

# Understanding Depression & Anxiety

Tutor's Handbook



# What are depression and anxiety and how to overcome them?

## Two Faces Of The Same Coin

Depression and anxiety are two very common mental health conditions that often come in pair – being depressed makes us anxious, and anxiety makes us depressed. Symptoms of these two disorders have a great deal of overlap, that's why it is sometimes difficult to clearly state which one we are suffering from. While the two have a lot in common, they are in fact separate conditions.

**In general anxiety is described as a tendency to have overwhelming worried thoughts about what could happen in the future.** Most often a person suffering from anxiety is not able to tell the reason or cause of these thoughts – they just appear and don't go away. Anxiety causes you to constantly feel that something wrong is going to happen and you are not able to prevent or stop it.

**Depression on the other hand, is more a feeling of sadness about the future. People who suffer from depression often seem as if they stopped believing that positive things can happen in the future, and they struggle to see the reason to even try to prevent threats.** Depression is connected with significant decrease of mood and interest that leads to low level of energy and unwillingness to undertake any form of activity – even as

simple as getting up from bed and getting dressed at the morning.



## Where Do Depression And Anxiety Come From?

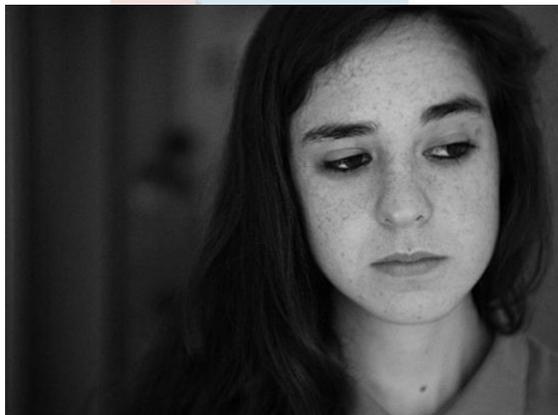
Although, we know quite a lot about the symptoms and strategies for treatment of depression and anxiety, the causes of these mental health disorders are not always clear and easy to understand.

Both depression and anxiety might be triggered by **difficult life experiences or prolonged exposure to negative environmental factors such as violence, poverty, abuse or severe neglect.** But, why then not everyone who faces challenges in life suffers from depression or anxiety at one point? Or why do people who never faced any of these experiences have problems with their mental health?

The truth is, the roots of these conditions runs much deeper, as they can depend on

our personality - it is proven that **certain character traits such as pessimism, low self-esteem, poor decision making, poor problem solving skills or strong self-criticism** make you more likely to suffer from depression or anxiety. These disorders can also depend on **your body's biochemical balance or gens.**

Experiencing ups and downs is a natural part of life. But if negative symptoms affect you longer than two weeks it's time for your internal warning sign to light up red!



## Many Shades Of Depression And Anxiety

Depression and anxiety may take many different shapes and sizes. Of course, they may affect anyone and at any age, but it has been found that probability to suffer from any of those disorders depends on your sex and age. It is proved that **women are more likely to suffer from depression or/and anxiety than men, and young people at their teens and mid-twenties are the most endangered group.**

What's more, the symptoms for young and older people as well as for women and men might differ. These mental disorders often manifest themselves in men as tiredness, anger, irritability, sudden abuse of drugs or alcohol and reckless behaviour. On the other hand, depressed or anxious women more often show sadness, feeling of worthlessness or overwhelming guilt. Teens and young people might suffer from anxiety or panic attacks while separated from parents or entering new environment. They tend to be easily irritable, sulky and refusing towards their responsibilities such as school or chores. Older people tend to manifest low moods and attitude of resignation.

## Strategies To Deal With Depression And Anxiety

Although depression and anxiety are serious mental health disorders that may strongly affect your well-being, the good news is they are both fully treatable. **It is said, that over 90% of patients eventually positively responds to the therapy and gain at least partial relief from symptoms.**

A first step in dealing with these conditions should be to search for help from professionals, as diagnostic evaluation, interview and examination are essential in order to identify possible causes of the illness and plan a course of actions. Medical strategies for dealing with

depression and anxiety include drug treatment and range of behavioural and psychotherapy support. Medical approach to deal with depression and anxiety is just one of possible strategies and it works best when supported by self-care.

One of the most important things you can do while dealing with depression and anxiety is to **practice regular physical activity** - it is proven that regular exercises boost your mood, improve your self esteem and confidence. If you struggle with lack of motivation it is worth joining a group or inviting your friends to join you.

Another important self-care strategy is **maintaining positive eating habits**. Sticking to regular eating hours, reducing sugar and unhealthy fats and replacing them with more vegetables and fruits are proven to benefit your energy, mood and coping with stress mechanism. In addition, **regulating your sleeping habits** may help you achieve even better outcome.

Another effective strategy is to **practice meditation and other relaxation or breathing techniques as improving your stress control can give great effects**. Even few minutes of regular breathing exercises every day can ease your anxiety and help reduce stress. It can be also helpful to **reflect on aspect of your behaviour that decrease your activity and try to improve them**.

## How To Use This Resource In Your Work With Local Group?

Use the information presented in this handbook and presentation on *understanding depression & anxiety* to:

- Explain to the members of your local working group what is depression and anxiety and what are their symptoms.
- Explain that depression and anxiety are separate conditions and may require diversified treatment.
- Present risk factors of depression and anxiety and give members of your local group tips on what they can do in order to overcome depression and anxiety or support someone who suffers from these disorders.

### Group Activity

Once you share with members of your local working group the video and presentation on *Understanding Depression & Anxiety*, encourage them to take short *Depression and Anxiety Level Test* that will help them to evaluate their current level of psychological stress and possibility of depression or anxiety. This test is not a medical tool and shouldn't be used to diagnose any mental disorder but can serve as a useful tool to indicate whether your mental health might be in danger of depression or anxiety.



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Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
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Project Number: 2018-1-UK01-KA204-048095