

## Non-medical causes of depression?

Most of the people I work with experience some form of depression in their lives. A very basic question is to ask what positive purpose does depression serve? Depression causes a loss of energy, a tendency to give up on things, low self-esteem, loss of confidence, submissiveness, and a withdrawn irritability. In what ways has it been shown to be actually useful to behave in these ways? In what ways is depression an actual attempted solution to some problem? Here are some answers.

**Depression stops us from chasing rainbows.** It gets us to give up on pursuing something that we believe we cannot achieve. Becoming depressed becomes the solution to avoiding this disappointment. If you are feeling chronically depressed ask yourself what dream or ambition or hope have you felt you have had to give up on in life?

When the parent of a small infant leaves a child unattended for too long the child will typically will cry in protest. In most instances the parent will return to soothe the child. However, if the parent persistently ignores the child and does not return to soothe the child's agitation and protest, the child typically begins to become withdrawn in a depressed way. In attachment psychology this is called the despair state. This state is, in many instances, the early experience of depression. A withdrawn sense of helplessness. In adult life, most clients speak in ways that echo this uncomplicated but profound experience. People describe a sense of separateness from others and feeling disconnected. They describe a background sense of not feeling like they belong. Depressed people identify with the feeling of wanting to be involved with others yet at the same time feeling unlovable and unable to achieve this. So the anxious attachment of the child to the parent, this pervasive sense that one does not fit in or belong or that others do not understand, carries on into adulthood like a dream. So becoming depressed becomes the solution. **Depression is an understandable response to the pre-verbal sensation of being ignored or forgotten.**

Ironically, infants can also begin to feel depressed as a consequence of too much closeness. A child can feel trapped and weighed down by a parent that smothers them, or does not give the child enough space or distance. If this is chronic and unending it can cause a guilt laden stress for the child, which is also replayed in adult depression. **So becoming depressed is the solution to feeling trapped and smothered.**

Another cause of depression can be subordination. Research shows that animals, and people, who have been subordinated or dominated, have overactive stress systems that cause depression. If a child or adult is dominated and controlled it is in their interest to keep a low profile and avoid trouble because of the expectation of being put-down. The depressed person has been placed in what they feel are no-win situations. They feel they have no choice but to surrender. If you do suffer from depression you will often have that sense of having to do what you don't want to do. You can feel trapped even if there is no jailor locking you in. Like any low-ranking animal in a social group, the depressed person will often feel worthless or inferior and find it almost impossible to assert him/herself. Depressed people can all identify with that sense of needing to keep the head down and the eyes averted. **It is the physical and normal response to enforced subordination in early life.**

**Depression is often a state of defeat and is a solution to the problem of not wanting to be defeated again.** Knowing how to cope with defeats and set backs is a real challenge in life and some are better at it than others. We are more likely to be depressed by life's defeats if we have unrealistic standards, if we think that other people are better than us, if we pile self-criticism on top of defeat, if we feel trapped and impotent in pure relationships, if we lose sight of the positive in the future.

The feeling of entrapment is very common for depressed people. People can feel trapped in jobs, marriages, places, or physical bodies. This kind of experience of entrapment causes a chronic stress. Most depressed people will say they feel trapped and want to escape but feel they cannot. The important point in feeling trapped is that the flight/fight system is active which increases stress levels. **So depression is the solution to feeling trapped but thinking one is unable to escape.**

For all of these reasons it is often very hard for depressed people to know what they experience – is it stress, is it anxiety, is it depression, is it my relationship, is it life, is it me. What's wrong with me is often the question posed. These were some basic answers. However, they are not satisfying answers. Next week we will look at why these solutions, though psychologically understandable, are not adaptive.