About These 5 Things

1. People do get through this, even people who feel as bad as you're feeling now. Statistically, there's a very good chance that you're going to live.
2. Give yourself some distance. Say to yourself, "I'll wait 24 hours (or a week) before I do anything". Remember that feelings and actions are two different things - just because you feel like killing yourself, doesn't mean you have to actually do it right this minute. Put some distance between your suicidal feelings and suicidal action.
3. People often turn to suicide because they're seeking relief from pain. Remember that relief is a feeling. You have to be alive to feel it. You won't feel the relief you crave if you're dead.
4. Some people will react badly to your suicidal feelings, because they're frightened or angry. They may increase your pain by saying or doing thoughtless things. Understand that their reactions are about their fears, not about you. And remember that there are people out there who can help you. They won't judge you, argue with you, send you to a hospital or try to talk you out of how badly you feel. They'll just care for you. Find one of them. Now. Use your 24 hours or your week to tell someone what's going on.
5. Suicidal feelings are traumatic. After they pass, you'll need to continue caring for yourself. Therapy is a really good idea. So are the various self-help groups available in your community and on the Internet.

Now, phone someone. The South African Depression and Anxiety Group Suicide Crisis Line: 0800 567 567
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We know that death is part of life. It can even give meaning to our existence by reminding us how precious life is. But the death of a loved one is life's most stressful event and it can cause a major emotional crisis.

After the death of a loved one, you experience bereavement which means 'being deprived by death'. You may go through a wide range of emotions - even when the death was expected:

You may not be prepared for the intensity and duration of your emotions or how swiftly your moods will change. You may even begin to doubt your mental health. But be assured that these feelings are normal, healthy and appropriate. They'll help you come to terms with your loss.

Remember, it takes time to absorb a major loss. You never stop missing your loved one, but the pain softens and this allows you to get on with your life.

Mourning is the natural process you go through to accept a loss. It may include religious traditions to honour the dead or gatherings with family and friends. Either way, mourning is a very personal process and can last months or years – it's up to you!

Grieving is the outward expression of your loss and it's likely to be expressed physically, emotionally and psychologically. Crying is a physical expression; depression is psychological. The best thing you can do is allow yourself to grieve!

At The Same Time

- Seek out caring people, relatives or friends, who understand what you're going through. Join support groups with others experiencing similar losses.
- Talk about how you're feeling. It'll help you to work through the grieving process.
- Look after your health. Eat well and get enough rest. Beware of developing a dependence on medication or alcohol to deal with your grief.
- Accept that life is for the living. It takes effort not to dwell on the past.
- Plan special things for anniversaries, birthdays or holidays which may be stressful reminders of your loss.
- Seek professional help when necessary. It's a sign of strength, not weakness, to ask for help.

Over time, the intensity of your grief will lessen. This isn't a bad thing. Just because you're moving on with your life doesn't mean you've forgotten about your loved one or that they weren't important. Enjoying life again doesn't make you disloyal to the person who died.

LifeLine 24-hour Crisis No.: 0861 322 322

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