

Mental Health:

“That’s the thing about depression: a human being can survive almost anything, as long as she sees the end in sight. But depression is so insidious, and it compounds daily, that it’s impossible to ever see the end. The fog is like a cage without a key.” – Elizabeth Wurtzel

By Liggy Webb

Mental health properly describes a sense of well-being, the capacity to live in a resourceful and fulfilling way and having the resilience to deal with the challenges and obstacles which life presents. Mental health problems or difficulties are terms that can be used to describe temporary reactions to a painful event, stress or external pressures, or systems of drug or alcohol use, lack of sleep or physical illness; this terminology may also be used to describe long-term psychiatric conditions which may have significant effects on an individual's ability to function.

Some of the more common mental health issues include anxiety, depression, mania, paranoia, schizophrenia, eating disorders and obsessive compulsive disorders.

On 9th October 2008, The World Health Organization launched its action programme, the mental health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP), in Geneva, aiming to scale up services for mental, neurological and substance use disorders.

“Depression is now set to emerge as the second biggest global health concern after cardiovascular disease by 2020 and one in four people will be affected by this at least once in their lives.”

This means that all of us in one way will be directly or indirectly affected.

Currently there is no blood test or brain scan to identify depression so, unlike other physical ailments, its lack of transparency makes it so much more difficult for everyone to deal with. Doctors have to make a diagnosis based on the severity of the patients symptoms; loved ones try to be as supportive as they can whilst feeling frustrated and inadequate; and, for the individual who is suffering with nothing tangible to show, they are left feeling like the invisible patient.

Many factors are involved in depression, which makes it all the more challenging and complex to cope with. A range of factors can be attributed to the illness including genetics, personality traits, attitude, diet, life styles and life events.

It is, however, now a recognised medical fact that depression is usually the result of low levels of the neurotransmitters serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine – these are all responsible for feelings such as enthusiasm, happiness and gratification.

It is also likely that any abnormalities in various parts of our brain such as the cerebral cortex, hypothalamus and pituitary glands can be responsible for negative thoughts and feelings. Depression shows itself in many different ways. People don't always realise what's going on because their problems seem to be physical, not mental. They tell themselves they're simply under the weather or feeling tired.

*“It’s snowing still,” said Eeyore gloomily.
“So it is.”
“And freezing.”
“Is it?”
“Yes,” said Eeyore.
“However,” he said, brightening up a little, “we haven’t had an earthquake lately.”*

A. A. Milne
From the book Winnie the Pooh

The very nature of depression, which brings a sense of helplessness and worthlessness, can prevent someone who is depressed from seeking help. They often withdraw from friends and relatives around them, rather than asking for help or support. However, this is a time when they need your help and support most. Perhaps the most important thing that you can do is to encourage your friend or relative to seek appropriate treatment.

Try not to blame them for being depressed, or tell them to “pull themselves together”. They are probably already blaming themselves, and criticism is likely to make them feel even more depressed. Praise is much more effective than criticism. You can reassure them that it is possible to do something to improve their situation, but you need to do so in a caring and sympathetic way.

Supporting a friend or relative who is depressed can be an opportunity to build a closer and more satisfying relationship. However, it can also be hard work and frustrating, at times.



Unless you pay attention to your own needs, it can make you feel depressed, too. Try and share the responsibility with as many people as possible, and find people to whom you can express your frustrations. There may be a local support group of others in your situation.

N.B. *It is really important that you talk to your GP or another healthcare professional about getting help for yourself and your family.*

Mental Health – Useful Tips

- Wake up with an attitude of gratitude and focus on the positives.
- Get up half an hour earlier than you would and go for a brisk walk!
- Investigate CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy)
- Use positive visualisation techniques.
- Reduce alcohol - it is a depressive
- Build in relaxation and meditative exercises
- Exercise 30 minutes every day – this is as good as a mild anti-depressant.
- Take a Vitamin B Complex – this is great for the nervous system.
- Keep a thought diary – offload how you feel constructively before you sleep
- Remember – you are not alone & try to keep a balanced perspective

Life is what YOU make it!

The above article is an extract from *The Happy Handbook - A Compendium of Modern Life Skills*



by Liggy Webb which is out now.

Liggy Webb is widely respected as a leading expert in the field of *Modern Life Skills and Workplace Wellness*.

As a presenter, consultant and author she is passionate about her work and improving the quality of people's lives. She is the founding director of The Learning Architect a consortium of niche industry experts. Liggy has developed a range of techniques to support individuals and organizations to cope more effectively with modern living and the demands and challenges of life in the twenty tens and beyond.

As a consultant with the United Nations she travels expensively and has recently returned from Afghanistan which she describes as biggest life education to date!

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