



Male/Covert Depression

By Tom Porpiglia, MS, LMHC, DCEP EFT-ADV

Male Depression. In our society, that is an oxymoron. Men are not supposed to get depressed, or feel anything for that matter. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), twice as many women report depression than men. The NIMH also states, "men are less likely to admit to depression, and doctors are less likely to suspect it." And consider this. There are four times more male substance abusers than female, and in my experience, that is an indication of the severity of depression in men. This accounts for the fact that 80% of the suicides in our country are men (Jed Diamond, *Male Menopause* www.menalive.com).

Our society has put many stigmas on depression and has created an unrealistic male image, a lie, which men have bought into. Men are supposed to be strong, unfeeling, creatures that climb the corporate ladder, supporting their families and competing with the neighbors. After all, we are tough, we can do it and we can take anything another person can dish out, AND, we can do it all by ourselves. We do not need or want support or help. That is sign of weakness.

Men, emotionally, we are not any different from women. We are supposed to feel, we do get depressed and we deserve support and help. We may experience depression differently from women because we do not want to feel weak or shameful. After all, according to our belief systems men are not supposed to feel and if we show our feminine side, then we are weak, and should be ashamed of ourselves. We are also afraid to look at ourselves because we believe who we are and what we do are linked together and we might find something really ugly inside of us. More guilt and shame.

Many men experience what Terrance Real labels covert depression in his book ***I Don't Want to Talk About It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression***. Some of the symptoms include feeling angry, irritable, having an inflated ego, creating conflict, needing to be in control, hostility, aggression and procrastination. As men, we often keep ourselves busy to avoid feeling and/or dealing with the feelings. Or we self-medicate with alcohol, drugs, food, TV, etc., all because being depressed means there is something "wrong" with us. It is also easier and more acceptable in society to self-medicate than it is to deal with our feelings.

The truth is that it is more courageous to express, and honor our feelings in a healthy manner than it does to stuff them or to self-medicate. As men, most of us have not been taught us to express our emotions in safe, appropriate ways, so we hide our feelings and go on as if nothing is wrong. We need to express and share our feelings in safe, effective and appropriate ways rather than stuff them. Stuffing our feelings may cause one of two things to happen: 1. We implode and become physically and/or emotionally ill, 2. We explode and do a lot of damage to others and ourselves. Either way the internal emotional pressure is too great and the body does something to get our attention.



So men, I encourage you to be courageous in a new and different way. If you are experiencing any of these behaviors or symptoms, seek professional help in the form of counseling. Medication may be necessary; however, medication only treats the symptoms and does not address the underlying causes of the depression. The energy psychology techniques (like Emotional Freedom Technique) in use by many therapists today offer improved healing over traditional methods, with or without medication.

Remember that it's OK to ask for help. You Deserve it and so does your family

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