

## **Talking Back to Depression**

### **By Mel Schwartz**

Mental health statistics indicate that in any given year one out of five Americans will suffer from depression. Over one's lifetime, the odds are one out of three that you'll experience some depression. Depression is so commonplace we might just as well be talking about a cold or the flu. Although the medical establishment would have you believe that depression is genetically inherited, it would be more helpful to consider that if you grew up with a depressed parent or life circumstances which were bleak or overwhelming, the environmental influences upon you were simply depressing. Depression becomes a learned habit. The good news is that it's also a habit which can be unlearned.

Throughout history, melancholy or sadness was viewed as a normal experience in the life cycle. Loss, death and other life transitions brought on melancholy. To be sad and functioning at less than full speed didn't indicate that you were damaged or dysfunctional. Somewhere along the way, in our cultural rush toward pathologizing and medicating, we came to believe that depression is an illness, rather than a state of mind. Moreover, the clinical diagnosis of depression suggests that you're damaged. Sometimes life presents us with struggles that are depressing. A death, loss of job or a divorce are very challenging life stressors. Equating them with depression is making a statement that we're not able to cope. At times, it's in the labeling of people as depressed that we de-humanize one another. It's far easier to create a diagnosis than it is to have compassion and support for those in need.

At times, some of my clients speak of their battles with depression and indicate that they valiantly try to keep the depression at bay and ward it off. The thought that it's lurking out there, ready to assault, makes for a very powerful self-fulfilling prophecy. What would be helpful is to realize that our thought of depression gives it its power. If we reflected on our struggles in a non-pathological way, we wouldn't victimize ourselves. "I feel down or hopeless" is a vastly different thought than "I have depression and I'm not normal."

The distinction between, "I feel depressed" or "I suffer from depression" is vast. The former suggests that you are responsible for your feelings, while the latter makes you a victim. At times, life circumstances may be overwhelming, but the notion of depression is more a matter of how our thoughts instruct us. The habitual replay of negative or depressing thoughts induces a state of depression. The way through the haze is to come to understand that our thinking paints the canvas of our lives. It's challenging enough to deal with life's rough spots without creating a state of pathology for ourselves.

Thought creates our reality and it scripts the quality of our lives. If we come to see symptoms of depression as signals that we need to make adjustments rather than seeing ourselves as ill, we can usher in healthy change. Depression isn't a thing; it's an outlook or a perspective. As such, it is informed by our thoughts and beliefs. Although the filter of depression colors our world, learning to change the filter permits the depression to

lift. Therein lies the solution. Coming into a greater awareness of how our thinking instructs our experience provides the pathway to disarm depression.

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Mel Schwartz is a visionary psychotherapist, thinker and author who earned his graduate degree from Columbia University. He has been a keynote speaker at Yale University. Mel is the author of *The Art of Intimacy*, *The Pleasure of Passion* and is currently writing, *Emergent Thinking*®. He is the founder of the *Emergent Thinking*® Process. He is in private practice in Westport, CT. and Mt. Kisco, NY. Visit his web site at [www.MelSchwartz.com](http://www.MelSchwartz.com).