

# How to: Understand Depression



**HEALING** SPACES

A background image of green leaves on a branch, with a white rectangular box in the center containing text and a quote symbol.

“

There are times when  
explanations, no matter how  
reasonable, just don't seem to  
help

FRRED ROGERES

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Healing Spaces Founder, Kelsey Grimm

# About Kelsey Grimm

Hello, my name is Kelsey!

I am the Founder of Kelsey the Counsellor, a counselling influencer brand dedicated to creating a community of mental health resources, and Healing Spaces, a clinical counselling practice based in British Columbia. I strongly believe in the power of the human spirit, the ability to overcome obstacles, and that the phoenix rises from the ashes.

I have witnessed brave people willing to face challenges, willing to learn, and willing to change. I believe my role is to support each person who wishes to grow, grow - who wishes to heal, heal - and who wishes to learn, learn. I support each person uniquely, and together we will face your current life challenges and move through them towards a brighter and better tomorrow.

*xo Kelsey*



# About Healing Spaces

Healing Spaces provides a warm and welcoming place with our main focus on supporting you move towards the life you dream for yourself! We focus on counselling support for anxiety, depression, grief, trauma, chronic pain, and chronic illness.

We offer counselling to children, youth, adults, couples, parents and families in person in Kamloops , British Columbia and virtually all over British Columbia.

Our team of counsellors are well trained and experienced in multiple areas of counselling with different specialties. We offer in person and virtual counselling options, which allows our team to support you from the comfort and safety of your own home.



Healing Spaces Office in Kamloops, British Columbia

# What is depression

## Mood Disorder

Depression is a mood disorder. In the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (the diagnostic manual that doctor's use) it is called 'major depressive disorder'. It is classified by someone struggling for more than 14 days with a list of symptoms. These symptoms include:

- not enjoying activities you used to enjoy
- isolating
- change in appetite
- change in sleep patterns
- low motivation
- difficulty concentrating
- lethargy and fatigue
- low mood
- irritability

## What depression feels like

Depression is more than 'feeling sad'. It can include a feeling of sadness, but often people describe it as a numbness or not feeling. It is a level of fatigue that a good night's rest just won't remedy. It is a deep, deep fatigue. People described depression to me in the following ways:

"Feeling like I am in a deep dark pit and can't get out"

"Feeling completely alone even when I am surrounded by others"

"Feeling like my body is made of lead and I can't move it"

"Feeling like I just don't care about anything"



# Is there a cure for depression?

There is no 'cure' for depression and as I explain in the following pages it seems like we still don't completely understand depression. Depression can go up and down and you might have good days/weeks/months/years and rough days/weeks/months/years.

Oftentimes people who struggle with depression might have a depressive episode 'triggered' by a life event such as a loss, a disappointment, or the exploration of big emotions. Sometimes it feels like depression comes out of nowhere and knocks you down.

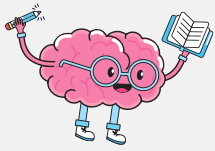
There are a number of lifestyle changes you can make that have been proven to support those living with depression.

## Lifestyle tips for a better relationship with your depression

- - Create a safety plan (see activity for more on this)
- - Know your signs. (see activity for more on this)
- - Daily movement
- - Daily nutrition
- - Prioritizing sleep
- - Finding a group of people that you connect with and trust
- - Prioritize your wellbeing and 'work your wellness program'
- - Finding a few hobbies you enjoy and can do even if you don't have a lot of energy
- - Adjust your expectations about how you 'should be ' when you are in a time of depression.
- - Find a counsellor you trust.



# What is the deal with serotonin?



## What is serotonin ?

Serotonin is a neurotransmitter – a chemical in our brain – that impact things such as sleep, digestion and mood.

It has been thought that low levels of serotonin in the brain have been linked to depression. Often when people take medication to help increase their serotonin levels, their appetite and sleep patterns are also impacted.

## Chemical Imbalance

What does this mean?

Since the 1960s, serotonin has been considered the culprit for those with depression. If someone is struggling with depression they might have been told they have a 'chemical imbalance' in their brains.

This means their depression might be organic and just a part of who this person is.

It has also arguably helped with reducing stigmas for depression in terms of reducing people's shame. It feels like there is a 'reason' they are struggling and it is okay to get pharmacological help!

### A note on Medication

Taking medication can be controversial. The important piece is to ensure you are honest and speak with your doctor openly about your experience, as well as trust and follow their advice.

Some people say they couldn't live without medication whereas others state they would never take it.

It is a highly personal decision and I am of the belief that if it is helping in some way, great - let's bring it into your care plan!



# What is the deal with SSRI's

## What does an SSRI do?

Selective-Serotonin-Reuptake-Inhibitors or SSRIs have been a part of the solution to help reduce the suffering of those with depression. Essentially they purport to prevent one's brain from re-uptaking the serotonin leaving more swimming around in the brain. The thought is with more serotonin swimming around the brain there is a mood elevating effect.

## Placebo effect

There has been a lot of research that indicated SSRIs don't really help beyond the same effectiveness as a placebo. That means that if someone takes a placebo or sugar pill, there is the same rate of improvement as someone taking an SSRI.

I always thought this was amazing evidence that our minds are more powerful than we can imagine.

## Fact or Fiction?

Recently, a body of research has come out that indicates the belief that low serotonin levels in one's brain is a MYTH! They are citing that low levels of serotonin as a reason for depression is not actually corroborated by facts and that might indicate that SSRIs are not very helpful.

Before you read on I want to note that, if you are someone who is taking an SSRI and you find it helpful - amazing! If it is helping, that is all that matters.

If you are on medication and it isn't helping - maybe it is time to speak with your doctor again and try a different medication or take a break with their guidance.

# What's the latest research?

## Umbrella Review – first in 10 years

Published in July 2022 in the journal *Molecular Psychiatry*, Mobreiff et al did an umbrella review researching low serotonin levels as connected to depression. In their article "The serotonin theory of depression: a systematic umbrella review" they found the following:

- More research needs to be done on how serotonin levels and depression are connected
- It is not as simple as SSRIs are a solution for depression.

If you are taking medication and feel like it isn't working, speak with your doctor or health care team. Medication can have a positive impact, however the best results for overcoming depression or a depressive episode are ensuring you are also going to counselling.



# Activity

## STEP 1: Create a depression safety plan

You will need:

- Some quiet space to reflect
- A note taking device (phone, computer, paper)
- To select at least one person to share it with

What you do:

- 1) Carve out a pocket of time by your self
- 2) Breathe in and out.
- 3) What are the ways your depression presents itself? Identify and make note. If you don't know, ask a trusted person who might be able to help.  
Do the dishes and laundry pile up? Does your activity level change? Do your eating habits change? Do you start to pull away from others? Do you sleep in and feel tired?
- 4) What would be helpful when things are STARTING to get tricky? Can you create a few ideas of what you can do. (ie. Connect with counsellor, start journaling, reach out to a trusted person for a walk, spend time in nature etc.).
- 5) Can you ask others to help when things are tricky? What you can ask of others if depression is starting to get hard? (ie. I need you to come over if I haven't responded to your texts after 48 hours. I need you to help me see the dishes piling up and gently point out to me to look at my safety plan.)

## STEP 2: Share this with a trusted person or two

What you do: (acute & short term stress)

- Let them know what your signs are when your depression is starting.
- Let them know you might not be able to alert them to it when it is starting - because that is depression!
- Ask if they would be willing to help in some way when you are struggling. Perhaps they point out some of the signs in a gentle and compassionate way or they have you over for dinner to see how you are doing.

# Resources



Playlist



Book/Article



App



Video



Podcast



## Videos for support and introspection

Kelsey the Counsellor

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCptyZFA-nwt3hUyGKSwKWHg/videos>



## Ted-Ed: What is Depression

Helen M. Farrell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-IR48Mb3W0>



## Hilarious world of depression

<https://www.hilariousworld.org/>



## Molecular Psychology

The serotonin theory of depression: a systematic umbrella review of the evidence

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41380-022-01661-0>



## NUNA

Helpful alpaca to support you move through stress

<https://www.nuna.ai/>



## Eugene Rubin

If it isn't serotonin

<https://positivepsychology.com/stress-management-techniques-tips-burn-out/>



# THANK YOU

Feel free to reach out if you have any questions! I am looking forward to chatting with you!



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