

# CAUSES OF DEPRESSION

## LOW SELF-ESTEEM

Flipchart the following statements and ask the group to think about each one. They are images we are bombarded with from TV, films, magazines etc.

- You must be taller / slimmer / prettier
- Wear this style of clothes if you want to be accepted
- Drive this car or you are a failure
- You must have a successful career
- To be a 'somebody' you need money and a big house

### Ask the following questions:

- Are these statements true?
- Does anyone believe any of them?
- Do they make you feel a failure?
- If you could change anything about yourself, what would you change and why?
- Would it make you feel better about yourself?
- Do you value the opinions of others above your own opinions?

Our value as a person is often determined by how successful we are. We feel we must do everything perfectly and live up to a certain standard. All of us want to fit in and be accepted by others. None of us want to be seen as different. We have this strong need to conform and be part of the crowd. Low self-esteem can stem from a feeling of not being as good as others or of not fitting in. Perhaps for some it began in early childhood. Many people are told or feel that they are 'not good enough'.

## WORKSHEET 3

Working with a partner, you must sit on two chairs so that you are both facing one another.

One of you must talk for five minutes on a subject that is VERY important to you. It is vital that it is a subject close to your heart – something you feel very strongly about.

While you are talking, the other person must not look at you and must show no signs of listening. He/she must not react in any way or give any indication that he/she is interested in what is being said. (Some have found it helpful for the listener to sit on his/her hands and stare at the ground)

It is vital that these instructions are followed closely if this activity is to work.

After 5 minutes, stop talking and swap roles so the listener is now the speaker and vice versa.

When the activity is over, answer the following questions:

1. How did the behaviour of the listener make you feel?
2. Did it get increasingly more difficult to carry on as the minutes passed?
3. How did you feel towards the listener?
4. Why is feedback from others so important to us?

Flipchart the following phrases and ask the group if they recall any of the following phrases being said to them:

- 'You'll never amount to anything'
- 'You're totally useless'
- 'You're lazy, stupid, rude etc'
- 'Why can't you be more like.....'

Explain that it's no wonder that many of us suffer from low self-esteem. It may be that these phrases were never actually spoken but we still felt the disapproval of others. Some have had very unhappy childhood experiences and this leads to a feeling of worthlessness. These can include:

- Constant criticism from family, school and friends
- Lack of affection or love in early childhood
- Physical or emotional abuse by a close family member or friend
- Unsettled childhood –always moving house or the introduction of a step-parent
- Accident, illness or disability

Low self-esteem is a common factor amongst depressed people. If you don't like yourself you will find it difficult to believe that others can value you as a person. You can start to believe that the world would be a better place without you and you can then start to think negatively about everything that happens in your life.

## **NEGATIVE STATEMENTS**

Flipchart the following list and ask the group how often they find themselves saying or thinking the following negative statements:

- Everybody hates me
- Everything I do goes wrong
- If only I hadn't done/said that....
- I've always been useless at....
- I'm a failure
- I wish I was as good as .....
- I will never be able to.....
- I hate my height / weight / nose / face / legs etc

Give out **WORKSHEETS 6, 7, 8 and 9** and ask them to work through the activities for homework. Discuss the results as a group.

## WORKSHEET 6

Take an exercise book. Use one page for each day. At the end of the day make a list of all the things that happened that made you feel uncomfortable or unhappy. You may have to think hard at first but this exercise gets easier as you regularly do it each evening.

Once you have made a list, place a tick next to all the things that were outside your control. For example, the car broke down and made you late for school or your friend was sick and could not go to the pictures with you. These are things that you could not do anything about. They were not caused by anything you did or said.

Now – what do you have left? Look at them carefully. Take each situation one by one and analyse it. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Was I really responsible for this?
2. Did I misunderstand the situation or overreact to it?
3. Did the way I react make the situation worse?
4. Could I have dealt with it more positively?
5. Can I learn from it?

For example, suppose your teacher criticised you in front of the class for not handing in your homework. Ask yourself – why did you not hand it in? Was there a good reason for you not doing your homework? Was your teacher willing to listen to your reason? Was the teacher unreasonable?

The point is, do we take responsibility for our actions? Can we see the difference between things that we could have changed and things that were really out of our hands? Do we tend to take the blame for everything, whether we were responsible or not? Do we realise that we all make mistakes, do foolish things or act irresponsibly at times? Do we accept that others, even those in positions of authority, can make mistakes?

It is important that you do this exercise each day and that you are willing to be completely honest with yourself. It can be a real eye-opener.