

FELT NEEDS

Understanding Sadness

NOONDAY
ASSOCIATION



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What is Sadness?

We all feel sad at times. In fact, at many times during our life, sadness is actually a natural response to many of life's experiences. That's because God designed these uncomfortable emotions and feelings into our psychological system to be a great warning system. Emotions like sadness let us know when we or others experience loss, hurt, rejection, or other upsetting or damaging situations. Sadness also is felt when we anticipate or think one of these situations might occur in the future and affect us or someone we care about. In fact, we feel anxious many times in our life because anxiety is actually part of the life-saving warning system God designed in our minds. This warning system lets us know when something isn't going right, potential danger exists, or we aren't seeing the situation accurately. Sadness functions like a red light on your car's dashboard which comes on when a problem might exist in the car. So, sadness is meant to be a good and life-saving part of our psychological wiring.

When Sadness Becomes a Problem

The normal sadness we feel as a reaction to a loss, hurt, or upsetting situation, is uncomfortable, but it shouldn't cause any lasting distress or interference in our functioning. When sadness becomes prolonged, causing ongoing distress while impeding our functioning, we call this depression. Depression has some of the following characteristics that differentiate it from the normal emotion of sadness:

- Depression interferes with perspective, and clouds our view of situations, ourselves, others, and God. Sadness doesn't.

- Depression is intense and flows into many areas of our life. Sadness is usually confined to the incident that precipitated the sadness.

- Depression lasts for a longer period of time. Sadness is short and can resurface for a short time when reminded of a sad past event.

- Depression interferes with functioning in many areas, whereas – except for an extreme situation like the death of a spouse or significant loved one – sadness doesn't dramatically affect most areas of a person's realm of functioning or responsibilities.

- Depression often causes significant distress, while sadness is uncomfortable and at times upsetting, but rarely does it cause significant distress.

- Depression interferes with decision-making leading to impulsive, harmful, or paralyzed decision-making. This can include self-medicating with food/substance, or self-harm, or even having recurrent thoughts of death or entertaining the decision to commit suicide. Sadness rarely interferes with decision-making, although some might put off a significant decision until the sadness subsides.



How Many Are Struggling with Depression?

Almost 1 in 4 Americans will struggle with a significant impairing bout of depression in their lifetime. As a result of COVID's disruptions, causing loss, hurt, and conflict as well as countless other adversities, over 31% struggle with depression and over 40% struggle with emotional distress. As you can predict, COVID hit children and adolescents the hardest and their rates of depression and suicidal thoughts are even higher than adults.

Stormy Times

Our society is more complex and conflicted than any time in recent memory. We are bombarded each day with so many tragedies from all over the world coming at us on our electronic devices. Adversity, trials, and tribulations are part of everyday life as we live in a fallen world with an evil ruler. Many haven't been taught how to understand and navigate these stormy times, so they often got tossed to and fro, veering onto a dangerous course leading to harm and destruction. You have the opportunity to jump into their boat, deliver some compassion and offer your presence so they know they aren't alone, and can have hope. Your steady demeanor can point them to the true Lighthouse that will guide them through the storm and offer sanctuary and safety.

Sadness Often Looks Like

- Struggling to get out of bed
- Minimal motivation
- Lack of energy

- Eating too much or not enough
- Ruminating thoughts about sad events
- Crying episodes
- Feeling like a failure
- Lack of confidence in yourself or ability to accomplish something
- Minimal self-worth
- Feeling unloved
- Feeling rejected or lesser than others
- Feeling like you're a burden on others or that people would be better off if you weren't around anymore
- Difficulty making decisions
- Trouble concentrating, staying focused, or remembering things
- Restlessness, pacing, or agitation
- Stressed by fairly simple or routine tasks
- Pessimism or always feeling gloomy
- Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, waking up early, or trouble getting up in the morning
- Not enjoying activities or people you once did
- Minimal sexual libido or appetite
- Loneliness or feelings of isolation



- Spiraling thoughts of worst-case scenarios
- Procrastination
- Emotional outbursts of anger, agitation, frustration
- Impulsive decisions to break up the downward slide
- Thoughts of death, not waking up in the morning, or suicide
- Self-medicating behaviors such as abusing alcohol, misusing pain meds or tranquilizers, overeating, cutting or other self-harm activities
- Feeling disorganized
- Trouble keeping up with usual home, work, education, financial, family, or relational activities and responsibilities
- Feeling numb with no feelings
- Often using words like “always”, “never”, “should”, “can’t”, “if only”

Sometimes Sadness is Physical

Some people aren't connected to their emotions so instead of these emotions coming to the surface through the mind as sadness or depression, they instead come to the surface through the body as physical symptoms. Common physical symptoms are:

- Decreased energy
- Appetite or weight changes
- Sleep struggles
- Headaches
- Heartburn
- Nausea
- Stomachaches
- Back pain
- Frequent infections
- Short of breath
- Increased heart rate
- Chest pain
- Decreased libido
- Erectile struggles
- Difficulty achieving an orgasm
- Pacing
- Physical agitation or restlessness
- Aching muscles and joints
- Restlessness



What an Explorer Might Say

- I am sad a lot.
- I struggle enjoying anything anymore.
- I get upset easily.
- I cry for no reason.
- My motivation and drive are gone.
- Keeping up with even basic responsibilities can be overwhelming.
- My mind thinks of worst case scenario, then I worry about it.
- When I lay down to sleep, my mind starts to work overtime and it won't shut off.
- It feels like I have sunglasses on all the time, and everything is a bit dimmer.
- I feel like I have a storm cloud around my head, making everything seem doom-and-gloom like.
- Everyone would be better off if I weren't around anymore.
- I am such a burden to my spouse and kids.
- I can't find any purpose.
- There's nothing special about me.
- I never do anything right.
- I just can't get moving.
- The day goes by so slowly, but I am not able to get anything done.
- I don't fit in.....anywhere!
- My memory is so bad lately.
- People don't want to be around me because I bring everyone down.
- I've tried to change, but I can't.
- Alcohol (or name of drug) is the only thing that helps me escape.
- My mind is my own worst enemy.
- I wish I could just turn my mind off.
- I take so many comments like a personal attack.

Wise Connections

- The Explorer who struggles with sadness, depression, and low self-worth has reached out to you, a stranger, and has no idea how you will respond. This shows how much pain and discomfort they are in that they are willing to risk more rejection or hurt to see if help is available. You want to represent Jesus to them by showing you are a safe person who can show them they have value, are worth investing in, and thus can access His peace, calm, and healing. This shouldn't be a judgmental or critiquing interaction, and in fact, your demeanor and responses should help them feel and know they are valued and cared about.
- Always pray first. Ask God to make His peace and joy clear and meaningful to the Explorer. Ask God to settle your heart and rouse your mind so you can use your skills and equipping to engage, soothe, and guide the Explorer.
- Resist the urge to fix or immediately fire out a Bible verse. First, you want to let them know they aren't alone, that you are jumping into the problem with them, and will hang in there with them until they feel safe enough to navigate with some other helpers or on their own.
- The initial process will be asking them questions about what they feel and think as well as effects of their sadness/depression. Then you want to show empathy and acknowledge their struggle while also showing you are right there with them while emotionally and psychologically holding them.

Tips for Responding to Explorers Experiencing Sadness

1. **Your voice should be peaceful and soothing.** Talk in a calm, clear voice. Softer in volume and slower in cadence. Don't be intense, rushed, or hurried and don't rush them. Your demeanor should exude God's peace, compassion, and joy that will encourage them and make it easier to reach out to you the next time.
2. **Be empathetic.** When they state difficult aspects or consequences from their sadness/depression, acknowledge that "it sounds very difficult" or "it seems like it has impacted you in significant ways."
3. **Avoid "I know how you feel"** or "we all get sad" or "it will go away soon" or "you're lucky 'cause it could be worse."
4. **Asking questions shows you care**, the Explorer has value, their story is important, and you are listening. It also helps you gather accurate information so you aren't guessing or making assumptions.
 - a. Can you tell me more about your sadness/depression?
 - b. It sounds like your depression has been difficult. How has it impacted you?
 - c. It sounds like your sadness/depression has impacted you. Can you tell me how it has impacted your relationships?
 - d. Thank you for contacting me to talk. Do you have any supportive people to talk to? Tell me a little more about them.
5. **They might sound like they want answers or reasons why but avoid giving those at the outset.** Your focus is to connect, let them know you are with them, and that they can have hope. You can tell them that sometimes it's hard to know why things happen or what the purpose for some hurts and losses are, but God has a plan for them, and they can have hope. Let them know you will be by their side helping them find God's plan – they don't have to navigate the storm by themselves.
6. **Explorers want to be heard**, so let them know through reflective and active listening that you hear what they are saying and acknowledge the feelings they have inside.
7. **Do not push Scripture** or therapy programs without first building rapport or connection with the Explorer.
8. They fear being judged or critiqued so **avoid language that can be perceived as judgmental or accusatory**. Don't mention mistakes the Explorer makes or how they could have done things better. You are **of of** using the first couple of interactions to connect and build a safe bridge to send more help later on.
9. **You don't need to give a diagnosis**, just understand and let them know they don't have to handle this struggle alone.
10. **Don't overthink your response** as it doesn't need to be complicated. They most likely don't have capacity to take in complicated info and you aren't going to have a long conversation to give them complicated information.
11. **When you can, try to use the words or phrases they use** to show you are listening and to form a stronger connection.

A Great Sample Response

Here's a great example of how to put some of those healthy response tips into practice for an Explorer experiencing sadness/depression!

EM

= Explorer Message

CR

= Coach's Response

NDR

= Next Day Response

EM

Sadness/Depression is a big part of my life. I'm really struggling to see anything positive in my life. Hope is dwindling away and I'm starting to be a burden on those around me. Just tackling my daily responsibilities is getting harder and harder. Not sure how long I can keep this up as it is so tiring.

Hi John, this is Karl. I received your message about your struggles with sadness/depression. I'm so glad you reached out even though you're struggling .

CR

EM

Thanks. Seems like everything I do takes longer and is harder than it used to be. I've been meaning to reach out for awhile, but finally pulled the trigger.

I think you showed a lot of courage by reaching out.

CR

EM

Not really courage, more like fed up as I'm running out of options and what I've been trying isn't working.

It sounds like you've been struggling with sadness/depression for awhile and it's impacting you in many ways. I am interested in hearing how the sadness/depression has impacted you. If you are comfortable enough to share, can you tell me about that?

CR

Yes, sure, but I am not sure you want to hear all this crap about me. But depression has really

EM

I am sorry you are struggling with (you can paraphrase if they mentioned a lot). I want you to know you aren't walking thru this struggle by yourself. I am here to help. This is a stressful world and we all need others to navigate storms with. I would love to talk more about it, and offer support, whatever that might look like. If you are comfortable, can I give you a call tonight or tomorrow morning?

CR

Yes, I would appreciate it. If I am not too much of a burden, you can call me tomorrow around 9A.

EM

Not a burden at all. I want to help you and I can call you tomorrow at 9A. Thanks for your willingness to talk more.

CR

Hi John, this is Karl following up as we agreed. It took a lot of courage to reach out yesterday. I know it can be uncomfortable talking to a complete stranger, but I'd love the chance to connect with you. There is no pressure, but I want to let you know I am here to help you.

NDR

Tips

The example response here is empathetic, showed you were listening, and validated the explorer's feelings. Simply engaging, or offering to engage with people is an important step to building rapport and letting them know you are a safe person to bring into their journey.



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