

Managing Anxiety & Depression

If you have ever experienced a panic attack, or, an episode of clinical depression - you could hardly be faulted for wanting and seeking a final and everlasting "cure." Some people who experience these conditions never have a reoccurrence. For others, anxiety and depression are persistent intruders in their lives. Why the difference? Likely, genetics predispose some of us to anxiety or depressive reactions as a response to situational stressors in our life. But that does NOT mean any of us are entirely helpless. Depression and anxiety are most often *manageable*.

Powerlessness: Beliefs, Behaviors, & Feelings

A key component to anxiety and depression are feelings of powerlessness. Perhaps some life stressor or loss has temporarily overwhelmed or discouraged you. Or, perhaps over time you have developed ineffective cognitive habits - styles of thinking - that promote your giving up power. These "distorted beliefs" lead us to have "distorted feelings" and "distorted behaviors". For example:

Suzy Somebody held and reinforced over time the distorted **belief** that *"No one would be interested in someone like me."* This distorted and powerless belief led her to behave by isolating herself from others. Her isolative **behavior** and belief that no one was interested in her, led to predictable **feelings** of loneliness. Then, looking at how lonely she felt and isolated she behaved - she reinforced the powerless belief that, sure enough, "See there! I told you no one was interested in someone like me!" And the spiraling cycle of powerlessness was complete and reinforcing.

It is much easier change the way we think and behave than how we feel. The good news is, if we can change the way we think (correcting distorted thinking) and behave (powerless behaviors), then most often what we get is a resultant change in how we feel (for the better!). This is why *cognitive-behavioral therapy* is the treatment of choice for anxiety and depression and why empowering clients is so important.

People often think of depression or anxiety as a function of low self-esteem. Actually and more precisely, depression and anxiety are made worse by low *self-efficacy*. What is self-efficacy? *Self-efficacy is the belief that I have a sufficient measure of control and power over my life.*

Cognitive behavioral therapy is an important tool in identifying ways we might be lowering our sense of self-efficacy, giving up power and control, and thereby encountering depression and anxiety as a persistent companion in our lives.

Tools for Managing Depression & Anxiety

Fortunately, we have many tools at our disposal for managing anxiety and depression. These include:

- Medications that help treat the biological basis of depression.
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy - changing the way we think and behave in order to increase our self-efficacy.
- Building supportive social networks of friends and activities.
- Increasing self-care habits to help us weather the storms of life.

If you would like support in managing anxiety and depression, help is readily available. Contact your primary care physician or allied health professional who specializes in treatment of depression. And if we can be of assistance, let us know.