



Breaking the Vicious Cycle of Depression

Hi, and welcome back to the 'Victim 2 Victor' podcast. My name is Anu and I am your host and in this podcast today, I will be talking about depression, its common causes and why people get depressed, its symptoms and reliable treatment methods. This is an important topic for me to cover because I myself suffered from depression for many years as a result of the abuse and trauma that I encountered from such a young age. I have spent many years studying depression and helping people who are depressed. As you may all be aware, cases of abuse and depression have increased during the COVID lockdown as many people have been living in isolation or in unhappy marriages, which has also resulted in more domestic violence and unfortunately, deaths. There is a lot to cover in this episode so if you yourself are suffering from depression or if you know somebody that is, then I hope that you find this episode both valuable and useful.

So what is depression? Depression is not feeling down for an hour out of your day. Depression is being on the brink of tears because you dropped your glass of water. It is not having the urge to clean up the mess, but rather you fall on the floor and cry and you are so down that you doubt the world will ever have color again. It is a disorder that can affect everything you do in your daily life. It is not something you can quickly recover from or get over, like a cold or a stomach bug. Many people with depression think they are just simply feeling sad, and that it will go away with time. For some people, it does just that, but for 15 million others, depression is a constant feeling that does not just go away on its own. It can remain for years or even for decades. In fact, the World Health Organization (WHO) discovered that depression is the second greatest reason for disability on the planet. Unfortunately, only 10% of these people ever receive any effective treatment or help.

It is normal to have mood ups and downs but when you cannot shake your feelings of despair or emptiness, this is most likely to be depression. It may have become tough to get through each day and seem as though you cannot get any pleasure out of life anymore, but it does get better. Don't ignore these feelings; talk to someone you can trust. You are not alone. Always remember that. The criteria for a depressive episode include a depressed mood, a loss of pleasure in usual activities, sleep disturbance, feelings of guilt or worthlessness, loss of energy, agitation, difficulties in thinking, disturbance of appetite, and recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.

Depression is the result of an interaction between personal psychology and changing sociological conditions. Change is undermining the traditional buffers and social skills that once allowed people to negotiate stressful changes and taxing situations in their lives. According to the *Human Givens College*, between 2.3%–3.2% of men are diagnosed with depression and 4.5% to 9.3% of women.

From this we can see that the rate of depression in women is 2–3 times higher, despite male suicide rates being three times higher. We also know that women take about 50% longer to recover from a depressive episode, as they suffer from different psychological, sociological and biological pressures. The single most important reason is the difference in style of communication between men and women. Men have been socialized for problem solving and action, whereas women have been socialized to build empathy through exploring feelings, therefore making them ruminate more about their depressive episodes.

There are numerous factors that increase the chances of depression in our daily lives, including: abuse, isolation, certain medications, conflict, death or a loss, substance abuse, major events and serious illnesses. Abuse, both physical and emotional, is one of the biggest factors and studies show that severe emotional abuse can be just as powerful as physical abuse. The immediate emotional effects of abuse and maltreatment which include fear, isolation, and an inability to trust, can translate into countless lifelong consequences, including relationship difficulties and low self-esteem, as well as an increased risk of the inauguration of an addiction to drugs and alcohol.

Looking deeper, depression presents itself differently amongst various age groups, and there are multiple symptoms that can allow you to identify if you need treatment. For example, in children, depression may manifest as severe separation anxiety and apathy. You may have seen that young children often cling frantically to their parents, and often refuse to leave them long enough to go to school and play with their friends. In adolescents, the most noticeable symptoms are often irritability, negativity, withdrawal, anti-social behavior and sulkiness, whereas amongst the elderly, apathy and difficulties in thinking – disorientation and memory loss – are the most prominent signs. In extreme cases, some people might also experience physical symptoms and discomfort, for example insomnia, lower back pain, and migraines.

Now more than ever, depression is a serious problem for many of us. We're several months into the COVID-19 pandemic now, and many of us are feeling the emotional toll of the dramatic changes to our habits and lives, and the uncertainty and worry that comes with this. If isolation, economic uncertainty, anxiety, and the daily onslaught of bad news generated by the coronavirus pandemic are taking a heavy toll on your mood, you are not alone. The stress of everything brought about by the coronavirus, and the profound loss that many of us are feeling right now can trigger depression for the first time for many or exacerbate symptoms if you have already been diagnosed.

It is no surprise that loneliness and isolation can fuel depression, and therefore it makes it harder for many of us to cope without spiraling into a depressive episode. Human beings are social creatures, so by being cut off from our family, friends and loved ones, it can leave us feeling like we must face our problems alone, which can lead to anxiety and worries and concerns spiraling out of control. Since depression and anxiety are believed to stem from the same biological vulnerability, one can often lead to another.

It's an interesting statistic when you look at primitive societies and groups such as the Amish communities where depression is almost unknown. In these societies, each individual feels supported and it is also each individual's responsibility to rely on society so that they are supported which helps

them to deal with problems quickly. So when we look at the Western style technological societies, where social structures are not so tight, you see an increased pattern of family breakdown. We live in a society where there is more emphasis on the self and to put our own happiness first, there is not much commitment to other people or to social responsibilities which undermine relationship skills, social tolerance, family and social stability. Yet the happiest families are those where there is a commitment to the larger group. So, by focusing more on others and taking more responsibility for others could help to combat depression if you are currently living in a self-state.

Another interesting concept is that of our needs. We all have emotional needs and when these are not being met, can lead to distress. According to the human givens institute, our main needs include:

- ✦ A safe environment and security
- ✦ To give and receive attention
- ✦ To be given a sense of autonomy and to be able to make responsible choices which gives us a sense of control
- ✦ Being emotionally connected to others
- ✦ Feeling part of a wider community
- ✦ Friendship and intimacy and to know that at least one other person accepts us as we are
- ✦ Privacy and the opportunity to reflect and consolidate experience
- ✦ A sense of status within social groupings
- ✦ A sense of competence and achievement which enhances our self esteem
- ✦ Meaning and purpose—which come from being stretched in what we think and do.

Learned helplessness is a term used for the illusion of having no control and is the theory which occurs when someone repeatedly faces uncontrollable, stressful situations, then does not exercise control when it becomes available. They have “learned” that they are helpless in that situation and no longer try to change it, even when change is possible. Once a person having this experience discovers that they cannot control events around them, they lose motivation and can become depressed. Even if an opportunity arises that allows the person to alter their circumstances, they do not take any action. An example would be if a child witness’s abuse regularly amongst his or her parents, they grow up with the belief that abuse is meant to exist within relationships and so will either become the abuser or accept abuse from his or her partner, thinking that this is the way that relationships are meant to exist.

We all have an inbuilt need to make sense of our world and to explain to ourselves why things happen the way that they do. Attributional style refers to the way a person explains things to him or herself. This helps determines whether or not we will get depressed when bad things happen to us. The three most important variables which predict how likely people are to come for therapy, how successful the therapy will be and whether they will attempt suicide or not, include: how **personally** we take something, how much of our lives are affected and whether we believe something is going to be short lived or go on forever.

Depressed people tend to have high levels of physiological arousal and negative thinking, they may also suffer from insomnia and other sleep disorders, which include having disturbed REM sleep and so they wake up exhausted which is why they are unable to activate or to motivate themselves.

Dreaming is the means of discharging emotionally arousing introspections from the previous day that haven't been expressed. Emotional arousal reduces the brain's ability to think in more subtle and objective ways and automatically forces the brain into a reactive, black-and-white mode of thinking. What this means is if somebody had a pessimistic outlook on life, they will catastrophise their interpretations of life events and introspect excessively about these which places pressure on the dreaming process and distorts the REM sleep system causing autonomic arousal discharge which in turn leads to physical exhaustion and subsequent clinical depression.

All therapies that are effective at lifting depression actually help to break this cycle of destruction. Antidepressants reduce or normalize REM sleep and psychotherapies work to break the negative introspection cycle which helps the depressed individual to solve problems better and to engage with life again.

Unfortunately, depression does not affect one person. There are many cases which indicate that a depressive lifestyle also naturally affects the relationships that a depressed person is involved in. According to *Human Givens College*, the depressed person's family relationships are damaged in at least 50% of cases.

It would be wrong of us to encourage depressed people to look for the bad things that happened to them and to explore and open up their hurt feelings. They may feel some temporary relief but research shows that they are much more likely to stay depressed, and to have repeated bouts of depression, than if they are given a therapy that addresses the underlying psychological process. But it is not all doom and gloom; there is light at the end of the tunnel. There are a variety of treatments and numerous ways out there that can help you out of a depressive episode. For example, try to find new ways to engage with others. It is understandable that meeting people face to face is a difficult issue right now, but that does not mean you have to resign yourself to feeling isolated and alone. Social interaction is one of the best ways to treat depression, and even though nothing really beats the mood-boosting power of face-to-face contact, chatting over the phone, video calling, and texting can all still help you to feel connected during these difficult times.

Another treatment idea that doctors are encouraging, is to try and adopt new, healthy habits. For example, practicing relaxation techniques like meditation, breathing exercises and progressive muscle relaxation have proved successful in providing a welcome break from the cycle of negative thinking, as well as helping to relieve tension and anxiety. These techniques are all immensely effective in addressing negative dimensions of psychological stress.

Regular exercise and healthy eating can also adversely impact your mood by giving you a boost of energy. In fact, it is thought that regular exercise can be just as effective as antidepressant medication in relieving depression, as exercise can also alter your brain chemistry, by regulating key neurotransmitters like serotonin. Interestingly, it is thought that exercise primes the brain to show less stress in response to new stimuli.

Of course, there are also many non-natural ways and methods of treatment when dealing with depression, for example medication like antidepressants. Antidepressants are a type of medication

used to treat clinical depression - generally only moderate or extreme types - and they work by increasing levels of chemicals in the brain called neurotransmitters. But according to the *Human Givens College*, it is important to consider low-intensity psychosocial interventions before resorting to these types of drug treatment. For example, individual guided self-help based on the principles of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), computerized cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and a structured group physical activity programme. For those suffering with moderate or severe depression, a combination of anti-depressant medication and a high-intensity psychological intervention is likely to be most effective.

To break the cycle of depression, you can see that there are many things you can do. To start with, it is advised to try to reduce negative rumination, lower emotional arousal, challenge negative thinking, attempt to normalize sleep patterns, rehearse new behaviors, and try to build hope and self-esteem. If these do not work, perhaps try consulting your doctor; always get support from someone who can help you, as they can provide a new perspective on your situation.

Remember, you shouldn't feel guilty for feeling the way you do because depression is an illness like any other, it isn't any more self-centered than having a broken leg. People are always told to show themselves the same respect and concern that they would show for others. We are so accepting of other parts of our bodies breaking, why can't we be that way about our minds too?

It is about time that the world raises awareness of these mental health disorders like depression. Raising depression awareness can help defeat the stigma of the illness and can also help people suffering from it to reach out and get the help that they need to defeat it. When people who are depressed and having suicidal thoughts feel discriminated against or misunderstood, it can have deadly consequences. Looking after your mental health is equally, if not more important, than looking after your physical health. If you're struggling, remember, you're not alone. Despite what it may look like, many people are in the same boat; most people experience some mental health issues. Sharing your feelings and talking to others are some of the best coping methods. Try not to suppress your feelings or bottle them up; instead, try to get comfortable with expressing your emotions. It will help in the long run, I promise!

As this episode comes to an end, please do not forget to check out my book 'Victim2Victor' which is now available on audio, in which I have shared my journey of healing through travel, self-help and a determination to cast off my damaging past. It is my humble attempt to reach out to fellow survivors of abuse, and to impact the lives of those who feel helpless. I am sure it will help others to find themselves just as I did.

I also have a 12-week self-development plan course that is FREE and aims to guide you to find your higher self. I will add the link in the description below.

Please like the podcast and tag someone or share it with somebody you know, who is going through a similar situation or who needs help. I will be back with another podcast soon. Until then, take care and stay blessed my friends.

