

Dealing with Depression in these Difficult times

Although there are many causes for depression, the most important thing to be aware of is that the way we think can often cause the way we feel. Therefore, changing an internal experience will create a different way of behaving and thinking.

Let's look at something called attributional style. Attributional Style explains how we see the world, it tends to be a preference that we adapt at quite an early age but that does not mean that we cannot change it. If we have look at our locus of control – the degree to which we believe that we are in control of our lives – an internal locus suggests that we believe we have total control over what happens in the world. For example, if we do well at a task whether that is baking a cake or passing an exam, we will praise ourselves and feel we have done well. This means that we must accept responsibility for things that we do wrong but accept that we don't always have control over what happens to those and those around us.

Some people, however, have a high external locus of control and believe they have little ability to change or influence whatever happens to them in life. They may believe that things are preordained, they may think that it's all to do with their star sign or bad karma. In the case of depression, whether we believe we have caused our negative feelings or whether we believe the world out there is totally responsible for how we are both incorrect.

Unfortunately, where depression is a problem for people, they may develop feelings of helplessness. In psychology, this is known as learned helplessness and it suggests that if we learn that we cannot do anything because our attribution style causes us to believe that is the case then we may not choose to find ways of overcoming our negative feelings. This means that the way we think on a regular basis can affect how we see the world. For example, we can either see unpleasant incidences as something that may happen occasionally, but this does not mean that life will always be like this. It has been shown that individuals who suffer from depression may have a very stable way of seeing the world and will find it difficult to accept that although things are difficult today, they may not always be so. In fact, this style of thinking is sometimes called a depressive attributional style. Individuals who think in this way will believe that things that happen are caused by themselves, will not change and will always be that way. The work of Michael Yap co-, who has written many books on the treatment of depression agrees that someone who displays this type of thinking will find it harder to overcome periods of depression and is much more likely to suffer a relapse. If an individual believes that they will never be happy and that things will always be this way it is likely that a complete recovery can be more problematic. Yapko is quoted as saying *"it is not that depression itself is recurrent; it is that life experience is recurrent."* We all experience

the ups and downs of life that means that if our regular pattern of thinking and subsequent behaviour does not change it is likely that feelings of depression will overwhelm us. One way of working with these resistant, stable attributional styles of thinking that lead to depression will be to use a brief form of therapy- constantly talking about feeling depressed will not help someone who is experiencing depression. Hypnosis can be a way of helping someone imagine a future where depression is not quite as overwhelming. Hypnosis can help people to identify positive goals. Combined with CBT – cognitive behavioural therapy – it can be a rapid and effective tool to help an individual who feels hopeless change their overriding belief that encourages new ways of thinking.

Certain factors will make us feel more depressed. Our feelings can change depending on who we are with and what we are doing. A sense of isolation and loneliness and reliance on technology can trigger feelings of depression in some people. It, therefore, makes sense that a passive way of dealing with depressed feelings is no good as it may cause further rumination particularly when we have no one else to talk to. As Mark Twain said, "life is one damn thing after another". We may catastrophise at the moment, analysing each piece of news we hear. However, it is unlikely we have always felt this way. It is unlikely that we were born feeling depressed. We need to find a way of empowering ourselves with ways that do not necessarily involve writing down negative feelings or ruminating what is happening in the world. Techniques such as mindfulness, meditation and hypnosis can help people build new associations, feelings of empowerment learn new skills and improve sleep. We may find that learning a new skill or doing more skills such as hypnosis or mindfulness will increase our resourcefulness. People learn better from experience, not just reading a book. Cognitive behaviour therapy can also be an effective tool to help people understand how the way they think may be causing the feelings they are experiencing.

Although most therapists, like myself, are still unable to treat clients on a person-to-person basis it is possible to use an online platform, such as zoom, to treat clients using several different techniques. Sessions of hypnosis can be recorded and sent to individual clients without using an electronic platform. Instead, individual sessions can be devised and recorded by Carole and sent safely and securely to any client who wishes to experience hypnosis or relaxation. Other techniques that can be useful and have been used successfully over the last few weeks include CBT, NLP and EFT. All these techniques are described in my practice leaflet or can be found on the website.

Appointments can be made as normal using a zoom platform to conduct a thorough initial assessment. For further information please email me at carolewan@icloud.com or telephone my practice on (01246) 416544.