

## Understanding and *Accepting* Depression –

Most people hate feeling depressed. They wish it would just go away. The key to start feeling better is to focus on how you treat yourself when you are depressed. It is important to understand how you may be rejecting yourself and your depressed feelings. Resisting depression, or anything else that you do not want for that matter, actually maintains it. Compassionate acceptance of one's feelings and ourselves, especially those parts of us that we do not like too much, allows us to grow as a person and to overcome the obstacles that often face us in our lifetime.

Consider this –

The state of depression may not be the problem....The process of depressing may be the problem.  
If you are depressed, ask yourself, “What am I depressing?”

When depressed—

You do not want to deny the experience nor do you want to indulge it.  
Each time you are depressed—stop and turn your attention inward. This might be scary, uncomfortable or unusual, but understanding what you are depressing and learning to accept this part of yourself may be just what you need to do to start feeling better.

Imagine that you are someone you have no reason to dislike. Pay attention to your feelings and begin to write them down. No analysis, just allow it to come out like a volcano. Spew it out. Express it in whatever way. Stay with yourself, this person you like, until you express everything you need to express. Go through all the feelings that arise until it seems like you get to the end of it.

Wait a minute! This sounds crazy to me. I'm depressing these things for a reason. What's the point? The point is when you do this kind of processing, you will begin to see patterns. You will begin to see the steps you take that lead to self-rejection and depression. You will notice your fears, assumptions, and conditioned reactions to circumstances. It may begin to become clear that depression is something you do, not some larger than life ogre to which you are a victim.

You can do this for yourself. Look deep inside for your courage. It is inside you mixed in with everything you are trying to dismiss, avoid, depress. You may notice that the first and last thing you encounter, when being present with yourself, is fear. We're often afraid of how we feel, afraid of who we are.

Make a list of the things you noticed you've been depressing or avoiding and discuss them with your counselor:

## Feel Better Fast Understanding and Accepting Depression

The only way we can know what is going on is to sit down with an open mind and pay attention. If we watch closely enough, we notice that there are sensations in our bodies that go with depression. They don't vary. They are the same every time. We have a labeling system that goes with those sensations. In this case, the label is depression.

With this label comes a learned response, the self-talk – everything we have been taught to believe about depression:

- What it is
- What it means
- What I am for feeling it
- What will happen as a result
- How the future will be

When that talk starts, we have an emotional reaction to it:

- I don't want this
- I'm afraid
- This is too painful
- Oh no, not this again

And then comes a conditioned behavior pattern which is usually avoidance/escape:

- I should skip class
- I've got to leave school
- I need a drink
- I want to break off my relationships
- I'm going to kill myself
- I can't function

This sequence of sensation, thought, emotion, and behavior pattern is going on inside you all the time. If we are willing to pay close enough attention, we may begin to notice that in depression:

- The sensations in our bodies don't vary
- The thoughts in our heads don't vary
- The emotional reactions don't vary
- The impulses toward certain behaviors don't vary

And the chain of events does not vary. One might look at depression as something we get addicted to. We know that it is not good for us and that we would be better off without it, but there is a payoff....our depression is actually protecting us from something that seems much too hard or too painful for us to address....so we continue to be depressed. Maybe this all makes sense to you or maybe you cannot relate to it at all but are willing to give anything a try. You might be saying, "I'm paying attention, so now what?"

Do what seems best right now! Do the thing that seems kindest, most caring, most compassionate, and continue to pay very close attention

## TRAIN AS IF YOUR HAIR IS ON FIRE

There is an expression in Zen: “Train as if your hair is on fire”

Now you may be thinking, this is sounding really weird now. What does this mean?

It means do not wait. Get immediately into the present moment and do what the moment requires. If your hair were on fire, it would not be helpful to panic and race around in all directions at once, nor would it be a good idea to take a nap. What would be helpful?

Get present, assess the situation, and then move as quickly as possible to the nearest source of help. Remember, you are looking inside yourself because you are trying to see what is wrong with you. You are looking inside to gain awareness, without judgment. What you find is not good/bad or right/wrong. You may have labeled it that way. You might have a feeling about what you find that is distasteful to you in some way. It is natural for this to happen. You may find it useful to continue to look inside anyway. It may seem too hard or too painful. You may need to seek others assistance as you delve into this emotional place. Eventually, these insights into your being can lead you away from suffering. Suffering happens when we depress what is going on inside ourselves, when we avoid those aspects of ourselves that we do not like. Awareness will help you move toward freedom from the process of depression. It will move you toward the process of well-being.

As you take this approach to depression, your life will begin to change. It will change for many reasons. It will change because someone is putting interested, kind, caring, supportive time and energy into you and that is what we want more than anything. As you start to be kind to yourself, you break the process of depressing.

Now it is time to make a list of at least ten ways you can be kind to yourself.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Next, make a promise to yourself. One that you will keep no matter what life throws at you. It is imperative that you begin to create a pattern of success for yourself. So choose your promise carefully. Make a promise to yourself that you will make being kind to yourself more of a priority. Now decide how you intend to do it.

My promise to myself: