

Depression—Ugh!

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Depression—how depressing! I don't know too many people who like being depressed, but it is a fact of life for millions. I thought about writing a more clinical article about depression, but that depressed me, so I thought I would hit it from a more philosophical approach.

If I were to plant a garden with the purpose of growing strong and healthy depression plants, I would use a quality seed called judgment, plant it in the hole of helplessness, fertilize it with blame, and give it a daily watering of criticism. In due time I would have a superb crop of the greatest depression plants on the market.

Zoloft, Paxil, and Prozac may be the most popular sources of treatment for depression, but what about the remedy we call family? I think since the family fosters most depression, it can also be the best form of treatment. Here is how it works.

When we get married we are like two projectors that are trying to show their movie at the same time. The film has all the footage of what life was like with our parents, siblings, and relatives, which also included their film footage of their families. So, when we marry, these films are always rolling on the screen at the same time. It is a wonder we are able to concentrate at all on the screen with all these overlapping images vying for attention

With a lot of our families having more than one marriage, just think of the possibilities for a confusing night at the family theater. If you are wondering where this is going, bear with me.

We somehow grow up with the belief that we were born to be special and unique, to have our own personality. The problem is that personality doesn't always fit into the expectations of what others in the family expect us to be. I call this the family projection process.

The family projection process means that we want our spouse or children to be what we wish they would be, and to make up for what we lack, rather than being truly themselves –whatever that looks like. If they were what we wished for, then the movie would be a lot easier to watch.

Consequently, we get judged about our failure to live up to their expectations and fulfill their needs. Along with judgment comes the daily watering of criticism that is meant to redirect our efforts, and the fertilizer of blame when something goes wrong in order for them to take the heat off us. Then, we start doing the same thing and the cycle goes on.

This can get really crazy in families, especially when the criticism and blame is defined as love. How can you argue with love and at the same time feel so angry about the remake? What a double bind that is. The result is getting the frustrating message that “we are not enough, and never will be.” This gets even more complicated when the parents take out their frustrations on their children, who are in the tough position of feeling helpless to solve the problem, or will cause enough problems to take focus mom and dad's attention more on them rather than fight each other.

The **bottom line** of all this is that the root of depression lies in the fact that somehow we have come to the conclusion that we are not enough or good enough, even though we are told we are by those closest to us—and that is if we are lucky. Think of the ones who are told they are constantly told or beaten up enough to be shown they are worthless.

Then, when we screw up our lives or our marriages in some way, that just reinforces the belief, and adds more growth to the depression plant.

Since I believe the family is the main place to be nurtured and grow into our unique personalities, then I think a lot of depression can be treated at home. Here is what I would prescribe.

- ◆ **Talk to each other:** This is tough, but try these questions with your mate. “What do you need for you to grow and be happy? How can I assist you in that process? By the same token, the mate should not give the response, “I could grow if only you would be a different person.” That would negate the whole process. If you need a referee to do this, get someone, even if it is a therapist. It will save a lot of time taking medications that don’t solve the problem anyway.
- ◆ **Take responsibility for your own life and behavior:** This is also tough, but it cuts out a lot of blame and criticism, which takes a huge load off the other person. It also makes you more loveable. The key to fostering taking responsibility is if there is forgiveness if you make mistakes in trying. Another big key is to actually make the decision to take that responsibility, even if your parents and mate really don’t want you to.
- ◆ **Don’t rescue:** Another tough one. Most of us need someone to listen rather than to solve our problems. After we get things out in the open, we can see things more clearly, and come up with great solutions, feeling stronger in the process. Trying to solve the other’s problems just leads to more defeat, which leads to more chances to be depressed for feeling like a failure.
- ◆ **Build a support network:** We like to help others when they are trying to help themselves. There are a lot of great people out there.
- ◆ **Learn to thank your spouse and family members:** Most haven’t been genuinely thanked in months or even years. It is amazing how a regular dose of that reduces blame and criticism. It also provides new soil to grow and enjoy each other more. Even the kids will feel better.

Life is full of loss, illness, change, unrealistic expectations, traumas, and draining, angry people. It gets tougher all the time not to get depressed. I do believe, though, that the philosophical issue is whether we believe people are basically good or basically evil. If it is the former, then we can see our family, friends, and neighbors as worth having around even if they aren’t like us. If it is the latter, they deserve our best judgment, criticism, and blame, and so do we.

I believe depression starts in the home, and therein lies the best hope for cure. It depends on whether we want to grow people and have the patience to take turns watching each other’s movie