

Overcoming Depression in Marriage: It's a Team Approach

“Just choose to be happy,” intoned a well-meaning pastor. Even as I type that phrase, it arouses anger. Although I wanted to “choose” to be happy, I just couldn’t do it—no matter how much I felt guilty or quoted Bible verses.

My body and emotions would not respond to “choosing” to be happy; so in addition to being depressed (which I didn’t know at the time) I also felt like a failure as a Christian because I could not “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:13).

It appears that more people struggle with depression than ever before; or maybe just more people are willing to talk openly about it. **Depression not only impacts the individual, it usually deeply affects their marriage.**

In my counseling experience, I have seen depression take its toll on not only the depressed person but also their spouse. At first, **the “non-depressed” spouse tries to pick up the slack** by helping more with the housework, doing homework with the kids and making up for lost finances by working extra hours.

Often the non-depressed spouse cannot understand the depth of discouragement, fatigue, and mental exhaustion their spouse is suffering from. As a pastor’s wife and therapist who has struggled with bouts of depression, I have often felt misunderstood by my spouse and friends. Maybe you are there, too, or you are just reading this article hoping for some practical tips on overcoming depression.

For those of you who are depressed or have a friend who is struggling with depression, **there is hope.**



Here are some tips for dealing with depression:

1. Admit there is a problem

- Because I was a Christian and a pastor's wife overly concerned with "image management", it took months for me to admit I needed help. I was struggling on a daily basis with getting out of bed and the normal tasks of life such as child rearing, going to work and making meals before I finally went to see a counselor.
- When simple tasks send you into a hysterical crying fit or confine you to bed, it is a signal to get help.

2. Take a Team Approach

- **Doctor:** Discuss your feelings of depression with your family doctor. They may recommend an anti-depressant. For many people, consistently taking an anti-depressant will lift the dark cloud so therapy can be more successful. Be sure to ask questions about the medication, including the sexual side effects.
- **Counselor/Therapist:** For many people, depression is not completely genetic or biological. It has root causes in previous or present life circumstances. In my case, my mother died and within weeks we assumed a new pastorate in a different state where I had no support system. Research has shown that the **best treatment for depression includes a combination of medication and counseling.**
- **Spouse:** Definitely include your spouse in these conversations. They are being affected by your depression and possibly have valuable insight into the situation to share with your doctor and therapist.

3. Exercise

- For many people consistent exercise reduces feelings of depression, especially if the exercise is outdoors. **Research has shown even three times per week for 30 minutes each day has a positive impact on reducing depression.** Even better would be to find an outdoor activity that you and your spouse enjoy and start today. Just a few ideas: riding bikes, walking, jogging, golf, skiing, cliff diving, mountain climbing and having sex (maybe not outdoors, though)!

4. Self-Care

- Self-care often includes exercise, but it can include so much more. Every human being is created with the need for rest and fun. Because of hectic schedules, we often do not take the needed time to recharge and enjoy life. Schedule a walk with a friend, a drive to the lake, or a few minutes at lunch to sit outside and absorb the rays, the happy chemicals in your brain will increase and your body (and maybe even your spouse) will thank you.

5. Practice “Grace-filled” self-talk

- Be curious about how you speak to yourself. Record your self-talk for a week. Are you kind? Would you speak to a friend like you speak to yourself? Do you have grace for everyone else but you? Process this exercise with a friend or counselor.
- Allow yourself to be imperfect.

If you find yourself or a friend struggling in the area of depression and/or marriage, please do not hesitate to give me a call. I have been there, and I care. 417-763-3309



Rachelle’s passion is to see people live abundant grace-filled lives with an undercurrent of joy, peace, and purpose. She believes relationships should be authentic and connected. Rachelle helps couples and individuals discover the reasons their relationships are unsatisfying and partners with them on the journey of rediscovering health and hope. Rachelle specializes in couples work including affair recovery, infidelity

issues, and sex therapy. With many years of ministry experience as a preacher’s kid, pastor’s wife, licensed minister, and missionary, Rachelle has a unique perspective into the struggles of ministry families and has a passion to help them live full satisfying lives while working in the Kingdom.

Her education includes an undergraduate degree in elementary education and a master’s degree in professional counseling. Rachelle and her husband have two sons and reside in Nixa, MO.