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## Depression and Anxiety

Hi everyone. Today we are going to discuss how to help someone with Depression and Anxiety.

My name is Kylee Mingham, I am a sister in Christ and a member at Birkdale ecclesia. I have been working in Mental Health for the last 5 years, and currently as a Psychosocial Recovery Coach. Before I started by studies to be able to work in this field, I suffered with depression and anxiety for approximately 20 years, but was able to overcome it about 10 years ago, so I know depression and anxiety is curable.

**Depression affects 1 in 7 people and Anxiety affects 1 in 4 people here in Australia.** These figures mean that when you are in a group of 4 or 7 people at school, at work, at the meeting, or just hanging out with friends, there is a likely chance that someone in the group has or is suffering with depression or anxiety.

We all can feel sad, moody, low, stressed, or worried, it is a normal part of life. Stress and anxious feelings are common responses when we feel under pressure, and they usually go away once the stressful situation has passed. But if these feelings come and stay for more than 2 weeks or make it hard to cope with daily life it may be a sign of depression or an anxiety condition that needs extra attention and assistance.

When someone has depression or anxiety it can affect how they feel and how they function, like their emotions, relationships with others, personal control, purpose in life, and life satisfaction.

People with mental health illnesses can hide how they are feeling, so we need to look out for signs of any changes and check in on each other regularly.

There is a large stigma attached to depression and anxiety, which is why some do not seek help, or tell someone about their feelings and emotions. The best way to help someone is to educate yourself about these issues, so you will learn and understand symptoms so you can help someone out with difficulties.

**Depression or anxiety affects people in many different ways.** Some of the reasons someone could be suffering include a range of life events, such as if they are suffering from a serious illness, loss of a loved one, trauma, long-term unemployment, difficult relationships, loneliness, life stresses, drug, and alcohol problems. These are just some of the triggers. Or they may suffer from a chemical imbalance in their brain, or they could have an increased risk of depression due to having a family history of depression.

Depression can affect how an individual feels about themselves, they may have difficulties with managing their day-to-day activities, or it could be a feeling of numbness or emptiness. Anxiety can lead to them avoiding situations that make them feel anxious, and this can impact their everyday activities and relationships.

We need to check in on our friends to see how they are coping. We need to be Godly, and our God shows us He cares. He shows compassion, He offers mercy, He brings hope, He instils purpose, and He gives victory.

We also need to follow in Jesus' footsteps and his instructions. Jesus demonstrated compassion, and He instructs us to help others, as in John 15:12 He says, "My commandment is this: Love each other as I have loved you."

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Encouraging and inspiring our friends and our brothers and sisters is an important part of loving them as yourself. The apostle Paul encourages us to follow Jesus' example by showing compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

So, we must look out and check in on those who:

- Are not coping,
- Or those who are avoiding ecclesial activities.
- Or have lost a loved one.
- They could be ones that are struggling financially,
- Or have had a tough year.
- And the ones that are alone, unwell, or experiencing stress, or
- Have challenging family relationships.

**Some symptoms of depression and anxiety** are, and not limited to –

**They may feel**

- Sad, teary, anxious
- Irritable, guilty
- Hopeless, afraid
- They may have self-doubt,
- Be lonely or have isolated themselves.
- They could be tense, wound up, on edge, nervous, restless, or scared.
- They may feel overwhelmed or be indecisive.
- They may have difficulties handling their emotions.
- And lack of confidence, with feelings of worthlessness, or feelings of being trapped.
- They could feel unhappy or disappointed or feel like there's no future for them.

**Their behaviours** may change - they may be

- Less motivated, lack energy or sleep.
- There may be changes in their appetite, resulting in weight changes.
- They may lack concentration and have memory problems
- Their personality may changes
- They may not go out anymore, or withdraw from family and friends
- They may not get things done at home or at work
- They may struggle to maintain a routine or maintain hygiene or appearance.
- They may rely on alcohol and sedatives
- They may be unable to concentrate.
- They may become reckless, aggressive, or give away sentimental or expensive possessions.

**They could have changes in their relationships**, such as

- Feeling like they don't belong or won't be accepted.
  - They are a burden to other people.
  - Feeling like a failure or a disappointment.
  - Finding it hard to talk to people, or fighting with others, and social withdrawal.
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### Their thoughts could be and are not limited too.

- Life is too hard and it's not going to get better.
- I can't cope and there is no way out of this.
- I am useless, no good, or I'm a failure.
- 'Nothing good ever happens to me.' or people would be better off without me.
- Or it could be obsessive thinking, intrusive thoughts, or Trauma flashbacks.
- Or even suicide, which may be them planning or thinking about ways to die, as they think life's not worth living.

### They also could suffer from physical symptoms, like

- Feeling tired sick and run down.
- Headaches, muscle and stomach pains, or a churning gut
- Loss or change of appetite, which can result in weight changes.
- Panic attacks, or hot and cold flushes.
- Racing heart or tightening of chest, which can result in them thinking they are going to have a heart attack.

### How can we help someone suffering from depression or anxiety?

- A conversation can make a difference in helping someone feeling less alone and more supported in recovering from anxiety and depression. Don't underestimate the importance of just 'being there' for someone.
- When you have a conversation and connect with someone that you think is suffering from depression or anxiety, choose a time when you are both calm and have time to have this conversation, and where you can talk openly and easily, without getting interrupted. You don't need to be a doctor or psychologist to check-in with someone you're worried about. It's common to feel unsure about how to talk to someone with anxiety or depression, or to worry about saying the wrong thing. Remember you don't have to have all the answers, but what is important is that you have taken the time to have a conversation to help them figure out how to start feeling better. Even saying "I'm not sure what to do, but I'm sure we can figure it out together", can help them feel they are not alone in their struggles.

#### Some conversation starters may be:

How are you? If they say "fine or good", follow up with "You don't sound that you are convinced, how are you really?" Showing that you genuinely care.

Or make the comment, "You don't seem yourself". This lets them know that you have noticed something different about them and shows that you care, and you could explain why you are concerned about them.

Or "I've had a strange week, how was yours?" - sharing some of the things you're struggling with can help start the conversation, but not focusing on yourself too much.

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Ask them, “Is everything okay at home or work?” This may help get the conversation started, but it may be a combination of many things that they are struggling with.

If there is a ‘suspicion’ on your part gleaned from their attitude or something they have said, you might ask to ask if they have had suicidal thoughts. It can be daunting to bring this up, but research shows that asking about it won’t put the idea in their head, instead they’ll likely feel relieved someone is there to listen and support them. You could ask them are you having thoughts about suicide? If ‘yes’, listen with empathy and non-judgemental and ask, have you thought about how or when you would kill yourself? Have you taken any steps to get the things you would need to carry out your plan? People that have made a plan are more at risk of suicide.

If the situation is this serious, you should also make sure the person is not left alone and firmly suggest that they seek professional help by phoning the emergency phone number (000 - in Australia) or relevant suicide HelpLines.

- During a conversation **listen without judgement**, let the person express themselves and feel heard. Listen to how they feel, what they’re thinking and what they’re doing differently. Also take your time to understand their experience of feeling anxious or depressed. Recognise and validate how they are feeling, while being respectful of their decisions.
  - **Show empathy and demonstrate understanding and show compassion**. This is to acknowledge their pain, show that you care. Encourage them, by showing them you are supporting them, and show gratitude that the person has opened up to you. Remember even though you may have been in a similar circumstance, every situation has different factors, and everyone has different feelings. Do not say you know exactly what they are going through or feeling, but that you understand that they are suffering due to their situation. Empathy means you have understood that the person is feeling hurt or in pain.
  - **Encourage them**, offer your support and understanding that it must be hard, and encourage them to take small steps, remember even small steps in the right direction is success and recovery; acknowledge each small step as encouragement.
  - **Don’t give up on them**, follow up with them. Don’t be put off if they don’t respond, they may not know how to respond on that day or be ready to talk. Check in a few days later. Offer them support and let them know you are there for them and that you care.
  - **Be supportive**, you can show that you support them by checking in on them with a quick visit, a text, a card, offering to pick something up from the shops for them, do their laundry or mow the lawn. If you are unsure what to say to a person in a text or phone call, or if there are no words for the situation you can send a screenshot of a nice image, e.g., bunch of flowers, to brighten up someone’s day, and let them know you are thinking of them. We need to give them time out of our busy schedules each week. And include them in social activities. Remember actions speak louder than words.
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- **Be patient** – depression and anxiety issues don't necessarily resolve quickly. Also, do not take their behaviour too personally as people are depressed or unwell they tend to push people away.
  - **We need to reassure** that they are not alone and there is hope that things will get better, but we need to be patient with them and help them to overcome any setbacks.
  - **We can also educate ourselves more**, by learning about depression and anxiety difficulties and warning signs, or asking a professional how to help them.
  - **One of the important things we can do is pray for them**, we need to pray for them to overcome their illness and have the strength and be given the comfort to face their journey. We are instructed to pray for one another in James. Plus, the bible tells us on many occasions that God answers prayer, and we have the examples of how God answered prayer, in scripture.
  - **We can also pray for ourselves**, to be able to offer the help they need or be shown what they need, so we can assist them. We need to put it to prayer, as we can't rely on our own understanding of the situation but need to seek God's guidance.
  - **We need to remember to respect their privacy** where possible by not sharing what they tell you with anyone unless they say you can, or you feel they are a danger to themselves. This may need an emergency phone call (000).

We need to assure individuals that depression and anxiety is treatable and it's worth reaching out and talking to someone about what they are feeling.

Even with our relationship with our God and having our Heavenly Father on our side, it doesn't mean that brethren and sisters will not need to seek professional help from a health care provider, as we still suffer from the effects of mortality. We need to encourage individuals to seek help, just like they would for a broken bone or an infection. Medications may be needed, just as they would take medication for diabetes or high blood pressure. Depression and anxiety are an illness, not a characteristic of whether you are strong or weak. Remind them they are not alone, and there is help available.

So, it is important to **encourage them to seek professional support**. Friends, family, and brethren and sisters can offer a great deal of support, but professionals have a crucial role in treating anxiety and depression and promoting recovery. If you are not qualified, don't give medical advice, but be more of a support and recommend someone that can give them the correct medical advice they need to improve.

**Seeking help is a sign of strength and courage and should be seen as a positive step.** Do not let them think their depression or anxiety isn't 'bad enough' as there is no wrong time to seek help and there are so many benefits when you seek assistance, as it helps to:

- Identify unhealthy patterns and underlying issues.
  - Improve emotional and social wellness.
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- Helps them to set goals and learn coping skills.
  - Increases their happiness and wellbeing.

**One last thing**, it's important to remember, when you take the first step in dealing with anxiety or depression, **you're not alone**. Support is available for you, too. You need to take care of yourself first so you can take care of others, as you need to be careful of burnout, as looking after others can be draining, both physically and mentally. You want to stay strong and reliable for the person you're supporting, but also for yourself. In the airplane the stewardess will remind you, first your own mask, then you turn to help others put their mask on. Because if you're not breathing, in theory, you will not be able to make sure anyone else is. The saying you can't pour from an empty cup, is a quote to emphasise the importance of taking care of yourself, so you can support others.

We long for that day when there will be no more depression and anxiety, when God will wipe every tear from our eyes, and God will renew our strength. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Kylee Mingham

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