

The Depression Checklist

By Jeff Dwarshuis LMSW ACSW

Depression is a common problem with a specific course and set of symptoms. It is not uncommon for people to feel depressed from time to time but the severity and length of symptoms determine if outside help is needed. The causes for depression might involve stress reactions and biochemical and hormonal complications. Other causes involve negative thinking patterns, poor emotive processing, traumatic memory and delayed emotional development from child abuse. Although depression can be a serious problem, it also is very treatable.

Symptoms of Depression

1. The individual has a depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day, and feels sad, empty or tearful. In children and adolescents, depressed mood can appear as constant irritability.
2. The person has a diminished interest in things that used to give pleasure.
3. The person has significant weight loss when not dieting, weight gain, or a decrease or increase in appetite. In children, failure to gain weight as expected can be a sign of depression.
4. The person sleeps very little or has a desire to sleep most all of the time.
5. The person is either restless or has slowed behavior that can be observed by others.
6. The person feels fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day.
7. The person has feelings of worthlessness, or excessive or inappropriate guilt nearly every day.
8. The person has trouble making decisions and concentrating.
9. Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide, or a suicide attempt.

Treatment for Depression

The treatment for depression usually involves several interventions. Treatment is generally done in psychotherapy sessions, group therapy or in a hospital setting.

1. **Medication** – Medication is generally used in moderate and severe cases of depression. In moderate cases, medication is used temporarily to decrease symptoms. Medication use is slowly decreased as other interventions are learned and used. In severe cases the timeline to decrease medications may not be as clear. Antidepressants should be taken in conjunction with psychotherapy as this is statistically the best way to end depression.

2. **Cognitive Therapy** – It is recognized that depression causes people think in a very specific way about themselves, others and the future. Cognitive Therapy is used to recognize unhealthy thinking patterns that contribute to depression and provides exercises to change these patterns.

3. **Emotive and Communicative Therapy** – Decreasing depression also comes from increased recognition of individual thoughts and feelings and the ability to clearly express them. Communication exercises can assist someone in knowing and sharing emotions that otherwise had been repressed or forgotten.

4. **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)** – EMDR is a type of treatment that eliminates the negative thoughts, feelings and body sensations that come from negative memory. Some negative memories such as child abuse contribute to negative self beliefs that contribute to depression.

5. **Problem Solving Therapy** – Depression can have a negative impact on decisions, self perception and relationships. Problem Solving Therapy consists of problem identification, goal setting and solutions that lead to more productive and rational behavior. Problem Solving Therapy is done in the therapeutic setting and involves therapeutic questions, confrontation and directives.

6. **Life style Changes** – Treatment for depression might also involve changes in self care and health. Examples include diet, exercise, healthy family time and interaction.

Jeff Dwarshuis LMSW, ACSW is a psychotherapist in private practice in Grand Rapids Mi. He specializes in EMDR for trauma, anxiety, depression and performance. Contact Dwarshuis by calling (616) 443-1425 or sending an email to jeffsemdr@tds.net

