

My Depression from Nowhere

I have suffered from some sort of mood disorder since childhood. However, it has only been in the last five years that I was diagnosed with depression. Depression and other mood disorders can have numerous causes and starting points. Often a traumatic experience can lead to a person feeling depressed, having mood swings, becoming angry and even violent.

In my case, depression seemed to come out of nowhere. I have always had the best friends, a fantastic, loving family and a great education. My only traumatic experience was the 2003 Canberra bushfires. The bushfires added to my anxieties; however, my mood troubles began well before that.

At age five or six, I was crying most nights before I went to bed. I remember being asked why I was crying or what was wrong and having no answer. I even saw the school counsellor. In the end the counsellor and my parents decided I must just hate school, and was crying because I didn't want to go the next day.

In my early teens I was very low much of the time. I felt like there was always a dark cloud over my head. I felt extremely low energy all the time and always felt tired. However, since my moods were brushed off the first time I figured it would be useless to try to seek help. So I continued to have days where I would feel so awful I could not get out of bed, afternoons where I would come home from school and lie on the couch watching television, and nights where I would lie in bed crying for hours.

Having no apparent reasons for my almost constant low moods was very hard to deal with. I would even get very angry because I was feeling like I had no reason to be upset. I'd always lie and say I was fine rather than trying to explain that I was upset for no reason whatsoever. I felt embarrassed to have these feelings and not know why they were there.

When there is a reason for feeling depressed, such as a breakup or a death, this reason can be sorted through and dealt with. When there is no cause for these feelings, there is nothing that can be done to try to solve them. Every time I felt low and depressed for no reason I would add to it by thinking things like "I should not be feeling this way". Especially when my parents and friends were so supportive, I just felt I should not be unhappy. It even got to the point where when something truly sad happened, I would actually be grateful for a reason to be upset because I could deal with what was making me unhappy.

I felt incredibly alone, and to try to feel better I sought help and advice from other teenagers in places like group therapy and internet forums for those suffering from mood disorders. Unfortunately, everyone I spoke to had had some sort of life-changing and/or traumatic experience in their lives. I couldn't seem to find anybody who had the same awful feelings I did for no reason. I felt like this just alienated me further from my peers.

This caused me to become very critical of myself. I was frequently telling myself to "stop being so stupid" and that I had "no reason for being upset". I even accused myself of making it all up or trying to get attention. If there is nothing wrong with my life, then I should not be unhappy right?

Being so critical of myself led to me hating myself, and this led to self-harm. In my second year of high school I started to cut my legs. My self-harm then spread to my arms and wrists. I had never heard of anyone else doing this to themselves, so I had no idea I was even doing anything wrong. I didn't even know that what I was doing had a name! All I knew was that when I cut myself, I didn't feel all the emotional pain anymore. All I could concentrate on at the time was the injuries I had created. So for a while, I felt like things were better; I had a way to control my emotional pain. However, I then started to use self-harm as punishment as well. If I got upset for no reason, then I felt I had to cut myself as punishment. I began to realise that none of my friends had scratches and other injuries like I did, and started to feel that maybe what I was doing wasn't entirely healthy. But I did not want to give it up, so I made up excuses so my friends wouldn't find out what I was doing.

When my friends realised that all my "accidental injuries" were indeed self-inflicted, and my cat was in fact sweet and did not scratch me almost every day (as per the excuse I used), they were so scared and begged me to see our high school counsellor. I still saw no problem with what I was doing so I went along with their plan so they would stop asking me if I was okay. I sat in the counsellor's office and listened as my friends went on about how worried they were and how they could not believe I could hurt myself like this. I could see they were all quite distressed and I felt so bad about scaring them. We all cried and hugged, and it was decided I would never harm myself again, and I was to talk to my friends whenever I got sad.

A few days later, my mum sat me down for a chat. The school counsellor had phoned her and told her everything. I felt so completely betrayed, felt like I could not trust anyone. I shut down completely and did not talk to anyone no matter how bad I felt. I obviously could not trust that counsellor, so I was not even able to talk to *her*. Things with my mum were tense and we did not talk much for a while. My parents, like my friends, did not understand why I would want to hurt myself, and therefore did not know what to say to me about my self-harming. I just brushed it off, said it was nothing and, under my parents' assumption I was no longer harming, it became a bit of a dead issue and we just did not talk about it anymore.

When I finally realised I was not able to deal with my moods by myself, and that I really wanted to hurt myself, I told my parents just how bad I was feeling and agreed to see a doctor. Relief flooded through me as my doctor told me that what I was feeling was quite common and certainly not wrong. She said I have a chemical imbalance in my brain, that sometimes my brain just doesn't produce the same hormones and endorphins as a normal human brain should. After feeling depressed for so many years, it felt great to know why.

Over the years since then I have been seeing a psychologist to learn better ways to deal with moods. I engage in regular exercise and try to be with my friends as much as I can. Being given a rationale of my feelings certainly did not suddenly make everything better. It did, however, make me feel a bit more normal. I have since found other adolescents who suffer from the same sort of chemical imbalance as I do, which helps me to feel less alone. My moods have definitely improved and, best of all, I have now been self-harm-free for five months.