

Depression vs. Sadness and Effective Support Strategies

You or someone you know may have experienced depression at some point in time. According to Michigan Psychological Care, almost 20% of all people will have an experience with depression. Depression affects multiple aspects of one's life, with some symptoms including changes to weight and sleeping patterns, feelings of uselessness and unworthiness, and suicidal thoughts or feelings. Depression is more than “feeling down,” but it can be difficult to distinguish depression from a period of sadness.

Washington Behavioral Medicine Associates note that the misunderstanding of depression stems from conflating its symptoms with those of a period of sadness. For example:

- A regular period of sadness will get better as time passes, while depression episodes last all day for a minimum of two weeks.
- If you are feeling a normal bout of sadness, you are still able to navigate your day, whereas a depression episode is draining and will prevent you from engaging.

- A normal period of sadness also improves with self-care or social support. Depression can improve with medical or therapeutic treatment.
- Normal sadness is temporary and dependent on a specific circumstance or issue. Depression does not go away, regardless of what current circumstances are.

If you know someone who is experiencing depression, Washington Behavioral Medicine Associates developed a list of successful support strategies, including:

- Active listening-Being invested in their journey and offering a supportive ear is beneficial to someone going through depression.
- Validating feelings-Use language to validate their pain or situation. Trying to diminish their experience or "put it in perspective," no matter how well intentioned, can leave someone depressed feeling even worse.
- Helping with daily activities-Helping to complete daily activities, such as chores around the house, can aid in their recovery. Depression can prevent someone from doing the things they typically do, and helping alleviates that burden.
- Suggesting treatment-Suggesting they receive treatment is one of the most beneficial things you can do. Mental health professionals are skilled in working with people suffering from depression and can provide access to necessary tools.
- Staying supportive-As your loved one deals with depression; remain supportive. Try not to take canceled plans or their moods personally, instead offer unconditional love and support. And while doing this, make sure you are taking care of yourself as well to mitigate the risk of burnout.
- Learning about depression- Learn more about depression to best provide care and assistance.

Depression is tough, but knowing how to ask for help, and building support systems are essential in overcoming it.

Want to learn more? In Saint John Vianney Center's Podcast Series, Journey to Thrive, we offer an episode on managing depression, presented by Patricia Donoghue, Ph.D., clinical psychologist at SJVC. Listen ***here.***

Sources: Washington Behavioral Medicine Associates and Michigan Psychological Care.