Dealing With a Lack of Motivation

by CARLA SILVER

Being Motivated With Depression

Carla and counselor Eric share their tips and experience with depression and motivation.

Carla's Experience With a Lack of Motivation

Searching the internet, I have found a plethora of articles on how to motivate oneself out of depression. So much “rainbow advice.” I say “rainbow advice” because to a person who is heavily depressed, that is what it feels like – a beautiful, but annoying, spectrum of colors, gloriously sparkling but always out of reach.

That has been my place since last week. This funk that settled upon me turned everything in my life into a black and white mini-drama with too many shades of gray.

The noises became louder; the kids with their seemingly endless demands became a drumbeat nothing could drown out; the silence, when it finally came, was louder and more deafening than the drums; and, finally, the tears came for no reason, stopping only because of dehydration.

I cannot give you any rainbow advice about depression and motivation because when you are in the middle of a dark room with self-loathing raging through your head, that kind of advice can make you want to see if RPGs are legal, purchasable items. They are not, by the way.

Just Keep Doing the Next Right Thing

My eight-year-old daughter, in her already infinite wisdom, coupled with the wise words of a dear friend, have been the only words I have been able to take to heart and grab on to so that I can get moving forward again.

I went to tell my kids goodnight. My six-year-old son was engrossed in watching some show about a kid and a puppet on the iPad and grunted his “goodnight,” never taking his eyes off the screen. When I went to my daughter’s room, she stood up on the bed and stretched out her arms for her nightly hug. She pulled back and said, “Mom, really? Shower. You stink.”

And with those words she climbed under the covers and told me to hit the light on my way out.

It was on the same night a friend of mine, who I had not talked with in years, called me to let me vent about my current circumstances. We laughed over what my daughter said, but she said there was a wisdom in those words, which made her think of that quote: “Just keep doing the next right thing.” Which for me meant have a shower.

Those words are the only words of wisdom I can impart to you about motivating yourself out of depression. Keep doing the next right thing. Get up — even if that is all you accomplish, you are at least standing.

Keep doing the next right thing. Brush your teeth, comb your hair, and eat some breakfast — whatever you need to do to keep going forward. At some point you are going to find yourself unstuck and in a much better place.

A number of other things are good as well, like journaling, exercising, healthy eating, changing your patterns of thinking, unplugging from social media for a while, surrounding yourself with people who support and encourage you. However, until you can get unstuck from the cement of depression, all of these words are just that, *words*.

Too many times, at least for me, words are my worst enemy. All the advice, all the talking about my feelings, all the voices in a constant loop of “you do this…” and “you should do that...” are words that put me in this place to begin with.

When you finally feel part of the human race again, all the rainbow advice suddenly doesn’t seem as annoyingly bright as it did before, and it seems entirely possible reaching that rainbow is in the near future.

Until then, just keep doing the next right thing. Seven words. One simple action.

Next page: Eric shares his tips for depression's lack of motivation.

Lack of Motivation, Depression, and What to Do About It

There is no doubt about it — you are just plain lazy. It seems like you are constantly finding excuses to get out of work. You know what you need? You need to pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and get moving. You need to quit feeling sorry for yourself and do something.

For you, the statements above will seem pretty familiar. People in your life have always made claims that you were lazy.

When you were younger, they blamed you any time homework didn’t get completed or your chores went undone. Now, people criticize you when the house is a mess or your quarterly reports are late at work.

Even worse, you have started thinking these people are right, and you labeling yourself as lazy.

What if isn’t laziness, though? What if it is depression?

Every day, millions of people meet the diagnostic criteria for major depressive disorder or another depressive disorder. They suffer from a list of symptoms that include much more than having a low mood.

There are 9 signs of depression that point towards the diagnosis, and there are two components that can contribute to low motivation: interest and energy.

The Interaction of Interest and Energy

People with depression tend to have less interest in activities and things they previously found pleasurable.

Some people are very interested in collecting comic books, for example. Every Wednesday, they visit their local shop to pick up the new releases, browse the store, make small talk with the staff, and head home to read their purchases.

Even if comic books are not your interest, you can see how this activity adds purpose, meaning, and happiness to someone’s life. It is a positive.

Depression will decrease the interest in this activity, leading to the person feeling less motivated to pick up their books for weeks or months on end. Without the positive support, depression worsens; but to people on the outside, the change in behavior presents as laziness.

The second component involved with motivation is energy level. Depression has the well-known ability to zap someone's energy.

This may result in exaggerated sleeping patterns of too much or too little. While they are awake, they may feel fatigued or dazed.

This person would really want to head to the comic shop but would feel unable to muster the motivation to head out the door. The interest is there, but not the energy.

Left unchecked and untreated, depression will produce the worst-case scenario of lack of energy and lack of interest. When both are missing, it will be a struggle to do anything, whether you enjoy it or not.

Chores, work, and arduous tasks will feel impossible. People will call this laziness, but it is really depression.

Moving to Motivation

Throughout the worlds of mental health and depression, motivation is one of the most challenging aspects to recoup. Some people who lose their energy and interest may not be able to recover for some time.

If you or someone you love seems to be having problems gaining or regaining their motivation, seeking professional mental health treatment might be one of the best steps you can take. Being evaluated and treated by a psychiatrist can radically improve motivation and overall depression quickly.

Next page: Eric's tips continued.

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Adding mental health counseling from a therapist, social worker, or psychologist can provide techniques and skills tailored to your unique needs and strengths.

Understandably, not everyone will feel comfortable using professional treatment as a first line of defense. Many will want to explore at-home solutions to improve their motivation before heading to the professionals. This strategy is worthwhile. Here's how:

Don't Go Direct

Motivation is so hard to improve because it is nearly impossible to target motivation directly. You cannot say to someone (or yourself), "Get motivated" and expect any progress to be made.

If you could will yourself into motivation, none of this would be necessary. Motivation cannot be targeted directly because it is not a problem, it is a symptom of a problem. To make improvements, you must focus on the problem: depression.

Acknowledge Depression

By committing time and energy towards improving your overall depression, you will see enhancements to many aspects of your life. Your mood, sleep, appetite, irritability, self-esteem, and levels of guilt will be more desirable.

Think about what helps people with depression. Exercise, change your diet, improve your sleep, and seek out the positives that life has to offer. Anything you can do to alleviate depression will alleviate your lack of motivation.

Change Your Thinking

For someone with low motivation, one of the best depression busters is changed thinking. Every day, your

thoughts are constantly swirling. People who are depressed think depressed thoughts, and people who think depressed thoughts are more likely to be depressed.

Gaining awareness and control of your negative thoughts will be crucial. Rather than feeling guilty about your lack of motivation, think about what you can do when your motivation returns.

Repeat positive affirmations and words of encouragement to yourself. In time, your changed thinking will lead to changed feelings and behaviors.

Boost Supports

Before you can run, you must walk. Before you can do the things you enjoy independently, you must rely on the assistance of your friends and loved ones. Tell them about your lack of motivation and what they can do to aid your recovery.

Along the way, tell them how you are likely to resist, so they can be prepared to intervene. You are in charge of your motivation, but they can help.

Start With Fun

If your motivation is lacking, don’t make your first goal to clean the house. The event must be small, simple, short, and fun.

Plan a trip to the local shop for a new comic or to the store for a coffee with your friend. Socializing when depressed can seem a daunting task, but once you have regular success with pleasant activities, you can begin adding in other tasks slowly. This is your path to balanced success.

Motivation is one of the most common complaints people have. Though it is common, the notion of motivation is quite complex. It represents the interaction of your energy and interest levels and the influence of depression.

Don’t be fooled into setting your aims at motivation directly. Target depression for the quality of life you desire. Seek the treatment of professionals and experiment with self-help, at-home techniques.

It’s true that some people are lazy, but more people are actually depressed.