# The Difference Between Depression and Sadness (National Depression Education and Awareness Month)

Many people have trouble naming and expressing their emotions. We are living in a world that, unfortunately, does not celebrate emotions. It makes sense that we don’t always have the right words to describe them. As a result of this, oftentimes, people mix up different feelings or conditions. This happens frequently with sadness and depression. While the two overlap, there are differences to each. Depression is a life-threatening mental health condition that affects all areas of your life. This month is National Depression Education and Awareness Month. It’s important to be equipped with the facts regarding this disorder. Part of the struggle with depression is shame and low self-esteem. Both of these can cause the person struggling with depression to be less likely to seek help. If depression is not treated, it can lead to suicide. Suicide takes the lives of approximately 110 Americans each day.

Sadness and grief are two difficult emotions to deal with. Both emotions are valid and deserve attention. Usually, with sadness and grief, there is a direct cause of the emotion coming up. It could be due to a variety of life changes. Some common ones include loss, rejection, divorce, money struggles, and so many more. Therapy can help with treating these concerns because it can help you get to the root of your sadness or grief. You and your counselor will be able to discuss healthy ways to express your emotions. CBT can be used to treat these emotions if they are causing issues in your life.

Depression is a serious mood disorder that affects up to 5% of people worldwide. Depression differs from sadness in that it is not simply a mood change. Depression involves the sufferer no longer enjoying things that they typically did enjoy. Other symptoms of depression include negative self-esteem, changes in energy levels, weight changes, and struggling to sleep. These symptoms affect all aspects of the sufferer’s life. Because of how encompassing depression can be, the sufferer can sometimes feel like they don’t have any way out of it. Or even worse, they think that the only way out is suicide. But this couldn’t be further, not the truth. There are treatments available for depression, and many of these treatments have proven to be successful.

The causes of depression are constantly debated, but some general ones include genetic, biological, and environmental influences. In addition to this, depression can be caused by challenging life changes. Life changes are things like relationship breakups, divorce, and loss of work. It’s important to remember that there are many life changes that happen throughout a person’s life. What is significant to one person may be meaningless to another. People having a hard time coping with these changes, which eventually led to their depression, are valid in their struggle. They deserve judgement-free support. But unfortunately, this is not what they always receive. There are stigmas with depression that suggest that people who struggle with it are lazy or that they don’t want to get better. It’s imperative to remember that depression is a mood disorder that can lead to severe consequences.

Depression is a broad term to describe the mood disorder that involves feelings of hopelessness, self-hatred, and sometimes suicidal thoughts. However, there are different types of depression that are beneath this broad term. All forms of depression, regardless of the type or severity, are valid. Some of the different types of depression are:

Postpartum Depression

This affects new mothers who experience depression while they are pregnant or after they give birth. It’s estimated that around 15% of women struggle with postpartum depression. While this is the reported number, there are likely many more, as a symptom of postpartum depression can cause shame, which leads to not seeking help or a diagnosis. As we mentioned earlier, depression can be caused by life changes. Becoming a mom is a huge life change in someone’s life. Postpartum depression can be caused by the hormone changes new mothers go through, or it can affect someone who has previously struggled with depression in their life. New moms may feel a loss of their identity. It’s important to remember that new moms struggling with depression are valid in their struggles. They are not any less of a mother because of it.

Bipolar Depression

Bipolar depression is a type of depression that is accompanied by extreme highs and lows. The “highs” that people experience with this are also referred to as mania. Bipolar disorder is usually treated with medication and some sort of therapy. There is no specific cause of bipolar disorder, but it is thought to be caused by a variety of genetic and environmental components. Bipolar depression makes it challenging for the person struggling to maintain a normal life if left untreated. This type of depression is usually treated with medication and therapy.

Seasonal Depression

Seasonal depression is a type of depression that flares up when the seasons change. Typically, seasonal depression is more severe in the winter or fall. Because there is less sunlight during these months, people who struggle with seasonal depression will sometimes experience a vitamin D deficiency, which can lead to changes in mood.

If you are worried about a loved one (or yourself) struggling with depression, there are a few warning signs to look out for. As we mentioned previously, it is difficult to tell if someone has depression just by looking at them. But some warning signs include changes in mood, energy, sleep, eating habits, recreational activities, and social life. If you want to approach a loved one with your concerns about (what you believe might be) depression, make sure you are listening and providing a judgment-free support zone. You don’t always have to say the right thing, but just knowing you’re there can make a huge difference in someone’s recovery. Another way to support someone in recovery is to help them find treatment that they have access to. For example, you could research therapists in your area or online for them. It can be common for the person struggling with depression to be too exhausted from their symptoms to seek the help they need.

While depression, grief, and sadness are different in their own ways, therapy can be a helpful tool for all. Therapy is a great way for people to learn what triggers their symptoms most and what steps they can take to prevent themselves from spiraling into depression if possible. Depression, grief, and sadness are all challenging to deal with and can often make a struggler feel like they are alone in their fight. By meeting with a counselor (either in person or online), the person struggling can feel supported, which might cause them to be more likely to be open to help. A common type of therapy for depression is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). Through CBT, you and your counselor will be able to specify your negative thought patterns (regarding your sadness) and replace them with healthier ones.

If you are worried that a loved one (or you yourself) might be struggling with depression, you can reach out to us here.

**References**:

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression>

<https://www.hopefordepression.org/depression-facts/>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/postpartum-depression/symptoms-causes/syc-20376617>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/bipolar-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20355955>

**Keywords**: depression, grief, CBT, therapy, online counselor [Michigan]