Is Depression Real? Dealing with Disbelief

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Responding When Someone Asks, 'Is Depression Real?'

Depression is part of your life. No matter how much you wish it wasn't; it is. Depression makes its presence known by removing your motivation, reducing your mood and changing you from someone full of hope and optimism to a pessimist. The way you view yourself and the world around you is skewed due to depression. For many, depression limits their self-esteem to the point that they no longer like themselves.

To make matters worse, some of the people in your life are being less than supportive. Rather than finding ways to understand or empathize, they view your issues as a character flaw or a personal shortcoming. They say you're being lazy, that you're unmotivated and that you should just "snap out of it".

Not only is depression pressuring you to not like yourself, it seems that it is encouraging people around you to not like you, either.

Depression: Myth vs. Reality

Everyone with depression will come face-to-face with people that have strong misconceptions about the illness. Knowing the arguments and the myths many people hold as truths will help you provide them with the information needed to expand their minds. Are you ready to enlighten the people in your life? Here's how:

Myth: People with depression are mentally weak.
Fact: Depression is not about being weak; it is about the combination of your biological predisposition and your life experiences that bring about depression. For some the threshold is very low and others very high.

Myth: People with depression are just sad.
Fact: Having depression means having a group of symptoms. No one has ever been diagnosed with depression just for "being sad." In fact, some people with depression have no mood symptoms. Instead, they experience problems with energy, motivation, sleep, appetite or irritability. Sadness contributes to depression for many, but is only a piece of the puzzle.

Myth: People with depression could change it if they wanted to.
Fact: This is the "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" argument and it is a poor one. People with depression are not choosing to be depressed. They had depression thrust upon them. Would you tell someone in a wheelchair that they could climb a flight of stairs if they put their mind to it? Of course not. The problem with depression is that it convinces you that nothing will help and only encourages you to do behaviors or have thoughts that make depression worse. This is why a therapist is so helpful. A therapist serves as an outside observer that is able to bring attention to distorted perceptions.

Next page: myths and facts continued.

Depression: Myth vs. Reality

Myth: I can't see depression so it doesn't exist.
Fact: It is true that depression cannot be seen. There isn't a blood test or an MRI that points to depression definitively, but you can observe the influence of depression. Compare depression to gravity. You cannot see gravity, but when objects fall to the ground, you see the impact it has on the world. If you are arguing with someone less scientifically minded, use God as an example. They have not seen God but believe in Him based on faith. Depression works similarly.

Myth: Depression is all in your head.
Fact: This myth is actually pretty true. Depression is all in your head, but so is everything else. The way that you perceive the world is solely influenced by your head. Your brain absorbs the information and sends it on to be interpreted. Depression filters out the good and focuses on the bad. Trying to convince someone that depression isn't real is no different than trying to convince someone that your couch is red instead of blue. They experience the couch as blue and cannot be told otherwise.

Myth: People inherit depression from their parents.
Fact: This is partially true. Studies show that there is a biological component to depression, but this is not always true. If it were, identical twins would both either have depression or not. This is not the case, though. Environmental factors comprise the other influence.

Myth: Depression is only for women.
Fact: It is true that women are diagnosed with depression at higher rates than men, but other factors are at play. It is more socially acceptable for woman to have symptoms of depression so they are more likely to seek treatment. Men, on the other hand, often express their depression as anger or irritability since those are more acceptable male behaviors. Additionally, men are likely to self-medicate their symptoms with drugs and alcohol.

Choosing to End the Relationship

Know when to walk away. You don't get to choose your family and you don't get to choose to have depression, but you can choose the level of contact you have with unsupportive people in your life. Strive to have positive relationships with many people while being realistic. If the overall outcome of the relationship is negative, plan ways to reduce contact. Continued exposure will only increase depression and lead to you questioning yourself as they are questioning you.

Conclusion

Having a solid network of supportive people in your life is a strong ally against depression. If people in your life question your depression, find ways to education yourself so that you are better able to educate them. Being aware of the popular myths and misconceptions about depression will make you better able to persuade others.

As always, you cannot control others. Know when to reduce communication or walk away completely if they cannot accept you. In the long run, it will only help your symptoms.