How Does Depression Affect Self-Esteem?

by BRITTANY DA SILVA

Low Self-Esteem and Depression

The majority of people will struggle with their self-image and self-esteem at some point in their lives, regardless of their medical history. With the pressure for perfection that is continuously perpetuated in today's media, it can be difficult for anyone to maintain a healthy level of self-confidence.

Although most individuals will one-day face self-doubt of some kind, there is a strong correlation between depression and low levels of self-confidence. When you struggle with a mental illness that affects your perception of self, it can be a constant uphill battle.

Common Symptoms of Depression

Some of the most common signs and symptoms of depression include thoughts and feelings that are correlated to a low self-esteem. If you or someone you know is struggling with depression, they may experience some or all of the following symptoms:

- Consistent feelings of sadness, anxiety, guilt, or numbness
- Feeling hopeless, worthless, or helpless
- Having a pessimistic worldview
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Irritability
- Fatigue or decreased energy
- Difficulties with sleep, including oversleeping or insomnia
- Restlessness
- Lack of concentration, memory, and decision-making abilities
- Changes in appetite and weight
- Aches or pains, with no apparent physical causes

The presence of even just a few of these symptoms can lead to a sense of low self-worth in an individual. Many people suffering from depression also blame themselves for the way that they feel, thus adding to their negative sense of self.

The Self-Esteem and Depression Correlation

The correlation between depression and low self-esteem is partially due to the similar thought patterns that exist between the two. Those who suffer from low self-esteem have negative perceptions of the self, which can also lead to a pessimistic view of other people, the world, and the future.

Of the symptoms listed above, the following can be true for depression, as well as low self-esteem: feelings of

sadness, anxiety, guilt, numbness, hopelessness, worthlessness, and helplessness.

Although there are many connections between depression and self-confidence, an individual can still suffer from one and not the other.

A portion of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), commonly used to treat depression, can also be useful for those who have low levels of self-confidence. As overcoming negative self-talk is an important tool in the treatment of depression, it is also useful in attempting to overcome feelings of low self-esteem.

The Issue of Self-Esteem

One of the biggest hurdles to overcome when trying to achieve a sense of self-confidence is our focus on self-esteem. When our sense of self-worth is dependent on our self-esteem, it can be challenging to maintain high levels of self-esteem at all times.

The main issue with self-esteem is that your sense of self-worth is dependent on your relationship and interaction with other people. To achieve a high self-esteem, you have to believe that you are better than others.

It is not enough to be average. You must be special.

As it is impossible for everyone in the world to be above-average at the same time, the concept of self-esteem requires a hierarchy. In this system, we must put others down to raise ourselves up.

This constant battle can also lead to self-criticism if we fail to meet the standards required to remain superior to others.

There seems to be no middle ground when it comes to self-esteem. Individuals tend to be narcissistic and confident, or when they fail to meet their high standards, slide into feelings of depression.

To gain a sense of self-confidence that can feasibly last, we have to scrap the concept of self-esteem altogether.

Exploring Self-Compassion

Lasting confidence ought to come from our internal sense of self-worth, completely independent from our relationships with other people. Dr. Kristin Neff, a pioneer of self-compassion research, believes that being kind to ourselves is the key to developing self-compassion.

Self-compassion differs from self-esteem as we do not need to feel superior to others to feel good about ourselves. It’s about showing ourselves kindness when things aren’t going our way, or when we notice something within ourselves that we don’t like.

No one is perfect, and it is this imperfection that connects us all. There is no need for each of us to feel isolated or alone when we fail, as we have all experienced similar suffering.

Compassion comes rather quickly to most of us. If a loved one is going through a difficult time, many of us will not hesitate to be there for them, sympathizing with their situation and offering to help.

Why does it seem so difficult to do the same for ourselves?

Building Self-Confidence

Self-compassion is available to us during the times that we need the most support, unlike self-esteem, which plunges at the first sign of disappointment. The next time that you feel deflated and down on yourself practice a small act of self-compassion to begin building your confidence.

Just as you would be there for a friend, support and care for yourself during your times of need. Try writing a letter of support to yourself, even if you have to pretend that you're writing it for someone else.

When you read what you've written down, try to internalize that understanding and compassion that you've expressed in your letter. Keep in mind that like a best friend, you can always be there for yourself.

It is time to stop being so harsh and self-critical. Many people with low levels of self-confidence treat themselves worse than they would ever consider treating another human being.

Practicing self-compassion is not self-indulgent or narcissistic. We are simply learning to treat ourselves with the same dignity and respect that we show to others.

As Dr. Kristin Neff explains, self-compassion allows us to feel good about ourselves, not because we're special, but because we are all humans who are worthy of respect. Once we learn to embrace this individual sense of kindness, connectedness, and emotional balance, we can begin building our self-confidence.