

Opinion: Understanding depressive disorders

By Betsy Glass

The common stressors of everyday life can result in feelings of sadness. But if a person feels sad more days than not and it causes a difference in social, academic, and occupational functioning, it may be signs of a depressive disorder.



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The day may feel heavy or overwhelming, a person may lose track of time or forget what is important, and things that used to cause joy and pleasure no longer bring happiness. The steps to feel better may seem impossible, but it's never too late to get support.

Commonly reported signs and symptoms of depressive disorders include:

- Sadness or hopelessness
- Agitation or irritability
- Fatigue or low energy
- Changes in appetite
- Changes in sleeping patterns
- Poor memory or concentration

- Feelings of worthlessness or low self-esteem
- Loss of interest or pleasure
- Thoughts of death or suicide.

The most significant and concerning symptom is thoughts of death or suicide. Suicidal thoughts or intentions are often an individual's way of coping with or escaping from the unpleasant and unbearable experience of their symptoms. If left unrecognized or untreated, these signs and symptoms can impact the quality of life for individuals and their loved ones.

Everyone has unique experiences with mental health concerns, and may not experience all of the symptoms identified. Developmental stages and age can also affect how someone experiences depression. However, anytime we notice an abrupt or significant change in mental or physical health lasting more than two weeks and interfering with everyday life, it's important to consider an assessment with a qualified mental health professional and primary care provider.

Feeling better is possible, according to Neuroscientist Richard Davidson, as "happiness is a skill that can be learned." Depressive disorders are manageable through following the recommendations outlined by a qualified mental health professional and primary care provider, which may include psychotherapy, medication management, lifestyle changes, and other alternative methods.

What can you do? It's important to:

- Know the common signs and symptoms of depressive disorders.
- Demonstrate empathy and compassion toward yourself and others.
- Encourage yourself, friends and loved ones to seek

support, possibly requesting or offering assistance in coordinating or attending appointments.

- Develop a care plan with your qualified mental health professional and primary care provider, addressing all the dimensions of your wellness.

- For those most at risk, please seek emergency services when in crisis, either by calling 911 and requesting a welfare check or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800.273.8255, or by visiting your local emergency room.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests that up to one in five Americans will develop a mental health disorder in their lifetime. Locally, the 2015 Community Health Needs Assessment identified mental health disorders as one of the top three most significant concerns.

Become more aware about how mental health conditions affect our loved ones and our community. Throughout the month of May, Barton Health and other community organizations are encouraging members of the public to participate in a 31-Day Mental Health Awareness Challenge. Get details about the challenge **online**.

Betsy Glass is a licensed clinical social worker at Barton Community Health Center in South Lake Tahoe. On May 12, she and other mental health clinicians will a free mental health talk at Lake Tahoe Community College's Aspen Room at 6pm.