

Signs and Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety

A GUIDE FOR ADULTS

Written & Provided by
The Ecumenical Center

All of us are subject to the stresses of daily life and personal relationships, and different people react differently. As members of a community, you are with your friends and neighbors both in times of celebration and in times of emotional need—and your help is valuable. But sometimes it is hard to tell when a friend or relative has reached a level of anxiety or depression that calls for clinical counseling or medical help. This booklet is designed to help you learn what to look for and what to say to the person you're concerned about.

Care for Yourself

so you can care for others.

First things first. Everyone is busy with their job and family. It is easy to give so much to others that you deplete your own resources. Don't let that happen. Remember that you're human and you deserve the same love and care you give your family and friends. So take care of your own body, mind, and spirit. Meanwhile, follow these suggestions to protect your own mental health.

- **Don't take situations so personally** – it's hard, but try.
- **Stay aware of your emotions** – they can teach and motivate you, so don't dismiss them!
- **Take time to be creative** – write, sing, paint, do puzzles, send your soul a message that it's valuable.
- **Get adequate rest** – you need it.
- **Count your blessings** – keep a gratitude journal.
- **Don't try to please everyone** – it can't be done.
- **Practice saying “no” to requests** – listen to your internal voice.

What to know about Anxiety.

Be alert for people whose anxiety level seems out of proportion to the daily stress they encounter.

How to recognize signs of anxiety.

Common symptoms and signs of anxiety disorders include:

- Feelings of panic, fear, and uneasiness.
- Problems falling asleep or staying asleep.
- Heart palpitations and/or shortness of breath.
- Restlessness, inability to be still and calm.
- Nausea.
- Muscle tension.
- Feelings of foreboding or dread.

Some anxiety disorders involve panic attacks.

Symptoms include:

- “Racing” heart and/or chest pains, as if there is a tight band around one’s chest.
- Sense of terror or sense that one might die or have a heart attack.
- Difficulty breathing.
- “Tunnel vision.”
- Feeling dizzy, faint or weak.
- Sweating or having the chills.
- Feeling out of control or a loss of control.

How to talk to people about anxiety.

Anxiety disorders can disrupt peoples' relationships and ability to work or participate in daily activity. So offer encouraging words:

1. **“Talk to an expert.”** Ask friends for recommendations of counselors and keep a list of trusted counselors and psychiatrists to recommend to friends who might need treatment.
2. **“Try calming techniques.”** Learn calming techniques, breathing exercises, or other ways of centering during anxiety that you can use or share.
3. **Learn more about anxiety and the triggers for people.**

What to know about Depression.

Learn to differentiate between people simply struggling with stress and those who may be experiencing depression.

How to recognize signs of depression.


Common signs and symptoms of depression include:

- Feeling sad or empty most of the day, most days of the week. This could also include irritability.
- Lack of interest or pleasure in most activities of the day.
- Changes in weight and appetite – either increased appetite and weight gain or decreased appetite and weight loss.
- Changes in sleep – insomnia or sleeping more than usual and feeling fatigued.
- Feeling restless, or worthless, or excessively guilty nearly every day.
- Recurrent thoughts of death (e.g., “I think my family would be better off if I were just gone”), thinking about suicide without having a plan, attempting suicide or having a specific plan for committing suicide.
- Loss of energy and/or motivation.
- Interpersonal withdrawal.
- Decreased or a total lack of concentration.

How to talk to people about depression.

Here are some suggestions for what to say and do when working with individuals who are experiencing symptoms of depression:

- 1. “Let me ask you some questions.”** Use the symptoms of depression noted here to assess levels of distress.
- 2. “Do you think a counselor might help?”** Ask the person’s opinion and feelings before you recommend speaking to a counselor.
- 3. Give them some information.** Even if the individual is initially reluctant to seek treatment, you can still provide facts about depression—plus names and numbers of counselors you know and trust.
- 4. “Let me help,” or “Let me send you to someone.”** Know your limitations when interacting with individuals who may have a serious mental disorder such as depression.
- 5. Encourage good health habits.** Talk about eating healthy, sleeping enough at night, and limiting alcohol, tobacco, and drug use.
- 6. Don’t downplay the problem.** Do not minimize their emotional distress.
- 7. Trust therapy to work.** Know — and mention to family and friends — that 80% of individuals who seek therapy for personal problems or psychological disorders report improvement and find psychotherapy to be very helpful.



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