

Dealing with Depression In The Workplace

By Lyndsay Swinton

What To Look Out For And What You Can Do

It's vital to be informed about mental health, especially if you want to be an effective leader, manager, parent, or friend. Dealing with depression in the workplace is important, particularly if you are responsible for growth, learning and development for others and yourself.

Although as a lay-person you are not expected to lift a person's depression, it's wise to be informed about what depression is, and how you can adapt your style or approach to dealing with a person with depression.

Depression Signs and Symptoms

If you have been feeling down or out of sorts, your thoughts can easily turn to whether you are depressed or not. Whether you fit with the signs of depression or not, is unimportant. If you are feeling so down that you need to do something about it, that is enough.

Common signs of depression;

- Exhaustion on waking
- Disrupted sleep, sometimes through upsetting dreams
- Early morning waking and difficulty getting back to sleep
- Doing less of what you used to enjoy
- Difficulty concentrating during the day
- Improved energy as the day goes on
- Anxious worrying and intrusive or upsetting thoughts
- Becoming emotional or upset for no particular reason
- Shortness of temper or irritability

Only a qualified doctor or health practitioner can formally diagnose you with clinical depression, however it is important to recognise that there are many things you can do to lift depression and inoculate yourself from future depression.

Depression Statistics and Key Understandings

- There is 10 times more major depression in people born after 1945 than in those born before.
- Women are twice as likely to experience depression as men.
1 in 8 women will experience major depression in their life.
- The average depression left untreated will lift after 8 months.
- Most depression is not due to a chemical imbalance or genetic factors. Low serotonin levels are a result, not cause, of depression
- When you are stressed, your brain works differently. You are more likely to resort to "All or Nothing" thinking, which causes catastrophising and difficulties in solving complex problems.
- The more emotionally arousing, negative thinking we do, the more we dream. Excessive dreaming (REM sleep) means less deep, restorative sleep, so we become exhausted. Exhausted minds will interpret reality in depressing ways, and so on, until our body is exhausted too.

How Depression Can Affect Learning and Development

1. All or Nothing (or Black or White) Thinking.

"Nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so"
William Shakespeare

Say a tree falls over in the forest, and no-one is there. It has no meaning whatsoever. Then, along comes a walker, looks down at the tree and thinks, "How sad, such a beautiful old tree, blown down in a moment".

At the same time, a nearby householder looks out of his window and thinks "What a piece of luck! That tree has blown down and the view is absolutely fantastic now." A local beetle considers it great luck because he and his family now have somewhere to live for the next 29 generations.

The meaning a learner attaches to an event is extremely important in determining how they feel. If your learner has a "negative spin" on things, it will make learning difficult if not impossible. The key is to recognise and subtly re-train their thinking style.

Introduce shades of grey into their learning experiences. Get the learner to give themselves marks out of ten for e.g. accuracy, improvement and difficulty so they learn to recognise there are many ways to assess performance, and there are more than two outcomes.

2. Learned Helplessness

If a learner has had bad experiences of learning previously and been unable to improve the situation, they may believe that all learning is bad and be resigned to failure. It is important to show the learner that they have control over the learning experience, and if things aren't working for them, that it is their right and responsibility to make changes.

3. Explanatory Styles

Listen to how your learner explains events. The "explanatory style" your learner uses may be positive and enhance learning, or negative and slow or stop learning in its tracks.

Explanation	What it means
Internal or External <i>Me or not me</i>	Internal: "It's not my fault" External: "It's someone's or else's fault, bad luck or whatever"
Global or Specific <i>Everything or just this</i>	Global: "My whole life is ruined" Specific: "That will be bad for that part of my life"
Stable or Unstable <i>Forever or Just now</i>	Stable: "This will last for ever" Unstable: "Things will change over time"

The learner may have low opinions of their ability, which is "their fault", "make them too stupid to work" and "will never get better". This negative explanation will make it difficult to move on and make progress. Words to look out for; always, never, perfect, impossible, awful, ruined, terrible, disastrous, furious etc.

Without dwelling on past history, it may be useful to help the learner come up with a more positive way of viewing their ability e.g. "the school didn't do anything about my truancy but I can commit to doing 2 hours per week on learning", "I am great at carpentry and making my kids laugh and need to improve in writing in front of other

people", and "in 4 weeks time I will be able to complete a crossword during my tea-break at work".

4. Anxiety = Uncertainty x Importance

An anxious mind cannot learn, so we can work on reducing anxiety by encouraging the learner to do relaxation regularly, particularly before a lesson, and reduce overall anxiety.

Learning how to tolerate uncertainty will also enhance learning. Encourage your learner to be "okay" with not knowing how things will turn out. List all possible outcomes, good, bad or indifferent, and come up with coping strategies for the worst case scenarios.

Link the learner's current learning experience to something they successfully learned in the past (even going as far back as learning to ride a bike!). This can be a powerful reminder that they have managed to learn something in the past, and probably don't think twice about doing anymore.

Depression Resources

Some of this summary is taken, with permission, from "The Depression Learning Path" , on www.clinical-depression.co.uk by Uncommon Knowledge. This covers [depression information](#), [understanding depression](#) and [treating depression](#) and is free.

There is also the [Uncommon Knowledge Depression Self Help Program](#), which is an in-depth self-help guide to overcoming depression, containing practical exercises, relaxation and useful information to lift depression and prevent future depression.

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