

When depressed, it helps to:

- Exercise
- Be assertive, not passive
- Talk with someone who can help you problem-solve
- Focus on the positive
- Interrupt negative thoughts
- Learn and practice relaxation techniques



Depression



What is depression?

Depression is a disturbance in mood characterized by feelings of sadness, loneliness, worthlessness, hopelessness and guilt. Most people occasionally feel sad or blue. These feelings are usually brief and have minimal effects on everyday activities.

Some people experience these feelings at a deeper, more pervasive, more lasting level. Sometimes daily activities may become more difficult, but the individual can still cope. At other times the feelings of hopelessness may become so intense that the person experiences extreme fluctuations in mood or a desire for complete withdrawal from daily routine. The depression may become so severe that suicide may seem the only solution.

Managing the Challenges of College

TEXAS  STATE[®]
COUNSELING CENTER

Texas State University-San Marcos
601 University Drive
San Marcos, Texas 78666
LBJ Student Center
Room 5-4.1
512.245.2208
counselingcenter@txstate.edu
www.counseling.txstate.edu

www.txstate.edu

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Symptoms of Depression

Changes in Feelings and/or Perceptions

- persistent sad, anxious or empty mood
- feelings of hopelessness, helplessness or worthlessness
- frequent crying spells or, at the other extreme, lack of appropriate emotional responsiveness
- recurrent thoughts of suicide or death
- exaggerated sense of guilt or self-blame
- inability to find pleasure in anything
- loss of sexual desire
- loss of warm feelings toward family or friends

Changes in Behavior and Attitudes

- irritability, complaints about matters previously taken in stride
- dissatisfaction with life in general
- neglect of responsibilities and/or appearance
- lack of interest in previously pleasurable activities and withdrawal from others
- impaired memory, inability to concentrate, indecisiveness, confusion
- reduced ability to cope on a daily basis

Physical Complaints

- decreased appetite, often with undesired weight loss, or compulsive eating, often with undesired weight gain
- chronic fatigue and lack of energy
- insomnia, early morning wakefulness or excessive sleeping
- unexplained headaches, backaches or similar complaints
- digestive problems such as stomach pain, nausea, indigestion and/or change in bowel habits

Causes of Depression

Depression can be caused by personality, environmental or biochemical factors. Chemical imbalance in the brain plays a significant role in depression for some individuals. In such cases, medication may be necessary.

Situational depression can be caused by the death of a family member or friend, any loss of a relationship, change in financial status, health problems, loss of self-esteem or other changes. A person may be able to cope with these situations with help from family and friends.

However, if the depression is longstanding or if there is

no readily identifiable cause, it is necessary to identify and understand the underlying causes or stressors.

Helping Yourself

When you experience changes in mood or the intensity of negative feelings, try to identify possible sources of stress or depression. Examine your feelings in relation to situations that may be troubling you. These may include relationships with family or friends, financial responsibilities, academic or job responsibilities. You might also:

- Exercise to work off tension, improve digestion and help you relax.
- Interrupt negative, self-defeating thoughts and replace them with more positive thoughts.
- Reframe the way you think about certain topics rather than dwelling only on the negative.
- Avoid expectations of perfection for yourself and others.
- Talk with people who offer alternative options and help you problem-solve, not those who help you wallow in self-pity or try to rescue you.
- Learn progressive relaxation, meditation or biofeedback.
- Learn to be assertive rather than passive or aggressive.
- Clarify and prioritize your values.

Helping a Depressed Friend

A concerned friend can provide a valuable service to a depressed person. Sometimes it is helpful just to have someone listen to you. When providing a listening ear:

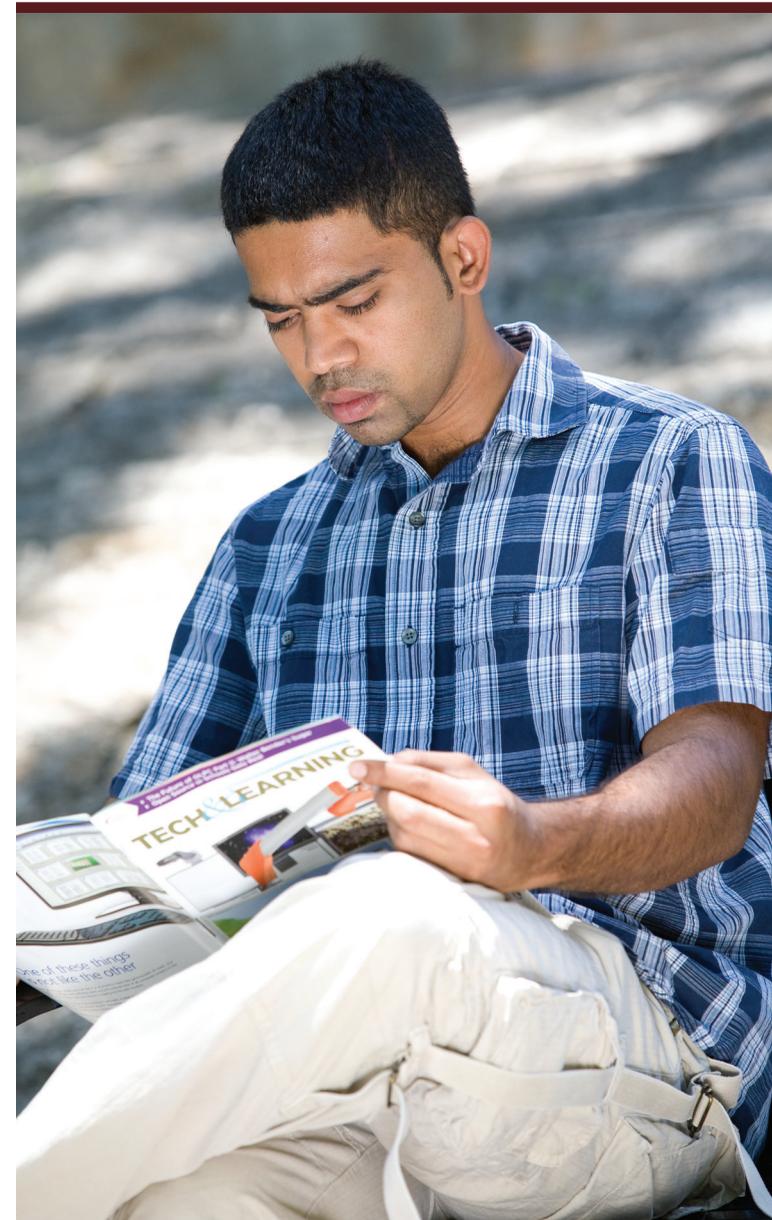
- Don't feel you have to solve all the problems; rather, help your friend find ways of coping.
- Don't try to cheer up the individual. This may give the message that the feelings of depression are not OK.
- Don't sympathize and claim that you feel the same way.
- Try not to get angry with the depressed person.
- Encourage the person to use some of techniques above.

If the feelings of depression are too intense or long lasting or if they seem to turn to thoughts of suicide, urge your friend to seek professional help. If your friend resists such a suggestion and you feel that suicide is likely, seek professional help yourself so you will know how to handle the situation and not have to deal with this crisis alone.

When to Seek Professional Help

Depression is treatable. A mental health professional or physician should be consulted when:

- pain or problems outweigh pleasures much of the time
- symptoms are so severe and persistent that day-to-day functioning is impaired
- stress seems so overwhelming that suicide seems to be a viable option



The Counseling Center Staff

Dr. Gregory Snodgrass

*Assistant Vice President
for Student Affairs
Director of Counseling Center*

Dr. Kathlyn Dailey

*Assistant Director,
Supervising Psychologist
Director of Training*

Ms. Mary Evelyn Grant

*Assistant Director,
Supervising Counselor*

Dr. Heather Aidala

Psychologist

Mr. Michael Beckham

Referral Specialist

Dr. Joseph Bosarge

Psychologist

Dr. Scott Janke

Supervising Psychologist

Dr. Pamela Moore

Supervising Psychologist

Dr. Israel Najera

Supervising Counselor

Dr. Joanne Salas

Psychologist

Ms. Blanca Sanchez-Navarro

Supervising Counselor

Ms. Amy Frisbie

Senior Administrative Assistant

Ms. Annie Kidd

Administrative Assistant

Ms. Roberta Ruiz

Administrative Assistant