

HOW TO COPE WITH YOUR NEGATIVE FEELINGS



ASIF AYON

The self-conscious mind is not a comfortable place for most people. Negative feelings have a tendency of overwhelming the positivity we try holding on to dearly. Our emotions at often times, feel cumbersome to us when all we're trying to do, is get through school, university or make an impression at workplace. While emotions and how we feel about the ones which are stigmatised vary from person to person, one thing a lot of us have in common is that we don't deal with them or just don't know how to.

With this in mind, I reached out to renowned psychologist, Dr. Mehtab Khanam, wanting to unravel what's at the root of our emotional ignorance.

WHY DO PEOPLE IGNORE DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY?

We have a habit of muddling up stress, anxiety, depression under one category which makes it harder for us to know what the right approach to our own minds would be. Depression is set off by memories and unconscious decisions made in the past. While over-thinking about the future triggers anxiety. Most people don't understand what's affecting them and are even conditioned to not ask for a second opinion either, because they've been given verbal and non-verbal messages by society to suppress the emotions which are bothering them or affecting them negatively. It starts from childhood when we are told to be strong and to not dwell on it. "Be strong" - preached to boys makes shutting off emotionally the logical approach to their issues. Even if someone is in need of emotional support, our friends and family often don't know how to be empathetic. Our emotions and thoughts end up feeling miniscule compared to everything because that is the message we've received time and time again. "It's going to be alright", "Life goes on" etc. have made us build walls around our emotions and in turn, shaped the walls we build around our loved ones as well. The most common case of this is the average couple's therapy where the wives talk about

their husbands and their inability to understand what's bothering their partners while the husbands themselves fail to open up during sessions.

HOW CAN LOVED ONES APPROACH US ABOUT OUR EMOTIONS?

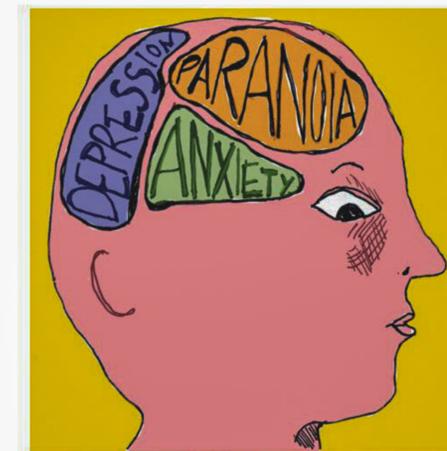
Emotions can be tricky. Emotional stress can be quite difficult to interpret because every person feels, perceives and reacts to issues differently. In times of distress, someone might require undivided attention, while another might need a respectable space for them to feel better again. It is important to understand that in a sensitive state, it is hard to open up. So it's important to let someone who is suffering know that we are there for them, however they need us - be it as a shoulder to cry on or someone to talk to or simply someone to go shopping with. It's unwise to force advices on them. Everyone copes in their own way.

HOW DO WE GO ABOUT APPROACHING OUR OWN EMOTIONS?

In order for us to approach our own selves, we have to be emotionally intelligent and fearless of the stigmas attached with being emotional. We don't spend enough time trying to understand our own emotions but it can be achieved through reading and other mediums which can enrich us emotionally. I've found people in bookshops looking at books on self-help and psychology, some never buying them, but turning the pages to read a little. These books can be a medium through which you can help yourself. Everyone should have emotional intelligence and have a good grasp on how his/her own psyche works. Knowing one's own emotions and the thoughts attached to them should be considered as a necessity to maintain a healthy life. It will make taking help or advice a less tedious task.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT A LOT OF PEOPLE DON'T SHINE A BIG LIGHT ON THEIR OWN DISTRESS BECAUSE THEIR EMOTIONS WILL END UP BEING STIGMATISED AND DISREGARDED?

A very common attitude we have towards negative feelings and emotions is one of sheer disregard. We go



to our friends in hopes for support and understanding but more often than not, they end up making us feel even more reclusive. We hear things like, "Don't worry about it", "It'll pass, just forget about it" and such which instead of making us feel better, make us shy away from opening up even further. And there are even times we refer to people who are having difficulty within their mental frame with derogatory terms and phrases. We label the distressed and anxious as "crazy", "downer", and other words which hold no merit in their healing process. All anyone ever wants in times of need is empathy and encouragement. That has become difficult to come by because we feel that the people around us lack the understanding and respect for our emotions which conditions us into shutting ourselves off even further.

HOW DO WE START THE PROCESS OF COPING WITH NEGATIVE EMOTIONS?

The first hurdle is the inability to open up and properly identify what it is that is taking a toll on our mental health. We have to learn to be honest about our emo-

tions, to ourselves and to others. Bottling up our negative energy only leads to fits of rage, mental breakdowns and tantrum. A good place to start would be to remember the times when we burst out in the past and think about the thoughts we were having at the time, analyse it logically and intelligently and ponder how we should've acted upon them. Emotional intelligence is the key to sound mental health, which is achievable through reading and through understanding other people's negative feelings better. Communication is the key to getting over our depressive hurdles. Our general outlook should not be one of disregard but of taking and offering help. We need to be empathetic, compassionate. As human beings, we go through our own forms of sadness and negativity and as practitioners we absorb our clients' words and sadness and help them find a way to cope. That should be the general outlook of society on negative emotions. Our family, friends and acquaintances possess the ability to be just as comforting to an emotionally conflicted and burdened person provided that they too, are all for helping us and comforting us. The general outlook on negative emotions needs an overhaul. Everyone goes through negative emotions but trudging along with it will only worsen the condition in the long run.

Emotions as burdening as they can be, should not be romanticised or stigmatised. It is estimated that depression will be the second leading cause of global disability by 2020 while it is expected to be the largest contributor to diseases by 2030. We don't have to look that far ahead. We do need to understand that if our attitudes towards negative emotions don't change on collective and individual levels, then we're only forcing ourselves into a cave of nothingness. Even if one wishes to go on with the burden of negative energies, one must choose to do so with poise and intellect, because self reflection only brings about a better understanding of your own emotions and of others' as well.

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