

Caregiver's Corner

Is it Depression?

By Patricia Peiser, LMSW

Older adults may experience a variety of emotions and may not know how to identify what is happening or what to do about it. Someone says "I feel Depressed" but do they have Clinical Depression? There is a huge difference. Caregivers need to understand as much as they can about recognizing and responding to signs that the older adult that they care for may be struggling with depression and get the medical help that they need.

There are many ways to deal with that feeling of being depressed, sad, down. There is one specific way of dealing with real Depression: medication and counseling. Treatment may be complicated by other illnesses and aging body functions. Physicians often overlook the symptoms, assuming that they are a normal part of aging. This is not so. It is essential that one who has clinical depression seek this treatment from a qualified physician or counselor. If not treated by a person qualified and experienced in treating Depression, it can only deepen.

Our greatest concern of one who does not seek treatment is the risk of suicide. Those people who do commit suicide are victims of undetected and untreated depression. Daily life has just become too much for them to deal with.

A dear friend of mine, always very dependent on her husband, when he died, believed that he had just gone away. She never dealt with his passing, had never allowed herself to grieve. She suffered anxiety, about everything, constantly waiting for the "other shoe to drop." Five years later, she began crying incessantly; she suffered a deep depression, and had much difficulty responding to treatment.

It is so essential that everyone suffering a loss of significance, whether it be the death of a spouse, loss of a home through fire, Katrina or whatever, loss of a car or precious belongings through theft, allow themselves to grieve, else it will come back to haunt them.

How can one deal with real depression? First, isolation must be avoided. He or she must have good health care, proper nutrition and physical activities. They must try to be with other people, in activities or social groups.

They must protect themselves, avoid situations that are upsetting, be able to say no to outside demands or commitment. Time must be taken to be alone, to think about the things or events that are significant, or even those that are causing this situation.

As caregivers, take a closer look at the older adult in your family, talk to them, argue with them, re-evaluate that situation, and put it in its proper place. Remember significant events from the past, holiday times with families and recall them not with sadness as a loss but with joy in remembrance. Explore new ways to celebrate holidays and significant dates.

And also think about how you can best take care of yourself. Depression can be a real problem for caregivers. Get good medical care and report your symptoms. Seek out people that you enjoy. Think of a pleasurable activity and do it. And most of all, seek treatment and counseling from a qualified professional experienced in treating depression you too are struggling.

It is important to know how to manage your stress.

- Breathe – Occasionally take a deep breath, hold it and let it out slowly, drop your shoulders. See how it relaxes your whole self?
- Do let it go. There are some incidents or subjects that pray on your mind, almost like an obsession. Let it go. Know what you can have control over, and leave alone those matters that cannot be changed.
- There is nothing more stressful than procrastination, so decide and “Just do it!” If it’s got to be done, delaying it just makes you worry – it prays on your mind – so just do it and get it over with, then you can relax.
- Take one thing at a time. Prioritize activities according to their importance.
- Perfectionism really gets in our way. We can’t be perfect about everything, in fact about most things. Trying to be perfect only sets us up for failure.
- You’re bound to get angry about something in your situation. Try to work it off with some physical activity that requires energy, instead of letting it out on someone else.
- Realize your limits. Be willing to accept that sometimes enough is okay.
- Take one day at a time
- Take care of your physical and mental health
- Have some fun.