

When Depression Hits Strike Back With Positive Action

NEWARK, Del. — Everyone has a bad day now and then, a discouraging day when nothing seems to go right. Most people bounce back from such down moods, but for others depression is an ongoing, self-destructive, downward spiral which becomes increasingly hard to overcome.

One of the world's oldest ailments, depression has been called the common cold of mental illness. Knowing its symptoms may help save a life — your own or someone else's.

Farmers and their families are as vulnerable as anyone to attacks of depression, says University of Delaware extension family specialist Dr. Patricia Tanner Nelson, especially during times of crisis. Feelings of hopelessness and despair are often triggered by some personal loss, such as divorce, death of a loved one, loss of a job or failure of a crop.

How can you tell if you or someone else is depressed? Symptoms vary with the individual, Nelson says. Some people have many, others only a few. Here are some of the indicators:

- Unhappy appearance — sad face, slow movements, unkept look;
- Guilt and low self-esteem — "It's my fault things aren't going right, I should be punished, I am a failure, Nobody cares about me";
- Less than normal activity — "Doing anything is too much effort";
- Difficulty concentrating;
- Withdrawal from other people;
- Stress-related physical problems — difficulty sleeping, weight loss or gain, decreased sexual interest, headaches;
- Suicidal thoughts — "I'd be better off dead; I wonder if it hurts to die."

People who have learned to cope with depression know that when they start to feel emotionally down it's time to take positive action.

"Depression is often relieved by participation in planned activities," the family specialist says. "When you're depressed, become involved in church functions, daily farm chores, Grange or other meetings — even if you don't feel like it. Get busy doing things you usually enjoy. Stay in touch with family and friends. Fight the physical slowdown of depression by exercising. Take a walk, jog, bowl. Exercise is a safe way to release the turbulent feelings that often accompany depression. Keep your energy level high by eating a balanced diet. Read self-help articles and books to understand

the emotions you're feeling."

Important as these efforts are, they may not always be enough to fight your way up from the depths of depression. At times you may need assistance.

"If you experience severe mood swings, feel your life is getting out of control, or are contemplating suicide, seek help," Nelson says. "Also seek help if you suspect your depression is related to other problems that require professional aid or think you would feel better if you talked with an experienced counselor. To find help, ask your doctor, a trusted nurse, your pastor or a close friend to recommend a good therapist. Or contact a mental health center, usually listed in the phone book under mental health services.

What if someone close to you is depressed? How can you help?

"Depressed people can be very difficult to be around," says Nelson. "Yet they need more than the usual amount of understanding and support from friends and family."

People who are depressed sometimes treat those close to them with disturbing anger and lack of concern. Because they feel unworthy, they may question the sincerity of others. Some withdraw to the point where it's virtually impossible to include them in activities that would help them feel happier or more hopeful.

Nelson says one of the best ways to help a depressed friend or relative is to simply be available. Let the person know you care and are concerned. Be a good listener. Don't pressure the person to "Snap out of it" or "Put on a happy face." Don't claim to know exactly how the person feels, but if you've had a similar experience consider sharing that. It might help. Urge the depressed person to seek professional counsel.

Be alert for hints or threats of suicide. If you think suicide is an immediate possibility, don't leave the person. Contact a mental health professional for help immediately.

Mild depression is common, and is usually of short duration. Chronic depression, on the other hand, feeds on itself, dragging down the sufferer. Once recognized, however, there are effective ways to combat it.

For a happier, more productive life, Nelson urges farmers and their families to be aware of the symptoms of depression and to take positive action against it.

Franklin Co. 4-H'ers Host New Yorkers

CHAMBERSBURG — Twenty six families in Franklin County hosted 4-H'ers from Canandaigua, N.Y., this week as part of a two-year exchange program.

Robert Kessler, Franklin County 4-H agent, said the 24 4-H'ers and three chaperones arrived from New York on Monday evening and were hosted at a covered dish supper. After a free day on Tuesday, the group visited Washington, D.C. Wednesday to learn more about our nation's Capital.

The group also enjoyed the rides


at Hershey Park, and many of the families visited the Amish area in Lancaster County. Saturday evening, the group will enjoy a chicken barbecue and covered dish supper and music by "Blue Jeans." The New Yorkers will visit the Battlefield at Gettysburg Sunday before returning home.

This is the second year of the two-year exchange program. Franklin County 4-H'ers visited the Canandaigua area last year to learn about their culture and how their 4-H program operates.

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