

Getting Help for Depression

Transcript

Host: Welcome to this podcast. I'm Marianne Jacobbi. Our topic today is how to seek help for depression -- either for yourself or for a loved one. Our guest is Kerri Johnson. Kerri is a licensed clinical social worker. She's joining us from Pennsylvania. Kerri, thank you for being here.

Kerri Johnson: Thank you for having me.

Host: Help us understand depression and how it differs from occasional feelings of sadness or the blues.

Kerri Johnson: Many of us struggle to tell the difference between depression and sadness because the primary symptom of depression is pervasive sadness, but it's important to know that there is a significant difference. Sadness is a normal emotion that is usually triggered by hurtful, challenging, or disappointing experience, an event, or situation. We tend to feel sad about something. However when that something changes or when we adjust or accept it, our emotional hurt tends to fade. However it's not the same with depression. Depression is a mental illness that affects our thinking, our feelings, and behaviors in a pervasive manner. We feel sad about everything. With depression, sometimes that sadness is present despite the fact that, from the outside looking in, everything is going well. Depression doesn't require a specific event, situation, or experience as a trigger. Depression is pervasive in that it infiltrates all aspects of our lives making everything less enjoyable and less important. Depression can be debilitating and significantly impact our daily life function.

Host: What are the signs and symptoms of depression?

Kerri Johnson: The most common symptoms include a persistent sad, anxious, or empty mood; feelings of hopelessness or pessimism; feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness; a loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and once enjoyable activities; sleeping difficulties, and that can be trouble falling asleep or staying asleep or even excessive sleeping; eating difficulties, which could be eating too much or eating ; fatigue, a lack of energy; thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts; a change in your mood, irritability or restlessness; difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions; persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain. If you think you might be depressed, I encourage you to see a professional as soon as possible.

Host: What steps should I take if I think I might be depressed?

Kerri Johnson: Some research actually suggests that the longer you wait or try to handle it on your own, the worse it can become. You can start by seeing your general practitioner, a therapist, or any doctor whose care you might be under. They can assess your need and help support connection to the appropriate resource if that's needed. I would also recommend increasing your activity. Engage in anything that brings you pleasure or joy. You can also talk to a trusted friend or relative and try definitely to stay active.

Host: What if I'm concerned about a loved one who seems depressed?

Kerri Johnson: It can be very difficult and challenging to live with and have concerns about someone that might be depressed. So if you are concerned about a loved one, please try to take immediate action. Stay engaged with them, encourage them, encourage them to see a medical professional.

Host: What if the person doesn't want to seek help?

Kerri Johnson: It's important for people who are suffering to know that they are not alone and that they don't have to suffer. So if they don't want to seek help, I would encourage you to try to keep them encouraged. Check on them, express your concerns and the benefits of getting help. And hopefully your persistence can support them to taking some next steps. I think the hardest thing for the person that lives with someone are feelings of helplessness because you feel that there's nothing you can do. You can't take the pain from them and you can't make them seek help. And I think the hardest thing for the individual who is depressed is when they don't seek help and think that it is sadness and it'll just go away or when they think that they can just handle it on their own and undoubtedly it gets progressively worse.

Being concerned about a loved one who may be suffering from depression is very difficult and while you are encouraging and supporting your loved one and trying to help them take the next steps, it's important for you to know that there are many resources available for you. So I would recommend that you explore your employee assistance program or meeting with a therapist and talking with someone to help you navigate helping them.

Host: Kerri, how treatable is depression?

Kerri Johnson: Depression is the most treatable of all mental illnesses. There are various kinds of therapies that work. Treatment such as psychotherapy, support groups, and medication management are the most common treatments for depression. So don't give

up, find support. Once upon a lifetime, I was a private practice clinician, so I absolutely worked with teens and adults who suffered from depression and I found that for me the most successful stories were individuals that stayed committed to regular therapeutic appointments combined with medication management and the change that we were able to facilitate was astounding and very successful.

Host: Kerri, this has been very helpful information. Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today.

Kerri Johnson: You are most welcome. Thank you.

Host: You'll find many helpful mental health resources on this website, including the article *Depression*. Thank you for listening.