



Health

KAUAI BUSINESS REPORT

Emotional constipation: a recipe for depression

It is normal to feel sad or angry over certain life events: the loss of a job, the diagnosis of an illness, estrangement from a close friend or family member, or the accumulation of chronic losses, such as the loss of childhood due to trauma or abuse. It is even normal to have feelings of sadness or anger associated with events that are mostly joyful, such as a wedding, graduation, or the birth of a child. In response to these stressors, perhaps a tear or two is shed, but you try to move on. You try to get over it, to put it behind you.

Your friends may give you advice: "You are better off without him." "She is in a better place." "Look on the bright side." "You should be happy." "Stop feeling sorry for yourself." "You have to move on." You wish it were

that easy. After all, no one would choose to feel so bad. You want to feel better, so you try to stop thinking about it, push it down, distract yourself, or drink it away.

Weeks go by, but you can't seem to shake it. You begin thinking, "There must be something wrong with me." You try to keep it together, but burst into tears during a movie, or at the mall, or while listening to a song on the radio. You have trouble sleeping as thoughts and images keep circling through your mind. Trying to put on a happy face saps your energy. It makes you irritable and short-tempered. You start to avoid people because you don't want to hurt them, bring them down, or burden them with your problems. Seeing others smile or laugh makes you hurt even more.

You hate whom you are becoming. Your concentration at work diminishes and you start to call in sick, perhaps staying in bed much of the day. You stop exercising and gain weight. Perhaps you start drinking a bit more than you should. You begin to think that you might actually deserve to feel bad. You may even begin to wonder if you would be better off dead.

You are no longer just sad; you are now depressed.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, up to 12% of men and 25% of women suffer from a major depressive disorder at some time in their lives, severely limiting their ability to perform in their roles at work, home or in the community. Depression is more than just feeling sad. For many, depression arises when people are

emotionally constipated; when they do not give themselves permission to experience and express difficult feelings, resulting in a vicious downward spiral.

In a culture where we are taught to bite our tongue, keep a stiff upper lip, suck it up, be a man and don't cry, or be a lady and don't be angry, it is no wonder many of us get weighed down with a heavy load of unexpressed emotions and unspoken words. This heavy load burdens us and over time can lead to a depressive episode.

But sadness, grief and anger were not meant to build up and burden us. They were meant to move through us, like waves through the ocean. We are born knowing exactly how to do this. Until we are taught otherwise, we are experts in expressing our feelings. Children

cry when they are sad. In fact, they cry with all their might until there are no more tears to be shed.

When they are angry, they lie on the floor and scream and thrash around. When they are finished, they pick themselves up and move on. Certainly, children need to be

YOU'RE NOT ALONE



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taught there are appropriate ways and an appropriate time and place for expressions of sadness and anger, but they are often instructed to "Stop it!" They are told to "Grow up," "Stop crying before I give you something to cry about" or "Don't get mad."

Research has shown that recovering from depression involves changing behaviors, challenging erroneous beliefs, and in some cases taking medication. All of these methods are helpful. However, to prevent depression, we must also learn to acknowledge and express our emotions in safe and appropriate ways, rather than try to pretend they do not exist. We can begin to do this by journaling, having a good cry, or having an honest talk with a trusted friend, mentor, clergy member or psychotherapist. Regardless of how we go about doing it, we must give ourselves permission to express our anger, sadness and grief in appropriate ways. Until we clean out our burdened hearts, we will have little room for joy, wonder, passion and peace.

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