

SADNESS IS NOT DEPRESSION

Sadness is a normal emotion that we all experience at some time. It often accompanies a loss, such as when a loved one dies. It usually passes with time as you come to terms with your experience. A sad person feels bad but can continue with their day-to-day responsibilities.

On the other hand, a depressed person has a persistent feeling of deep despair, often accompanied by feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and an array of physical symptoms of an intensity that has a strong negative effect on your day-to-day life. There may not be a logical reason for these dark feelings. This type of depression can linger for months and even years, although psychotherapy (and possibly medication) can help ease symptoms of depression. Certainly, early identification and treatment can significantly reduce the negative impact of depression in most people.

If it's actually sadness you are experiencing rather than depression, there are strategies you may consider using to help you through this time until it passes.

Coping With Sadness

Loss is an inevitable part of experiencing life in its full tapestry of emotions. All too often it seems we are encouraged to fear negative feelings and to avoid them any way we can. However, sadness is a normal human emotion and can enrich your life experience. Some of the healthier ways to experience normal sadness include:

1. **Allow yourself to be sad.** Repressed negative emotions can work against you in the long run. Cry if you feel like it.
2. **Allow time to feel sad.** If you feel like having a sad day, then plan for it. Make room for those feelings. Plan a day or evening just to be alone, listen to melancholy music, and to observe your thoughts and feelings. Planning time to be unhappy can be beneficial by helping you to ultimately move into a happier mood.
3. **Work out what is making you unhappy.** Sadness relating to loss is relatively easily understood. But spend some time really working through the cause of your unhappiness – is it fear of being alone, worries about your future, other issues that might cause you to feel helpless and alone? Once you understand more clearly the root cause of your feelings you will be in a better place to manage your intense emotions.
4. **Sadness can result from a change that you didn't expect, or it can signal the need for a change in your life.** Change is usually stressful, but it is necessary for growth.

Sadness is often associated with grieving. Much has been written on the grief process and ways in which you can work through the emotions associated with losing someone

important to you. The resources listed at the end of this article may be helpful. Alternatively, your local library, community centre or medical practice are good places to start looking for extra information that can help you cope with sadness, especially if it is associated with grieving.

But What If It Is Depression?

Depression is a physical illness and can be successfully alleviated in many people using a combination of talking [therapy](#) and, sometimes, psychiatric [medication](#). A formal assessment needs to be completed by a Psychologist to clarify the nature and extent of your symptoms. This can be arranged through your General Practitioner.

You should seek help if you experience 5 or more of the following symptoms for longer than a 2 week period:

- Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day, (e.g. feeling sad or empty, uncontrolled crying).
- Significant weight changes (e.g. a change of more than 5% of body weight in a month).
- Repeated thoughts of death or suicide.
- Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, pessimism.
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, low self-esteem nearly every day.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed, including sex.
- Decreased motivation, general fatigue, nearly every day.
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions.
- Sleep problems including insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping nearly every day.
- Restlessness, irritability, mood swings.

Conclusion

The essential thing to remember when deciding whether you are sad or depressed is that sadness symptoms can be traced to a specific cause, whereas people suffering from depression cannot usually identify a particular negative event that is responsible for their symptoms. Sadness is an emotional state that will usually pass with time. Depression, however, requires professional help to ensure you get the support you need to manage your symptoms effectively.

RESOURCES

Coping with Loss

[Coping With Bereavement](#) – Succinct and caring site about grieving and coping with loss. (Mental Health America - <http://www.nmha.org/index.cfm?objectid=C7DF9618-1372-4D20-C807F41CB3E97654>)

[Life after Loss: Dealing with Grief](#) – Youth-oriented guide to coping with loss. (University of Texas - <http://www.utexas.edu/student/cmhc/booklets/Grief/grief.html>)

[Grief Support](#) – This Australian site provides insights into grieving and the grief process. A companion page contains detailed information about children’s grief. (Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement - <http://www.grief.org.au/support.html>)

Loss of a Spouse

[On Being Alone: A Guide for the Newly Widowed](#) and [Seven Choices of Grief](#) – A comprehensive series of articles on grief and loss offering practical, as well as psychological advice. (AARP - http://www.aarp.org/families/grief_loss/a2004-11-15-newlywidowed.html)

Are there Stages of Grief?

[The Kübler-Ross grief cycle](#) – Details each stage as it applies to persons facing death or other negative life change. Note that the cycle as presented includes seven stages, including initial shock. (ChangingMinds.org; http://changingminds.org/disciplines/change_management/kubler_ross/kubler_ross.htm)

[What is grief?](#) – Lays out general stages of grief with tips for helping someone who is grieving. (<http://www.counselingcenter.uiuc.edu/Brochures/grief.htm>)

Grief after Suicide

[Grief after Suicide](#) - Survivors of suicide and their friends can help each other and themselves by gaining an understanding of grief after suicide. (Canadian Mental Health Association - http://www.cmha.ca/bins/content_page.asp?cid=3-101-103)

[Grief after Suicide](#) Understanding your emotions, as well as suicide in general, may ease your grieving after suicide. (Buddha Dharma Education Association - http://www.buddhanet.net/r_suicid.htm)

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

Mental Health Association NSW Inc.

Ph 1300 794 991 for services in your area.

National Association of Grief and Loss (NALAG)

Tel 02 9976 2803 website: <http://www.griefaustralia.org>

Club Speranza

Tel: 02 9908 1233 or <http://www.clubsperanza.org>

Education, training, counselling, resources and support groups for people affected by suicide or self-harm.

Solace Association Inc

Tel 02 9519 2892 or <http://www.solace.org.au/>

A support group and counselling service staffed by trained volunteers for people who have lost a partner.

Mental Health Matters <http://www.mental-health-matters.com/>

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy – <http://www.actmindfully.com.au>

Lifeline

Tel 13 11 14

24 hour counselling, support and information.

Compassionate Friends

Tel 02 9290 2355 or <http://www.thecompassionatefriends.org.au/>

Self help for bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings.

Individual Counselling with a Psychologist

For some people, a Medicare rebate is now available for up to 12 sessions per calendar year with a registered psychologist who has a Medicare Provider Number. To obtain the rebate you must be referred by an appropriate medical practitioner, ie., a GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician. The practitioner will ensure that you meet the eligibility requirements and develop a management plan for your condition. The cost and rebate from Medicare can vary depending on the consultation length and fee charged. If the psychologist bulk bills there will be no extra cost. For further information about the rebate or to locate a psychologist in your area contact the Australian Psychological Society: Tel 1800 333 497 or <http://www.psychology.org.au>.