

# My Journey Through Depression and the Importance of Support

*After facing 8 hours of ABE interviews, I hit a place that no one knew, a place I had never experienced before, and didn't appear to meet the threshold for any support. I had no idea how to come out of the darkness. As I feared the societal stigma surrounding the condition, the change for me was someone reminding me just how far I had come and what I had achieved despite all I was living through.*

*But I had my son to fight for, and although some days I continue to struggle, I now can recognise the difference between PTSD and depression. Although closely linked, on the days my past does not trigger me, the symptoms don't occur.*

*My drive has always been to understand the theory, but it became evident during the most challenging days that I was wearing a mask and couldn't bring myself to discuss my feelings. The consequences of post-separation abuse were profound. Because I wasn't able to access the level of support I required due to having no mental health history, I began my journey into the psychology and neuroscience of mental health.*

*Although that did teach me so much theory, the one presiding factor that pulled me out and helped with my mental well-being was my children and my patients. Knowing I never want anyone to feel the way I did, so trapped and fearing others' opinions and the societal stigma attached to mental health, has been a driving force for me.*

*Thirty-four years of never having needed support, and I can say that it has been the most challenging 12 months I have ever faced.*

## **Reflecting on the Diagnosis Pathways**

*Looking back at the diagnosis pathways 12 months on, I see very few symptoms I once felt. Like many others, I could have ticked so many boxes when I was desperate for support. Although I know there are hard days when things can become too much, that's situational. I can see and recognise the signs after exposure to a trigger and can preempt the fall, ensuring the coping strategies I need are in place to see me through.*

*The impacts of post-separation abuse and PTSD have an everlasting impact. I hope the world can become a kinder place.*

## **Understanding Depression: Signs, Symptoms, and Diagnosis**

*Depression is a complex mental health condition that affects millions of people worldwide. Recognising the signs and symptoms, understanding the diagnosis*

*pathways, and knowing how to seek help are crucial steps in managing and overcoming depression.*

## **Signs and Symptoms of Depression**

*Depression manifests in various ways, and its symptoms can range from mild to severe. Here are the key signs and symptoms to look out for:*

### **Main Symptoms (DSM-5 and ICD-11):**

- **Low Mood:** Persistent sadness or feeling down.
- **Loss of Interest or Pleasure:** Lack of interest in activities once enjoyed.
- **Reduced Energy:** Feeling fatigued or lacking energy.

### **Supplementary Symptoms (DSM-5):**

- **Change in Sleep Pattern:** Insomnia or excessive sleeping.
- **Change in Appetite or Weight:** Significant weight loss or gain.
- **Reduced Energy or Tiredness:** Persistent fatigue.
- **Poor Concentration or Forgetfulness:** Difficulty focusing or making decisions.
- **Feelings of Guilt or Worthlessness:** Excessive guilt or self-blame.
- **Agitation or Retardation:** Restlessness or slowed movements.
- **Suicidal Ideas:** Thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

### **Supplementary Symptoms (ICD-11):**

- **Loss of Self-Esteem:** Feeling worthless or inadequate.
- **Guilt:** Excessive feelings of guilt.
- **Suicidal Thoughts:** Thoughts of self-harm or suicide.
- **Reduced Concentration:** Difficulty focusing or making decisions.
- **Agitation or Retardation:** Restlessness or slowed movements.
- **Sleep Disturbance:** Insomnia or excessive sleeping.
- **Appetite Disturbance:** Significant weight loss or gain.

## **Diagnosis Pathway**

*Diagnosing depression involves a thorough evaluation by a healthcare professional. The two central diagnostic systems used are the DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) and the ICD-11 (International Classification of Diseases).*

### **DSM-5 Diagnosis of Major Depression:**

- At least one main symptom (low mood or loss of interest/pleasure) for at least 2 weeks.
- At least four supplementary symptoms.

### **ICD-11 Diagnosis of a Depressive Episode:**

- At least two main symptoms (low mood, reduced energy, diminished interest) for at least 2 weeks.
- At least two supplementary symptoms.

### **Severity of Depression**

#### **Mild Depression:**

- **ICD-11:** Two main and no more than two supplementary symptoms.
- **DSM-5:** One primary and no more than four supplementary symptoms. Normal function is possible with effort.

#### **Moderate Depression:**

- **ICD-11:** Three main and more than two supplementary symptoms.
- **DSM-5:** Two main and more than four supplementary symptoms. Normal function is affected.

#### **Severe Depression:**

- **Both Systems:** Most symptoms present, with minimal function.

### **Addressing Suicide Risk**

*The stigma and guilt associated with suicide highlight the importance of a non-judgmental approach to risk assessment. It may be helpful to normalise the fact that many people experience thoughts of self-harm and suicide when faced with significant life stressors.*

Consider suicide risk in four related dimensions:

1. **Intent:** Does the person want to end their life?
2. **Plans:** Has the person made any specific plans for suicide?
3. **Actions:** Has the person taken any steps towards carrying out their plan?
4. **Prevention:** What factors prevent the person from completing their plan?

### **Screening for Suicide Risk**

*The P4 screener is a validated tool used to assess a person's suicide risk. It provides a classification of minimal, lower, and higher risk based on responses to these four questions:*

1. Has the person made any past suicide attempts?
2. Does the person have a suicide plan?
3. What is the probability of the person being able to complete the suicide plan?
4. What preventive factors are stopping the person from completing the suicide plan?

### **Conclusion**

*Understanding the signs and symptoms of depression, the pathways to diagnosis, and the importance of addressing suicide risk are crucial steps in supporting those affected by this condition. If you or someone you know is struggling with depression, seek professional help and support. Remember, you are not alone; resources are available to help you through this challenging time.*