

Covid-19 Blues, Stress, or Depression

How can I Tell the Difference?

This pandemic may have been stressful for people, even pastors. You and others in your congregation have faced fears, anxieties, learned new coping skills and ways to still connect with one another yet can bring a lingering state of mental challenges, such as, blues, depression, or a lack of motivation to start or plan anything new.

Public health actions, such as social distancing, can make people feel isolated and lonely and can increase stress and anxiety. However, we all know these actions are necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Coping and dealing with our emotions in a healthy way will make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger.

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations, depending on your background, social support from family, friends, church, or pastoral colleagues. I have broken down 3 issues that have been revealed through this pandemic. This article can be helpful to you, your church or other family members.

In planning for the future, it is important for us to identify if any of these have or are currently bothering you and use appropriate interventions before moving forward to what God is telling you what to do in 2021. Thank you for your service and the way you have tried to maintain consistency in your ministry and church.

Recognizing the Symptoms of Stress, You May be Experiencing:

You may have noticed:

- Changes in sleep or eating patterns.
- Feeling irritation, anger, or denial
- Feeling uncertain, nervous, or anxious
- Feeling helpless or powerless
- Lacking motivation
- Feeling tired, overwhelmed, or burned out
- Feeling sad or depressed
- Having trouble concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems.
- Worsening of mental health conditions.

Please refer to stress, compassion fatigue, and burnout articles and resources from our website, www.pastoralcare.org.

Tips to cope and enhance your resilience.

- Communicate with your coworkers, supervisors, and employees about job stress.
- Talk openly about how the pandemic is affecting your work.
- Identify factors that cause stress and work together to identify solutions.

- Ask about how to access mental health resources from denominational leaders or ministries like Pastoral Care, Inc.
- Remind yourself that everyone is in an unusual situation with limited resources.
- Identify and accept those things which you do not have control over.
- Recognize that you are performing a crucial role in fighting this pandemic and that you are doing the best you can with the resources available.
- Increase your sense of control by keeping a consistent daily routine when possible — ideally one that is like your schedule before the pandemic.
- Try to get adequate sleep.
- Make time to eat healthy meals.
- Take breaks during your shift to rest, stretch, or check in with supportive colleagues, coworkers, friends, and family.
- When away from work, get exercise when you can. Spend time outdoors either being physically activity or relaxing. Do things you enjoy during non-work hours.
- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories regarding this pandemic. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting and mentally exhausting, especially since you work with people directly affected by the virus.
- Read the Word and continually ask for guidance, peace, purpose, and direction.
- Engage in breathing exercises or meditate on something positive.
- If you are being treated for a mental health condition, continue with your treatment, and talk to your provider if you experience new or worsening symptoms.

Recognizing Symptoms of COVID-19 Blues:

If you are generally not feeling like yourself, that may be one of the first signs you are experiencing the blues. You may find you do not enjoy things as much as you used to or negatively feeling “stuck” in knowing what to do next. You may have noticed:

- Being unsure whether the church or ministry will ever look the same as before.
- Withdrawing from some of the things you use to enjoy doing.
- Present outlook may look dismal or bleak.
- Sad or discouraged about any ministry momentum being lost or difficult to retrieve.
- Feelings of guilt or helplessness to the people you love or care about.
- A sense of restlessness.
- Consistently thinking more on negatives than any positives in your ministry and life.
- Wondering what other negatives lie before us.
- Integrating symptoms of stress with pessimistic thoughts about the future.

Recognizing Symptoms of Depression:

Depression is a measure of severity of some of the symptoms listed above. A person can exhibit symptoms of stress and blues for a short time but when reoccurring thoughts, feelings, and outlook negatively impacts your life and ministry in a way that causes extreme changes, one may consider seeking help from a mental health professional. You may have noticed:

- feelings of sadness, tearfulness, emptiness, or hopelessness.
- Preferring to be withdrawn from others.
- Wanting to sleep all the time or not wanting to get out of bed to do anything.
- anger or irritability more than normal.
- avoiding talking to family and friends.
- thoughts about harming yourself, believing you are a failure, and overwhelming desire to quit.
- changes in appetite or weight (more or less)

Symptoms of the blues can often be the same as those of depression or anxiety. The difference is how long these feelings last and the severity. The blues can come and go in waves, but a major depressive episode lasts at least two weeks. If you are constantly distracted from your normal roles, like work or family life, that can be a sign of something more serious.

It is important to note to not write off depressive symptoms just because you or a loved one have occasional moments of happiness or joy. Being in a depressive episode does not mean you cannot experience moments of happiness. But if you are feeling sad, angry, or anxious most of the time, you may need to seek professional help.

Another note is whether one has a history of experiencing clinical depression in the past are more likely to experience it in the future. So, it is important to be aware of symptoms and seek help from a mental health professional if you notice you or a loved one is in a depressive episode.

What you can do:

Do the opposite of what your body tells you. This may sound crazy or at best be difficult, sometimes the best way to get yourself out of a depressive episode is to do the opposite of what your body is telling you to do. When you are in a depressed state, your body is telling you to do everything you can to stay in that depression.

Cognitive/Behavioral therapy may help you think about your situation in positive ways, using interventions to bring about a positive result, getting one to objectively think about their situation rather than being led by feelings. This may be structuring an intervention to have a plan to get out of bed in the morning and walk. After walking, examine that walking was not as bad as you may have thought and will lead you reinforcing your thoughts to a more positive path.

Use virtual support to connect to other pastors or people that you know can encourage and relate to your feelings and thoughts in a respectful way. It is often difficult to find a friend or fellow pastor to share with in confidence. You can always contact Pastoral Care, Inc. for help and encouragement. We are here to help. You are too important to us and the Kingdom of God to stay in this state,

Understand this pandemic will not last forever. Even if we sometimes feel it will last forever, by repeating “it will not last forever” may help us to re-focus on the truth, hope, God’s provision, and bring ways to increase our patience, and understand that our lives are in His hands. The Bible says, He will never leave us nor forsake us, even during times we do not feel Him.

We should not be led by our feelings, thoughts, or by what the social media may be spreading. Our hope, calling, direction, and provision only comes from above. I know it is hard, but I have stated this hundreds of times to others. The key is to get our eyes off ourselves and re-focus on the things that above. He is greater and will get us through this difficult time. Perseverance will make us stronger and better pastors, better family member, and better example of the need to follow Him.

Again, thank you for all you do in the Kingdom of God. We are hopeful this article will be a blessing to you or other people in your church or family. Please feel free to contact us at Pastoral Care, Inc. at 918.758.4147.