

# Blues can be beaten

Depression is no longer a word to be avoided and hidden like a shameful secret. That is good, but the next step is to look at the importance of the link between relationships and good mental health.

We need to draw a distinction between clinical depression, which requires medical intervention, and our common use of the word “depression” as a blanket term for sadness and the blues.

It's the latter that we choose to deal with here.

Life involves times when we feel depressed – life looks grey; the sunshine has gone out of it. But there are things you can do to combat the feeling.

For many, depression cuts in when we feel isolated or lacking something in our lives. That can often be the lack of a meaningful relationship. This doesn't mean you need always to have an intimate relationship on the boil, but you do need to feel connected to the world around you and be able to concentrate on something other than yourself.

Isolation is one of the biggest aspects of feeling blue, so the need to look outside yourself is important. It has been well documented that single people don't live as long as happily married people, and that single men tend to do worse than married men – which might prompt married women of a mature vintage to mutter something about good cooking and home comforts.

Happy relationships do contribute to good mental health, but they may not be human-to-human relationships. Having a much loved pet is also a valid relationship, and gives people something outside themselves on which to concentrate, care for and interact with.

At the heart of the kind of depression we are talking about is unfulfilled desire and the lack of a sense of belonging. Having someone extend a hand of friendship can often go a long way to alleviating feelings of isolation.

Having someone reach out to you is a huge help when you feel at the bottom of a black hole. It can stop a slide into depression. Many people who reach out through volunteer work comment that they get as much out of it as they give.

Teaching our children the importance of good mental health and how to maintain it by staying connected to people is an important element in helping them to cope with life's troubles.

## Survival tips

- **Maintaining good relationships is a key to good mental health**
- **Feeling connected to others can help stop a slide into depression**
- **Small gestures of friendship can have powerfully good effects**
- **Teach your children how to maintain good mental health.**