



Brief Guide

Depression

This is a brief guide intended to help you understand depression and how it can be treated. If you attend Nexus, further written material during your sessions with us will be provided.

The word depression is often used to refer to many sorts of experiences. Sometimes we say we are depressed when we are feeling "blue" or down or disappointed. Generally, such feelings are short-lived and don't have too much of an impact on our ability to live our daily lives. Depression properly understood is something more than that: it involves emotional, physical and thinking changes that are more intense and of greater duration and which significantly impact on a person's ability to live their daily life. Depression should also be distinguished from grief, the sadness we naturally and appropriately feel after a loss. While grief can be intense and longer lasting, it is also healthy and functional in that it is a process we go through that allows us to adjust to a new life after the loss. Depression on the other hand is not healthy and functional: it tends to stop people from seeing new ways of developing themselves and tends to take the meaning out of their lives. People with depression will have a negative view of themselves (they are valueless), a negative view of the world (it is a threatening or unpleasant place) and a negative view of the future (tomorrow holds no promise).

Depression is not something to be ashamed of or guilty about: indeed, to feel that way will add to our depression. It is not a sign of a weak personality (because it is not a character trait). Depression is very responsive to treatment and the prospects of recovery are excellent.

There are essentially three types of treatment for depression.

1. Antidepressant medication. The aim of these treatments is to restore the chemical balance of the brain.
2. Psychological treatments. Psychological treatments focus on providing a supportive environment, and the learning of new skills that will change the thinking patterns and modes of behaviour which contribute to depression. These new skills stay with a person and can be used to reduce the likelihood of relapse.
3. Medication and Psychological treatments. Sometimes both antidepressant medication and psychological therapy are used. Such an approach may be indicated in more severe cases of depression.

Which treatment is best? That is not an easy question to answer. There is research to suggest that psychological treatment is at least as effective as antidepressant medication (American Journal of Psychiatry, 1999) and research to suggest that a combination of the treatments is best (The New England Journal of Medicine, 2000).

At Nexus we specialise in psychological treatments and (in consultation with your GP or psychiatrist) the combination treatments.

Psychological treatment for depression involves a number of elements. You will be shown how to identify negative thinking patterns and how to replace them with more realistic assessments. You will be shown techniques for reducing your irritability and agitation, including relaxation techniques. You will be shown how to increase your involvement in pleasurable activities and those activities that indicate your "mastery". You will be introduced to techniques that will help improve your sleep patterns. And throughout the process you will receive the personal attention of an experienced professional who understands your problems.

Please be assured that you, like many other people, will be successful in managing your depression.

We look forward to working with you.