

Opening our eyes:
Tools for when depression hits
by Nan Dickie

One marvelous characteristic of a depression support group is that, when someone says, “I can’t do anything about being depressed,” they don’t get away with it.

It’s true that, if we live with clinical depression or bi-polar disorder, we can’t choose whether, or when, or for how long we have an episode. Nor can we choose what symptoms we have, nor how intense.

Given these tough realities, it is understandable that a person who is in an episode will cry out in frustration, anger or agony in a support group meeting—or anywhere for that matter—that they “can’t do anything about it.”

The first response they will receive from other participants in the support group will be something like, “I know what your mean,” or “I’m sorry you’re feeling depressed.” This will be followed quickly by someone saying, “I used to feel that way.” And then the conversation gets rolling, with participants sharing the ways in which they approach their episodes, the things they choose to do to help make this episode, this trip to hell, as tolerable as possible. In other words, they say they can, in fact, “do something” about being depressed.

There are many “tools” available to those of us who live with mood disorders, anxiety and PTSD. I can list only a few of them here. I’ll introduce more in a future article.

One category is lifestyle tools. We need to eat a healthy, balanced diet, and be aware of the effects of stimulants (sugar and coffee for example) and depressants (alcohol) on our bodies and our minds. Fresh air provides us with essential Vitamin D; moderate exercise generates endorphins in our brains; sufficient sleep, if we can achieve that, gives us energy to cope positively with our symptoms. We should incorporate these tools all the time, even when we are well, and especially during episodes.

Then there are talking support tools. When we are depressed, we are often too much “in our heads.” We need sometimes to unload, or get help with our inner chatter (which can be as destructive as self-loathing). We can consult with a therapist or counsellor in either the public mental health system or the private sector. Individual or group therapy may be prescribed. A depression support group regularly reminds participants that they that they are not alone—many of us have remarkably similar experiences and stories.

There are various educational tools. Interior Mental Health offers workshops which teach participants how to deal with anxiety. Counsellors employ cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) whereby people learn new helpful and healthy ways of thinking. Workbooks for depression, anxiety or other disorders can help people work through various challenges of their illnesses. A proliferation of self-help books offer

Opening our eyes:
Tools for when depression hits
by Nan Dickie

insights and sensible techniques for self-healing. The internet oozes with material relevant to mood disorders. It is critical to be discerning in what we choose to believe and follow.

This is just the start of a list of self-help tools for depression. Stay tuned for more!

[Nan Dickie is the facilitator of a depression support group in Salmon Arm. Meetings are held the first and third Mondays at Askews Uptown community room at noon. Everyone, including supporters, welcome. Info: ndickie@telus.net; 250 832-3733.]