

## Ep #242: Depression



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Brooke Castillo**

## Ep #242: Depression

Welcome to *The Life Coach School Podcast*, where it's all about real clients, real problems and real coaching. And now your host, Master Coach Instructor, Brooke Castillo.

Well hello, my friends. What's happening? How are you doing? How are you doing – I hope you have a good answer to that question. Don't be giving me some BS, "Fine." Fine? Really? Come on, rally it up. What you got? Be amazing.

Today, we're going to talk about depression. Now, I am someone who has had my share of depression and I have had experience with clients who've been depressed, a mother who's been depressed, a grandmother who's been depressed. And that's clinically, quote en quote, depressed.

I put clinically because I think a lot of times, clinical depression is subjective. And I don't think it's useful to differentiate between the two unless it is useful to you.

So labels usually don't serve us, but I have found that, oftentimes, depression is one of those things that people have shame about. And so I want to talk about it because I think that shame about being depressed is about as bad as it gets.

It's like you're already depressed, and then you're depressed about your depression, and then you have shame about your depression, which means you think that there's something wrong with you as a human because you're depressed. And first and foremost, I think the most important distinction we can make is that being depressed is something going on in your brain.

It is something going on in your brain, and your brain is not you. Your brain is not who you are. If I have taught you nothing, let me teach you that. What happens in your brain is an effective evolution. It's effective programming. It's an effect of genetics. It's an effect of how you were raised and your society and your culture.

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Who you are, the essence of who you are, is separate from all of it. And your worthiness and your wholeness is preserved through all of it. So when we start to question our worthiness as humans because we're depressed, we're very confused.

Our depression, if we feel depressed, if we're experiencing clinical grade depression, there's something going on in our brain; that's it – 100% worthy, something going on in my brain. Depression doesn't mean there's something wrong with me as a human being, period, the end. That is non-negotiable in my book.

When I have people come to me that tell me that they're broken and there's something wrong with them and they're defective as humans because they're depressed, there is no part of me that believes them, or will ever believe them. They are whole and worthy and complete, and they're experiencing depression in their brain.

So I've found, for me, that is very, very useful in how I think about depression. I think I have a genetic predisposition towards anxiety and I think I have a genetic predisposition towards depression.

I have a theory in my own personal life, and it's been useful for a lot of my clients; that the constant worry and anxiety that I think can come from having certain experiences in your childhood can exhaust you to the point of depression if you don't know how to process and feel emotion. So one of the things that I say often is that the exhaustion we feel from resisting emotion can lead to depression.

Depression is what happens when we lose the plot in our brain. That is it. There is a habit – there are neurotransmitter circuits that can fire together and continue to fire together and you can actually create the habit of any emotion and the habit of the emotion of depression. If resisted too long, it becomes to the point where I think we would classify it as non-functional clinical depression.

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Now, the thing that's important to remember about depression is people who are depressed don't necessarily feel sad. They actually feel just an emptiness where the emotion should be. So it's not even just negative emotion and sadness, or despair, it's numbness. It's nothingness. It's helplessness and hopelessness, which is a very different thing.

So when people are depressed, a lot of times, people go, "Well just cheer up. Come on, slugger, just cheer up." That, my friends, is not going to work and it will likely get you punched in the throat. Do not do that when we are depressed. When we're depressed, we're depressed. We're hopeless, we're helpless.

And it feels like what's interesting about being depressed is there isn't any motivation to not be depressed. It's almost like you've run the well dry to haplessness. There's not even a desire. It's like, "I'm just depressed and I'm depressed about my depression."

And the other thing that's really interesting to know about, like, a clinical diagnosis of depression is that there's no, like, test. They can't be like, "Let's take your blood. Yep, you're depressed..." or, "Let's do an MRI. Yep, you're depressed." No, it is simply a collection of symptoms that you describe to your doctor and then they diagnose you based on the symptoms that you tell them.

And what's interesting is that a lot of clients who are students that I have, clients that I have, patients that doctors have, will present with very different symptoms that are all classified under depression. But one of the mainstays of depression is just this feeling of foreboding endless helplessness.

The symptoms show up in that nothing seems interesting, they're unmotivated, you're overwhelmed, low energy, lots of desire to sleep but the inability to sleep well; just a general lack of luster, let's say. And one of the main issues I see with a lot of my clients is this shame over it and feeling like they shouldn't feel that way, and the same over not wanting to take any medications to help with it.

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And one of the things that I think really helps with when you're kind of debating whether you should take a medication or not is if you felt a certain way because of the cause of something – so if you had a disease that you could pinpoint the cause of it and your doctor offered you some medication to help with it, you would most likely accept the medication in order to feel better.

And I think a lot of people associate being depressed as there being something broken about them and they don't want to take a medication to kind of verify that. And what's interesting is, of course, it's the way that you choose to think about it.

If you think taking medication means that there's something truly wrong with you – and a lot of people will say to me, "I don't want to take medication because I'll become addicted to it or I don't want to take medication because I don't want to be dependent on it. I don't want to be that weak. I think I can talk my way out of it."

I think whether you decide to take medication or not for your depression, it's very important for you to make a decision based on a thought you have come up with consciously, not something you're defaulting to.

So I have been depressed, I would say, two major times in my life. I did not take the medication that was offered to me because I felt like, "I can handle this myself." I read a lot of self-help. And, in retrospect, I think I could have been helped much more quickly had I taken the medication. And here's why; the effect of depression, the effect of the consistent mind loop thought error in the brain creates a chemical situation in the brain that can be helped by medication.

So it's almost like the medication allows us to have enough interest in getting well. And I've seen this happen in so many of my clients who come to me depressed and they'll be working with a therapist and they'll get on medication. And then we're able to get to the point where at least there's the motivation to try and change the thinking and do the work on it because, when you're really clinically depressed, when your

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neurotransmitters and your chemicals are so off, it's almost like you're not even interested in getting better; you're that depressed.

So I think it's important when you understand, "Hey, there's something going on in my brain. I want to get to the point where I can at least have interest in fixing it." That's where medication can come in useful.

I am not saying that you need medication or that you should take it. I'm just saying, you make the decision based on what you believe, not what your brain just happens to be telling you from its depressed state.

The question becomes, for some of us, did the depression come first from the chemic imbalance, or did it come first from the thought errors that caused the chemical imbalance. When we get a pattern of thought in our brain over and over and over again, can that create the chemical imbalance that then causes the depression? Or, does the chemical predisposition for it start it, and then the thought loops continue it?

And my answer to that question is, I don't think it matters. Who cares? You're here now. You're depressed now. You're in this situation now; what are you going to do about it?

So I think obsessing over its original seed of cause doesn't serve changing it. And I think, a lot of times, offering an explanation as to why someone is depressed can be useful in giving them an answer and a direction of how they can change their thinking, but I don't think that it's necessary.

So when you get caught in a brain cycle of thought errors that regenerate themselves and spin you out into a negative spin cycle, that can create an endless cycle of depression and negativity and exhaustion form resisting emotion. And that's what I see happen the most often with depression; that the thought patterns are so ingrained and so consistent and so habitual that in order to get out of them, for some people, there has to be this flow of interest and self-regard to change.

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And sometimes, there's just not enough energy to generate the interest for that, and that's where sometimes bringing a doctor and a psychiatrist in to help with that can be really useful. When people are depressed – when I was depressed, when I notice my family members are depressed, what is one of the main characteristics is that the brain is bent on seeing the negative, the helplessness, the hopelessness in the world.

And a lot of people will argue that depression is caused by experience. It's caused by situations, by things that are happening in the world. And I want to offer that that is absolutely not true. You can have people that go through the most horrific circumstances; they can go through the most horrible situations, the deepest level of loss and not get depressed.

And people that will go through the exact same thing that will get severely depressed – there can be two people who experience the exact same thing and one gets depressed and the other doesn't. And I'm not talking about similar things in their lives; I'm talking about the exact same sort of experience and not be depressed by it. And the only way that we can explain that is by different brains having different thoughts and creating different experiences based on thinking.

So I think, for me, that is very important to understand, because when we think depression is caused by something external and that the world is just a bad place or the world just doesn't care about us or that we are just cursed, we're not going to make any kind of effort to change it. So I think the most important thing to remember when it comes to depression is that we do have options.

And my recommendation for anyone who is suffering with significant non-functioning depression, meaning you're having a hard time functioning in the world, is that you put depression in the C-line as a circumstance. I don't think there's a benefit of negotiating whether you're depressed or not.

If you're asking yourself if you're depressed, you probably are. People who aren't depressed don't normally ask themselves if they're depressed. So if you're having the symptoms of depression, if you're feeling helpless and

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hopeless and energyless and you want to sleep all the time but you can't really sleep all the time and you're not interested in anything outside of just basic functioning, then the answer is yes.

So put it in the C-line and then ask yourself, "Okay, now what?" And what I want to offer is that there are things that make depression worse and there are things that make depression better. And I'm not talking about curing depression. I'm not talking about, "Hey, just use coaching and you won't be depressed anymore." That's not what I'm saying.

What I'm saying is, we can make it worse or we can make it better. And I know this from my own personal experience and from working with many, many clients.

Here are some things that make depression worse; one, having a victim mindset, seeing yourself as the victim and everyone else as a perpetrator. And this can happen with the people that are in your life right now. This can happen when you think about situations from your past. Be very careful to notice, in the stories that you tell, are you the victim in this story.

Second thing that can make it worse is self-loathing; hating on yourself, saying very mean things to yourself and about yourself, getting down on yourself because you're depressed, getting down on yourself because you're not taking the action that you want to take because you're not feeling the way you want to feel. That just compounds a depression. That was my experience when I was depressed. I just hated myself. I hated myself for so many reasons and then I hated myself because I was depressed on top of it. So it was just a terrible brew of self-loathing that created further depression.

Regret – indulging in regret over what's happened in your life or what you've done in your life perpetuates depression. Body-shame – that is one thing that with all the work I've done with my clients on overeating and weight-loss, body-shame is one of those things that can compound and feed that depressive cycle.

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And basically, it's just hating on your body and the way that you look. And typically, what that looks like – what it looked like for me was I didn't bother brushing my hair. I didn't bother dressing in clean clothes. I didn't bother taking a shower or any of that stuff. And so, of course, I had so much body shame already and then every time I looked in the mirror, it just got perpetuated. I wasn't taking care of myself.

Being past-focused makes it worse. Ruminating over your past, things that have happened to you in your past, things, like I said earlier, that you regretting, that you wish you hadn't done, it's kind of like looking at your past and telling yourself a sad or terrible story about what should have been different in your past makes it worse.

Blaming yourself or blaming others is another way to do real damage to the experience of being alive if you're already depressed. Blaming yourself for being depressed, blaming yourself for anything that's happened in your life or anything that you've done, the constant blaming – it's like the double of disempowerment.

It's like you are the victim and the villain in that scenario and there's no winning. And when you blame others, of course, you're the victim in that scenario, which just perpetuates that victim mindset.

Another thing that makes it worse is complaining. And I'm talking about that unconscious complaining and looking for the negative in everything. When I was depressed, that's all I did. My brain was on the search for everything that was terrible and it would find it and it would reiterate it and it would complain about it in my brain and it would complain about it out loud.

And the last thing that really makes depression worse is buffering. So like I said, I think one of the definitions that I use most often for depression is the exhaustion that comes from resisting and avoiding emotion. And one of the ways that we resist and avoid emotion is by buffering, which is overeating, overdrinking, using drugs, using the computer, using porn, using those avenues to try and avoid the experience of processing emotion.

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And the reason why buffering compounds it is because, first of all, it's exhausting to buffer all the time and avoid emotion all the time, but also, there's usually a net negative consequence of buffering. For those of us who overeat, it's gaining weight and feeling sick to our stomachs.

For those of us who overdrink, it's the hangover the next day. It's the way that we act when we've had too much to drink, the regret that comes with all of that just perpetuates the cycle of depression. And that's why so many people who start drinking to try and avoid feeling their emotions end up depressed, because it's just such a negative downward spiral, and then alcohol is a depressant, which of course, makes it worse.

I've been down that road. That is not an enjoyable road. So if you put in the circumstance-line depression, just notice what is driving that buffering and do your very best to become really aware of how you're buffering, trying not to experience emotion.

Now, the next piece of this is what can make depression better. If we put depression in the C-line, then what can we do if we can muster enough energy? And for some of us, we might need some medication or something to help us change the chemical balance in our body in order for us to make these changes, but they are possible for sure and you can start thinking about them.

One of the best things that we can do is thought work; most importantly, remembering that are not our thoughts. We are not our depression. We are whole and complete and our brain is creating depression within itself. But outside of that, the bigger part of us, the spiritual part of us has nothing to do with what's going on in our brain.

And thought work is the process of separating ourselves from our thoughts so we can look at our thoughts from a distance, from the higher part of ourselves and decide more consciously what we want to think. When you're depressed, you will notice that your thoughts are a negative rampage. They are going crazy. And when you can notice, you're going to be like, "Of course I feel terrible, look at all my thinking."

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The second thing that you can do that makes it better is focus on your future. I told you what makes it worse is focusing on your past, ruminating about your past, judging your past. One of the best ways to help yourself is to focus on the possibility of the future.

Again, some of you may be in this space where you're feeling helpless, you're feeling like you can't get to the place where you can even think about your future and you might need to do some of the other tactics first. But if you're in a place where you can start imagining a future that's better than where you are right now, you may not be able to control exactly how you feel in this moment, but you can control what you imagine your future to be.

And that is one of the most important activities you can do when you're depressed, to imagine a better future and to think about that future. Because, what will happen is, you may not be able to come up with positive thoughts about your present; you may be too deep in it to do that. But most of the time, you can imagine that someday you could feel better. And that will actually, by just imagining it, generate some positive emotion now, which will be really helpful, which will take you kind of out of the negative spiral of thought errors.

Creating plans, setting goals, even if they're really small goals, even if they're goals just a week away, even if they're easy, anything that gets you out of the present spiral into the future. And it's very important to make plans and to follow through on those plans. In the beginning, this may be very challenging.

I remember, I had a client one time and all we focused on was her just going for a walk for five minutes a day. She hadn't been able to get off the couch. She hadn't been able to really function. She was just sitting and eating all the time. And one of the things that I told her to do is, just five minutes a day, you're just going to force yourself to get out of the house, get some fresh air, get some sunlight and go for a five-minute walk, and that was a game-changer for her.

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It wasn't because five minutes of exercise was going to make her lose weight. That isn't the point of it. The five minutes of exercise was something she was doing for herself. She was making a plan, she was following through. She started to honor her word to herself and then she started to trust herself again.

It's important to go through the motions of the things you want to do. You're not going to probably feel motivated or excited about those things, but just pushing yourself to go through the motions, of going out to lunch and going to see your friends and going to go on a walk or go to the gym or go get a massage, even though that's the last thing you want to do. It's super important to get up and follow through on that to create another neuropathway, another option for your brain to consider.

Exercise is huge. It really affects your hormones and your neurotransmitters and the way that you process blood flow in your brain. Forcing yourself, if you have to, to even just do five minutes of exercise can be a true game-changer.

The next thing I recommend, and I've always recommended this to everyone, is positive tapes, positive podcasts and reading positive books. You need to fill your brain with positivity. I know, for a fact, this is what saved me from spiraling down into the depths of despair.

I was always listening to Tony Robbins, I was always listening to Marianne Williamson. I was listening on tapes, y'all, when I was really depressed. This was back in the day. And I would just listen to them over and over and over and try to drown out my own voice within my head.

This is before I had thought work, but I just tried to get rid of the voice that was always hating on me and always telling me how terrible I was. And I was able to listen to their voices talk to me and tell me wonderful things that took my mind off of all the negativity that was going on inside of my brain.

Reading books, self-help books, positive books, good novels, reading comedy, reading things that get your brain thinking thoughts other than

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complaining negativity and self-loathing really can be powerful. And, you know, it's not just the activity in the A-line. It's actually the thoughts that you'll be thinking because of the reading and because of the listening to the podcasts.

One of the most empowering things you can do that can help you come out of depression is to make decisions on purpose. One of the things that we do when we get depressed is we start to abdicate any kind of responsibility for our life and we stop making decisions. It's almost like we lose interest in the decisions that are made.

And so, one of the things that I want to recommend is that, when if you are feeling depressed, when somebody says to you, "Hey, where do you want to eat?" My reaction used to be, "I don't care. I don't know, I don't care." And if you can kind of expect more of yourself, make a decision, "I want to go to the steakhouse or I want to go to the Cheesecake Factory..." or wherever it is you want to go.

Make those little decisions, especially the insignificant ones that aren't going to make a big difference, because you will start feeling empowered when you just start making some decisions about your future and in the moment, you will start to feel more and more empowered.

One of the other things that I highly recommend is doing what I introduced to you on the last podcast, which is called a rampage of appreciation and positivity. Fill up a page. Force your brain to look for positivity. When you're depressed, your brain is on the lookout for danger and ugliness. That's what it's doing. It's in a spiral.

You need to force it out of that spiral by expecting it to see positive things and wonderful things and lovely things in the world, even though you may have the thought that everything's hopeless and nothing's good, there's still electricity and there's still puppies and there's still babies and there's still fresh water and homes and beds with blankets; like, forcing your brain to notice the things that are positive. And even though you may not feel

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cheery about those things, telling your brain what to think about is a very powerful exercise.

And the last thing I want to recommend, and I think this one is one of the most important things, is to get a shower every day and get dressed. When you're depressed, it is very easy to stay in your pajamas all day. It is very easy to stay in your sweats all day because you just don't have the energy or the desire to do anything else.

And I want to recommend that you ask more of yourself in that moment. This is what I would say to myself, "You can be depressed, but we're going to get up and we're going to put a pair of jeans on and we're going to put a t-shirt on and we're going to put shoes on, and that's how we're going to roll."

And make the bed every day, and clean the room, straighten up the room every day even though that's the last thing you want to do because what you're going to see visually will compound your depression. So if your bed's a mess and your hair's a mess and you're not clean and you haven't dressed yourself well, that will make it worse.

And most of us who are feeling depressed can have enough gumption to get ourselves dressed. And I remember, it used to be exhausting. I was doing a lot of buffering at the time, so I was overeating a lot, so I was heavier than I'd ever been. And I put on my jeans and I put on a t-shirt and I put on a belt and I brushed my hair and I put on some makeup and it just made me feel just a little bit more empowered, a little bit more in charge of my life.

And I just asked myself to do that every single day, and eventually, I started doing more and more and more. I started making more plans and then one day I realized that I wasn't depressed anymore. It's something that we need to do consciously.

Most of you know that I have anxiety every morning when I wake up. Most mornings when I wake up, I have the purse of anxiety that I carry around

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with me. And I've learned how to be a high-functioning person who has the experience of anxiety. And I think that we can utilize that same concept as it applies to depression.

I think that we can feel sorry for ourselves because we're depressed and shuffle around in our pajamas and let our hair get greasy, or we can understand, yes, we're depressed, but I'm going to get up, brush my hair. I'm going to get dressed. I'm going to do some rampages of appreciation. I'm going to listen to some positive podcasts. I'm going to think about my future and I'm going to do some thought work.

And at the very least, I'll feel a little bit better than if I would have sat around hating myself all day. It seems like a little thing, but it's the biggest thing. It's the biggest thing that gets your brain off of the loop of thought errors and negativity and onto the loop of positivity and empowerment.

So I hope that helps. I know a lot of you are struggling with depression. I know a lot of you are on medication and trying to find your way back to yourselves. And I just want to let you know that there is a way back. It is possible, but you, in and of yourself, are perfect and wonderful and worthy, and it's just your brain that's depressed.

And that's okay. You can find your way out of it, I promise you that. Alright, my friends, have a beautiful week. I'll talk to you next week. Take care, bye-bye.

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