**Dealing with Depression**

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Discussing depression and its presenting symptoms has become a widely considered topic in recent months. This is due in part to an increase in the likelihood that you or someone you know is currently struggling with depression in light of the current global atmosphere during the pandemic and political unrest. According to a screening assessment conducted by Mental Health America, rates of depression in 2020 increased by 62% in comparison to depression rates in 2019 [4]. While minorities and youth seem to be among the most affected, depression knows no boundaries in regard to age or demographics [4]. One of the most concerning aspects from a mental health perspective is the stigmatization of depression as a moral weakness and the presumed etiology as a lack of faith. Alternatively, research suggests “there are many possible causes of depression, including faulty mood regulation by the brain, genetic vulnerability, stressful life events, medications, and medical problems” [2]. Depression can be defined as a “mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest…it affects how you feel, think and behave and can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems” [3]. When we consider the reasons one might experience depression, the notion of an underlying traumatic event as the source of an onset symptoms, often comes up as a probable cause. To conceptualize a traumatic event, it is important that we understand that trauma can be loosely thought of as any novel event or circumstance that effects are outside of our current coping capabilities. It is fair to say that COVID-19 catapulted us into a season where we are collectively navigating trauma. For people who have a predisposition to experience depression for the reasons listed above, it is understandable that we would see an increase in symptoms.

As you can imagine the suffering that coincides with depression is difficult, but there is always hope because it is held by Christ and tethered to a good and faithful God. There is no shortage of biblical examples where God shows us that this suffering befalls even the most faithful among us. David cries out to God exclaiming, “Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?” And before David skips a beat he answers the question for himself with a directive and direction, “Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (Psalm 43:5). This would be a sufficient example of what we can view as a situational depressive episode. The good news is that depressive symptoms tend to be transient, with studies showing that around 50% of episodes are resolved on their own without treatment in approximately 6 weeks [6]. As with most mental health issues, the severity of symptoms will ebb and flow, and tend to occur in tandem to life’s more stressful seasons. One might ask, but what about the times when your persistent low mood is not manageable and does not improve when life’s circumstances seem to let up? These are good questions and from a clinical standpoint it would be important to assess whether the frequency, duration and severity of your symptoms are affecting your job, your family life, school and/or relationships. If the answer is yes, it’s time to seek professional therapy. Here are some symptomatic red flags to be watching for in the form of a helpful mnemonic device (M SIG E CAPS):

M mood depressed

S sleep disturbance (insomnia or hypersomnia)

I interest loss (nothing brings pleasure)

G guilt (feelings of worthlessness)

E energy depleted (fatigue)

C concentration problems (indecisive)

A appetite disturbance (weight gain or loss)

P psychomotor change

S suicide preoccupation (thoughts of death) [1]

It is important to highlight the last symptom, which are suicidal thoughts. If you or someone you know is having suicidal thoughts this should always be taken seriously and help should be sought immediately.

As the church we have an opportunity to co-labor with Christ in our ability to help those who are suffering from mental health issues. This starts with the way we talk about it in our church meetings, bible studies and Sunday school classes. God can use us to create an atmosphere laden with empathy and genuine love and concern. The over-spiritualization of mental health issues is detrimental to the healing of those suffering. An example of this is telling someone with clinical anxiety that they just need to trust God more, or an individual who has depression being told that they are just discontent and have lost their joy. Another way we can, as the church, partner with those affected by mental illness is to “reinforce the grace of belonging (in Christ) to inspire change vs. spiritual fighting that creates more exhaustion” [5]. The enemy undoubtedly has a hand in the perpetuation of distorted thinking, however subtly relating depression to a lost fight with the enemy takes away from the victorious work that is done and finished on the cross. As we move through this year and the years ahead it is paramount that we extend grace and love like we never have before. Please do not hesitate to contact Hyde Park Counseling Center if you or a loved one may be facing depression. You are not alone and we are here to help you.

References

[1] Gross, Carey, MD. Creator of M SIG E CAPS mneumonic device

[2] Harvard Medical School. (2019, June 24th). *Harvard Health Publishing.* [*https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/what-causes-depression*](https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/what-causes-depression)

[3] Mayo Clinic (2018, February 3rd). Retrieved from: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/symptoms-causes/syc-20356007>

[4] Mental Health America (2021). *Retrieved from:* [*https://www.mhanational.org/issues/state-mental-health-america*](https://www.mhanational.org/issues/state-mental-health-america)

[5] Padilla, Joe. *What the Bible Says about Depression & Anxiety.* The Grace alliance. Retrieved from: <https://mentalhealthgracealliance.org/christian-mental-health-and-mental-illness/battling-anxiety-spiritually>

[6] Yarhouse, M., Butman, R., & McRay, B. (2005). *Modern psychopathologies: A comprehensive Christian appraisal.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press