

Depression: A Family Affair

Stephen R. Swallow, Ph.D., C. Psych.
Oakville Centre for Cognitive Therapy



Overview

- ∅ What is depression?
- ∅ What are the signs that a family member may be suffering from depression?
- ∅ How are families affected when a loved one is depressed?
- ∅ How can family members help a loved one with depression?



What is depression?

- } Depression is a serious form of mental illness that produces significant changes in the way a person feels, thinks and behaves.
- } Depressed individuals experience persistent and extreme feelings of sadness, apathy, guilt, worthlessness and hopelessness
- } Depressed people tend to think very negatively
- } Depressed individuals tend to lose interest in life, shut down, avoid, withdraw, disengage



What are the signs of depression?

- } Depression is not always easy to detect
- } People with depression may not understand the symptoms they are experiencing and attempt to hide them out of shame or fear
- } People can afflict anyone—even those with no “reason” to be depressed



What are the signs of depression?

(cont'd)

Emotional signs:

- } Loss of interest in normal activities
- } Feeling sad, down, "blue"
- } Feeling hopeless
- } Crying spells for no apparent reason
- } Feelings of irritability, easily annoyed
- } Feelings of worthlessness



What are the signs of depression?

(cont'd)

Physical signs:

- } Problems with sleeping (or oversleeping)
- } Unintentional weight gain or loss
- } Restlessness, agitation
- } Feelings of fatigue, weakness
- } Loss of interest in sex
- } Unexplained physical symptoms (e.g., back pain, headaches, stomach aches)



What are the signs of depression?

(cont'd)

Cognitive signs:

- } Memory problems
- } Difficulty concentrating or focusing
- } Difficulty making decisions
- } Recurrent thoughts of death, dying—or even of suicide



What are the signs of depression?

(cont'd)

Behavioural signs:

- } Deteriorating self-care, hygiene, etc.
- } Avoidance and procrastination
- } Deteriorating attendance or performance at work/school
- } Staying in bed



What are the signs of depression?

(cont'd)

Social signs:

- } Withdrawal or disengagement from usual social activities—becoming isolated
- } Shyness, sullenness, anger in interactions with others
- } Loss of assertiveness



How does depression affect families?

- ∅ Disruption/reconfiguration of normal roles, routines and responsibilities
- ∅ Confusion and bewilderment about changes in person's mood and behaviour
- ∅ Tendency to look for "ordinary" explanations for what is wrong
- ∅ Frustration and impatience with person's refusal to "cheer up" or take responsibility



How does depression affect families? (cont'd)

- ∅ Uncertainty about what should be done to help
- ∅ Fear about asking for help due to stigma
- } Sense of loss and sadness at the magnitude of the change
- } Anxiety about the future



How does depression affect families? (cont'd)

- } Anger at the apparent unfairness of the situation
- } Self-blame, guilt, remorse for failure to help
- } Increased levels of stress
- } Social isolation
- } Hopelessness
- } Depression



How can families help?

#1: Understand depression

- } Read books/pamphlets about depression
- } Talk to other people who have been treated for and recovered from depression—or who have helped others deal with depression
- } Talk to a mental health professional about depression



How can families help? (cont'd)

#2: Encourage prompt treatment

- } Describe what you have observed and why you are concerned
- } Suggest an appointment with a family doctor or mental health specialist
- } Take to appointments and encourage them to follow through on all treatments




How can families help? (cont'd)

#3: Offer support

- } Listen—let them know you want to understand how they feel—never disparage feelings, avoid giving advice
- } Give positive reinforcement—express love, remind of strengths
- } Learn to respond—don't react



How can families help? (cont'd)

- } Encourage regular routines, schedules and an organized environment in order to minimize stress
 - } Plan activities together—be persistent but don't push
 - } Try not to take it personally (i.e., anger, disengagement, loss of interest in sex, etc.)
- 

How can families help? (cont'd)

- } Develop a “What Works” list and a “What Doesn’t Work” list that is individually tailored to the specific needs of you and your depressed loved one



How can families help? (cont'd)

My "What Works" list:

"When my loved one starts to get depressed..."


- } *I can exercise with him*
- } *I can respond rather than react*
- } *I can plan something we can do together*
- } *I can help him to remember to take his meds*
- } *I can remind myself not to take it personally*
- } *I can take him to church with me*



How can families help? (cont'd)

My “What Doesn’t Work” list

“When my loved one is depressed it won’t work to...”

- } *React to what he says*
 - } *Tell him what to do—and get frustrated and angry when he doesn’t do it*
 - } *Try to cheer him up by telling him how much he has to be grateful for*
 - } *Always believe what he says—and take what he says personally*
- 

How can families help? (cont'd)

#4: Be aware of danger signs

- } Depressed individuals are at increased risk for suicide
- } It's okay to talk about feelings of suicide—be as direct and blunt as possible—people experience this as a relief not a threat
- } Ask if they have a plan



How can families help? (cont'd)

What are the danger signs?

- } Talking about suicide
- } Being preoccupied with death
- } Obtaining means to commit suicide
- } Withdrawing from social contact
- } Dramatic mood swings
- } Increased use of alcohol or drugs



How can families help? (cont'd)

- } Changing normal routines
- } Engaging in risky or self-destructive behaviour
- } Giving away belongings or getting affairs in order
- } Saying good-bye to people
- } Marked personality changes (e.g., becoming extremely cheerful after being very down)



How can families help? (cont'd)

- } Know the resources at your disposal (e.g., 911, local emergency department, the person's mental health specialist, their pastor, suicide crisis hot-line, etc.)
- } Don't leave a suicidal person alone



How can families help? (cont'd)

#5: Take care of yourself

- } Open up to friends and family—develop a support group
- } Cultivate “depression-free” relationships
- } Protect your own mental, physical and spiritual health
- } Maintain appropriate boundaries



How can families help? (cont'd)

#6: Impart hope

- } There is hope rooted in clinical science
- } A number of highly effective treatments have been developed and empirically validated (i.e., antidepressant medication, cognitive behaviour therapy, interpersonal psychotherapy, ECT, etc.)
- } With proper treatment, 80–85% of depression sufferers fully recover to lead normal lives



How can families help? (cont'd)

- } There is also hope rooted in faith...
- } Faith in God
- } Faith in the promises God has made to his people



How can families help? (cont'd)

- } The Bible reveals a God who is...
- } Good
- } Loving
- } Just
- } Merciful
- } Gracious
- } All-knowing and all-powerful



How can families help? (cont'd)

- } The Bible reveals a God who promises...
- } To be with us, to walk with us, to comfort us in times of darkness and pain (Ps. 23)
- } To give us hope and a future (Jer. 29:11)
- } To strengthen, to heal, to save (Isa. 35:3-7)
- } To never leave us (Rom 8: 35-39; Mat. 28:20)



How can families help? (cont'd)

- } The Bible also tells us how we may access the wonderful promises of God...
- } We access the promises of God through a relationship with his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:18; 2 Cor. 1:20)
- } Christ himself is our hope (Col. 1:27; 1 Tim. 1:1)



How can families help? (cont'd)

- } Lead your loved ones to Christ—the ultimate source of hope...for this life and the life to come



Contact Information

Trinity Baptist Church

4372 Appleby Line

Burlington ON

www.trinity-baptist-church.com

Dr. Stephen R. Swallow

Oakville Centre for Cognitive Therapy

1235 Trafalgar Road, Suite 405

Oakville ON L6H 3P1 (905) 338-1397

sswallow@oakvillecvt.ca

