

The Counselor's Corner

"Depression"

If you have ever suffered from depression, you know how much confusion there is about this topic. One of the greatest misnomers is that depression is caused by something, and, if we are able to figure out that something- **POOF**- the depression is gone. Family members and friends are always asking what is causing the sadness and telling depressed individuals to look at all the things in their lives that are going right. The hope seems to be that if you build a big enough list, the depressed individual will surely see the light.

Grief, sadness, and depression are not the same, but people mix them up. Grief and sadness resolve themselves over a period of time, and they are attached to an unpleasant life event. On the other hand, there seems to be no apparent cause for depression. Depression can be triggered by an event, but it is complex and far more serious. It is disabling, and it can lead to a terrible outcome.

Andrew Soloman, author of *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression*, shared some of his observations in a video. His own depression began in 1994. Activities that are normal for most people became insurmountable for him. He said "the opposite of depression is not happiness, but vitality...." He said everything was overwhelming, even the simplest of tasks like showering, returning phone calls, and eating lunch. He viewed each as a chore made up of several, energy-expending tasks that were impossible for him to start. He had no interest in life or any of its components. He had met people who retreated to their beds and covered their heads with blankets, because tasks like these were "burdensome" and "exhausting". Others seem so fixated on "existential questions," that they neglected the here and now. Luckily, Andrew faced his depression, shared his immobility with his father, and Andrew received therapy and medication. Andrew's case is severe, and therapy and medication are ongoing. However, he actually enjoys life and no longer feels sad over routine activities.

Some people choose to ignore depression, thinking it will just go away. Some feel acknowledging depression is weak. Instead, Mr. Soloman points out that depression is a "genetic vulnerability". Further, it is far more common than we think. He found so many people willing to share the impact of depression on their lives, once he shared his. If we do not address depression, Mr. Soloman says we will be "enslaved". The sooner we deal with it, the better. So, if you are finding that your life has lost its zest and vitality for no apparent reason, take the first step: see a doctor. Something is wrong. Perhaps it is depression; perhaps it is not. However, a medical professional will be able to help you discover a way to live a fuller life with more joy.

Diane L. Rivard