

Relationship Advice - What If You Live With A Depressed Partner?

I was apparently born mildly depressed. I've always known low energy and a very low amount of enthusiasm. I'm 53 years old and I only beat depression for good two years ago.

What a long time for my wife to live with someone depressed! In the beginning, we didn't know any better. The critical sullenness that became more prevalent over the years was tempered with hope that the next job, or the next move, or even the next TV show would shake me out of it.

How I regret that she had to put up with my mood all those years!

What about your relationship? Is there hidden depression? Is it out in the open? Now is the time to face it. Let's not put it off any longer.

We're not talking here about situational depression, that some call a case of having the "blues." Situational depression comes, but then it goes. Right now we're talking about the real thing that hangs on and on. The person's mood is chronically low, self esteem suffers, and there is a pervasive negativity.

It may be "Major Depression" which is the big deal, or more likely, it may just be like mine: a chronic inability to take joy out of life, while otherwise being able to function just fine.

I always looked for distractions. Television was a common avoidance mechanism. Sugar was a payoff for feeling "low." Caffeine was the stimulant of choice. And, my relationship with my wife was more often a "should do" rather than a "want to" or a "get to."

What about you or your partner? Are there too many distractions? Are there things that get too much attention while your relationship suffers? Are there any addictions starting to show: alcohol, drugs, over-eating, over-working, or over-something?

There are many things that can cause some of these problems other than depression, but if you suspect depression, mild or severe, consider these things:

1. Talk it over with your doctor, minister, or counselor. You may need more than one opinion. Mild depression is so normal that some professionals will just dismiss it. It's fine to feel good about quick assurances, but it is also OK to seek a second opinion.
2. Increase your exercise routine as a couple. Exercise releases those feel good chemicals called endorphins and elevates mood. It's also a positive activity to do together that builds positive expectations for being together.
3. Increase your social activities as a couple (unless this is already one of those excessive things.) Depression normally leads to some degree of isolation. Being with people also elevates mood by producing those endorphins. (Hugs do, too, so hug a lot!)
4. If the doctor suggests anti-depressant medication, definitely consider it. I first tried such medication around the age of 40. While my results were quite dramatic and out of the norm, it was as though I could see in color for the first time in my life! I suddenly knew what I'd been missing all those years, as well as, what my wife had been missing in me!
5. Buy an inexpensive copy of "Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy" by Dr. David Burns, along with the companion workbook.

This "new" mood therapy isn't so new, since I've been recommending this book for the last 15 years, but it is still the most user-friendly cognitive therapy you can find for depression. It is simple to use, but still a sophisticated approach.

6. Encourage "positive anticipation." This means to look forward to things. We now know that this simple mental exercise causes the brain to secrete more dopamine, a neurotransmitter essential for a better mood.

This mechanism is what really changed my life two years ago. I learned that I can control my mood simply by looking forward to what is before me.

For instance, I might consciously look forward to the experience of writing this newsletter for you. I can enjoy the possibility that a percentage of readers will be helped. I might anticipate my first client of the day and feel some level of joy that I get to see that person again. And, I will remind

myself to look forward with positive expectancy to seeing my wife this evening.

All these conscious choices of "how to be" will add dopamine to my system and will make me feel very good.

Sometimes, just these simple steps will do what you need, but at times it is far more complex. That's why we have professionals to help us out. So, make use of them! I regret the 15 years of married life that could have been so much better if only I knew of the treatment options. I don't want you to have a similar experience!

Depression? Take care of it now. It is so possible to feel good again. I know.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

About the Author

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