

What to Do When The Blues Last Too Long

In my work as a woman-centred psychotherapist, I'd say the number one 'presenting problem' clients bring to my office is "depression." The reason I have this word in quotes is because this word is often misapplied. I'd like to share with you my understanding of three 'clusters' of emotional symptoms that are often labelled "depression", but are in fact, specific types of malaise that all involve some aspects of true "depression" and therefore, need to be looked at separately.

Type #1: Situational Depression

This is when you feel really sad, bummed out, and may be temporarily unable to go about your normal daily routine due to an upsetting major life event such as: a break-up or divorce, the death of a loved-one, or losing a job. The difference between this and clinical depression is that it is temporary in nature. While you may feel hopeless, helpless, lost, and unmotivated, these feelings won't last forever and you'll eventually start to feel like your 'old self' again.

Type #2: Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

If your depression seems to hit during the winter months, you're probably suffering from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). This is a very common form of depression, which is only noticeable during those months where there is very little sunlight (like now!). You may be particularly at risk of SAD if you live on the West Coast where we tend to get a lot less sunshine than other parts of the world at this time of year.

Type #3: Hormone Imbalances

You'll know you're being 'held hostage' by your hormones if you feel particularly blue at one particular stage of your monthly menstrual cycle. This is when you cry when you see a baby bird on the ground and cannot seem to stop and then one minute later, are laughing at a cute cartoon in the newspaper. Chalk it up to hormones. Menopause is another treatise altogether, but suffice it to say that the lack of estrogen in one's body can also cause temporary feelings of feeling hopeless, helpless, lost, and unmotivated.

How do I know if it's Clinical Depression?

This is the most severe form and differs from the others in that it is genetic (i.e., it runs in your family) and doesn't tend to come and go. You know you're clinically depressed when you haven't gotten out of bed for three weeks, haven't taken a shower for a while, and don't feel like eating. Also, you'll have lost interest in social activities. You may even feel that life isn't worth living. If this is the case for you, go and see your family doctor immediately or go to your nearest mental health clinic. You need professional help.

To end, I'll leave you with some tips to help you recover from whatever type of "blues" ails you:

ESTHER'S TOP SEVEN THINGS TO DO TO RELIEVE DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS:

1. See your doctor and tell her/him about how you're feeling. They may suggest medication to lift the depression, which can do wonders for those suffering. If they don't seem very knowledgeable about depression, ask to be referred to a psychiatrist for an evaluation.
2. Educate yourself on holistic approaches to improving mood such as regular exercise, nutrition, acupuncture, massage, and herbs and vitamins- there is a lot of very helpful stuff out there.
3. Practise lots of positive self-talk- much of depression is a result of what we say to ourselves- we need to learn to 'think happy': when we do this, the brain follows.
4. Read as much as you can about depression and how to manage it. The book I most often recommend is: **The Feeling Good Handbook** by David Burns. It's basically a self-help book to overcome/manage depression and is a great resource. You can purchase it directly by going to my website (listed in my bio.) and clicking on "books"- it is listed under "depression/anxiety".
5. Look into getting a special light used to treat SAD. The one I use and recommend constantly to my clients is called the "Lite Book".
6. Check out some websites on depression to help you get started- there are a lot on Google.
7. Lastly, find a good psychotherapist in your community who specializes in treating depression. The research shows that the best results for moving through depression are a mix of regular 'cognitive-behavioral' psychotherapy sessions and anti-depressants.

About Esther Kane, MSW, Registered Clinical Counsellor

Esther Kane, MSW, Registered Clinical Counsellor, is in full-time private practise as a psychotherapist in Courtenay, B.C. Esther has over a decade of experience counselling women and their loved ones with a multitude of presenting problems. Her main focus is helping women to become free of barriers which keep them stuck so that they can become all that they dream of being.

To book a session or to set up a free 15-minute phone consultation (**only if you reside in the Comox Valley or surrounding areas**), call Esther at (250) 338-1800.

To learn more about Esther's services, please visit her website and read glowing testimonials from many satisfied clients, <http://www.estherkane.com>

Please note: due to the high volume of e-mails received, Esther only replies to potential therapy clients and the media.