The Importance of Talking About Depression

by NATASHA DEVINE

Don’t Keep It a Secret

Depression affects everybody differently but at its worst, the symptoms can be crippling. Sometimes it takes everything you’ve got to get out of bed, or go to work, or put a smile on.

You can be so completely exhausted and be so indifferent about everything. Depression can eat away at your very being until you’re a shell of who you are when it isn’t present. I’m sure the last thing you want to do at this point is talk about how you’re feeling.

Why is it so difficult for those affected by depression to talk about it and the effect it can have on their lives? I know for me, it was hard to accept the diagnosis, harder to explain it to friends and family, and even harder to fully own it to the point where I can write about my experiences.

It’s hard to talk about it because it’s so much more than not feeling well. The fear comes from the stigma surrounding depression and mental illness. But as difficult as it can be, it’s so important to talk about depression. Here are a few reasons why:

It Breaks the Stigma

The stigma surrounding depression can be one of the biggest social obstacles to overcome. Stigma is a mark of disgrace or stain on a person’s reputation. Even the definition is harsh! Experiencing stigma can make you feel ashamed, isolated, and embarrassed which can lead to reluctance to seek help.

Some of the stereotypes around depression are that people with depression are unpredictable and that it’s a sign of weakness. By talking about depression, you can help to break the stigma around depression by proving that it’s an illness and nothing to be ashamed of.

Your friends and family likely don’t think you’re unpredictable or weak, so sharing with them that you have depression shouldn’t change their perception of you. Show them that you’re still the same person, you’re just sick and that with the proper treatment and support it can be managed. Shatter the stigma by providing personal experience that proves the stereotypes aren’t true.

It Raises Awareness

I’ve discussed before, the importance of raising awareness, and talking about depression is the first step. Let’s look at some of the statistics:

- Depression is one of the most common mental disorders in the U.S.
- It is estimated that one third of those that seek help do not receive adequate treatment
- In 2013, it was estimated that over 6.7% of American adults had a least one major depressive episode

that year

6.7% of American adults – that's over 15 million people! Imagine the awareness that would result if each of those people were talking about their depression. It could become as normal as saying, "I have a cold," in that there wouldn't be any stigma or stereotypes attached to it because people would be aware and understanding of how it affects those who suffer from it.

Next Page: Help Others to Understand and Being Stronger

It Helps Others to Understand

The best way to spread information of any kind is word of mouth. People trust what their friends and family have to say about certain things. Talking can help educate the people in your life about your experiences and how depression affects you personally.

It doesn't have to be an extensive discussion; you don't have to share everything you know and all of the facts at once. Start small with something you're comfortable with and then be open to questions. They may ask questions that seem 'silly' or even offensive, but it's because they don't understand. They likely aren't educated about the details of depression. Having first-hand experience with it you can help to correct any judgements or misconceptions they may have.

Not everybody lives in a situation where others will understand or are even open to it being an illness so start slow and with something you're comfortable sharing. If it's easier, you can start with facts; strong resources like brochures, reliable websites, and medical journals can help support your side of the debate.

It Makes You Stronger

In addition to bringing awareness and educating those in your life, talking about your depression can actually make you stronger. You'll discover a new found courage in speaking out about your illness. It can be a difficult topic to discuss but you're denying yourself and your experiences by keeping quiet. By sharing your story with others you could find a strength you didn't know you had.

It also makes asking for a help easier. If your loved ones are aware of what you're going through, then you don't have to start from scratch when asking for assistance. Whether you need help seeking professional attention, help with chores, or even a distraction for a few hours, asking for their support will be much easier when they already know what's going on.

It Encourages Others to Speak Up

Depression can often make you feel isolated; it could be due to stigma, negative emotions, or being the only one you know with the disorder. But it can be such a relief when you hear someone say that they know what you're going through, or that they understand and offer their support. Group therapy is great for creating a sense of familiarity, or online communities such as this.

When Robin Williams passed away and depression was being splattered across all news and media platforms, so many others started speaking out about their struggle. It wasn't just celebrities; here and there people could be heard saying, "I know what he was going through." It can become so empowering to know that you're not alone.

We find new strength and courage when we realize we're not alone. Because of this, by talking about depression, even if it's the slightest comment, you can encourage others to speak up as well. You don't have to be a celebrity or someone in a spotlight to empower others; sharing your story can inspire others to do the same.

Conclusion

Depression can be heavy topic in our society due to the fear, stigma, and stereotypes that surround it. Opening up about your experience and knowledge can be the start of a big change.

Simply talking can help to break the stigmas that surround depression, it can bring awareness and education to the general public, and it can show you strength that you may not have known you had. So let’s start talking.