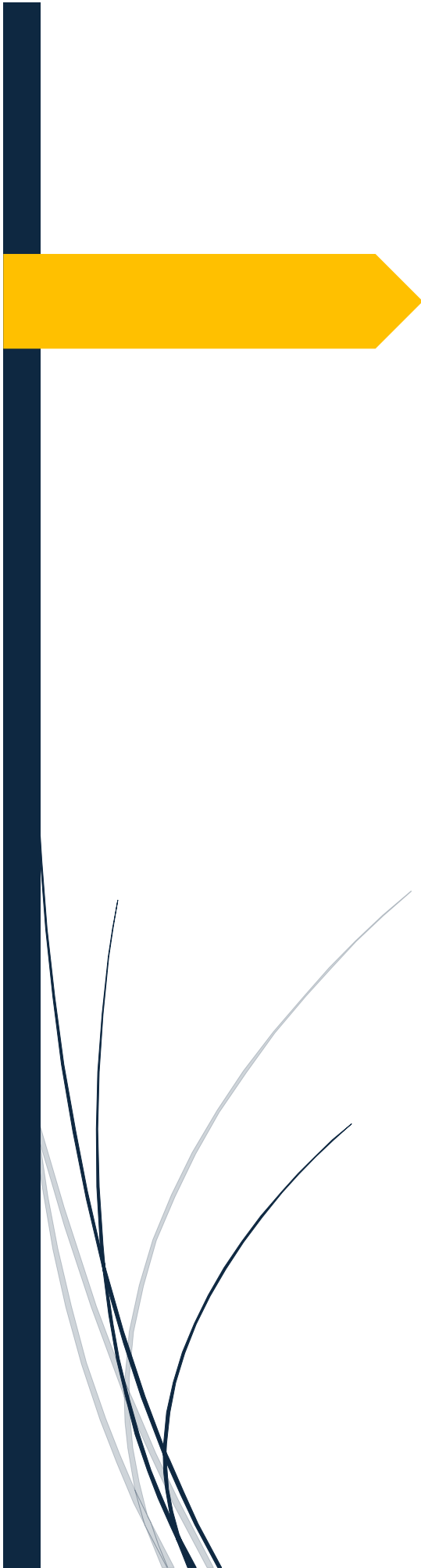




Depression

Understanding Our Switches
& Disconnects

Tracy Henderson
Counseling

Depression can look and feel different from person to person. It may show up as sadness, but it can also feel like exhaustion, numbness, irritability, withdrawal, low motivation, difficulty concentrating, or simply not feeling like yourself.

When we are experiencing depression, it can be tempting to ask: **“What is wrong with me?”**

Try a different set of questions:

- What has switched off?
- What has become overloaded?
- What have I become disconnected from?

Rather than viewing depression as one single problem, consider it a signal that something within you or around you may need attention, support, change, or reconnection.

Switch Off vs. Overloaded Switch

Imagine your mind and body as a system containing many different switches.

Some switches influence energy. Others influence pleasure, motivation, connection, concentration, hope, movement, sleep, or our ability to care for ourselves.

When depression develops, some of these switches may begin functioning differently.

Switch Off

Sometimes something that normally provides energy, pleasure, motivation, meaning, or connection simply doesn't seem to turn on.

You may notice:

- Activities don't sound enjoyable.
- You stop reaching out to people.
- Getting started feels difficult.
- Exercise or movement decreases.
- Self-care becomes harder.
- You stop looking forward to things.
- You feel less curious or interested.
- Things that once mattered don't seem as important.
- You feel disconnected from yourself.

This can create a difficult cycle: **Less energy → less activity → fewer rewarding experiences → less connection → less motivation → greater withdrawal**

The less we engage with life, the fewer opportunities we have to experience the things that might provide energy, accomplishment, pleasure, connection, or meaning.

Overloaded Switch

Other times, the problem may not be that there isn't enough happening.

There may be **too much**.

Our system may have been carrying stress, responsibilities, uncertainty, conflict, loss, pressure, health concerns, parenting demands, work demands, relationship challenges, or unresolved experiences for an extended period of time.

Eventually: **Overload → stress → depletion → withdrawal → disconnection → shutdown**

What looks like a lack of motivation may sometimes be an exhausted system trying to conserve its remaining resources.

The question becomes less: **“Why can't I get myself to do anything?”**

and more: **“What has my system been carrying?”**

Find Your Disconnects

Depression can involve becoming disconnected from some of the things that normally help us feel grounded, engaged, capable, connected, and alive.

Consider your current relationship with each of the following areas.

BODY

How connected do I feel to:

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| • Sleep | • Hygiene |
| • Movement | • Sensory experiences |
| • Exercise | • Sexual health |
| • Nutrition | • Rest and recovery |
| • Physical health | |

Connection: 0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

SELF

How connected do I feel to:

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------|
| • My identity | • My capabilities |
| • My values | • My confidence |

- My interests
- Self-care
- My ability to regulate myself
- The person I want to be

Connection: 0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

PEOPLE

How connected do I feel to:

- My partner
- Family
- Children
- Friends
- Community
- Coworkers
- People who support me
- Myself

Connection: 0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

PURPOSE

How connected do I feel to:

- Meaningful work
- Helping others
- Learning
- Contribution
- Responsibilities that matter to me
- Personal goals
- Something larger than myself

Connection: 0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

PLEASURE

How connected do I feel to:

- Hobbies
- Play
- Humor
- Music
- Creativity
- Recreation
- Food
- Sex/intimacy
- Nature
- Activities I previously enjoyed

Connection: 0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

AGENCY

How connected do I feel to my ability to:

- Make choices
- Influence my circumstances
- Solve problems
- Set boundaries
- Ask for what I need
- Complete tasks
- Make changes
- Take action

Connection: 0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

FUTURE

How connected do I feel to:

- Hope
- Goals
- Anticipation
- Possibilities
- A secure future
- Something I'm working toward
- Something I'm looking forward to

Connection: 0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

What Did You Notice?

Which areas are most disconnected right now?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now consider:

- **Did depression contribute to these disconnects?**
- **Did these disconnects contribute to the depression?**
- **Could both be happening at the same time?**

You don't necessarily need to determine which came first. More important is identifying **where you might begin reconnecting.**

Behavioral Activation

Don't Wait to Feel Better to Start Doing Better

One of the traps of depression is waiting for motivation.

We tell ourselves: “**When I feel better, I'll start doing things again.**”

But sometimes action needs to come **before** motivation.

Behavioral activation works from a different direction: **Do something → create an experience → observe what happens → learn → adjust → repeat**

The goal isn't to force yourself to feel happy.

The goal is to intentionally create opportunities for **movement, connection, pleasure, accomplishment, agency, and meaning.**

Behavioral activation is particularly helpful and includes movement, exercise, routines, self-care, social involvement, volunteering, skill building, problem-solving, accountability and other activation strategies.

Activate Your BODY

Try something that changes your physical state.

- Take a shower.
- Change your clothes.
- Step outside.
- Walk for 10 minutes.
- Stretch.
- Exercise.
- Eat something nourishing.
- Drink water.
- Sit in sunlight.
- Change your environment.
- Practice a sleep routine.
- Use breathing or grounding exercises.

Don't underestimate small physical changes. Sometimes **moving the body helps move the mind.**

Activate CONNECTION

Depression often encourages withdrawal.

Try moving slightly toward connection instead.

- Text someone.
- Call someone.
- Sit in the same room with someone.
- Spend time with your partner or family.
- Play with or care for a pet.
- Ask someone to go for a walk.
- Volunteer.
- Attend a group or community activity.
- Tell someone you're having a difficult day.

Connection doesn't always require a deep conversation.

Sometimes the objective is simply: **Don't disappear.**

Activate CAPABILITY

Depression can make us question our competence and ability to influence our circumstances.

Create a small opportunity to remind yourself: **“I can.”**

- Finish one small task.
- Make your bed.
- Cook something.
- Fix something.
- Organize one drawer.
- Answer one email.
- Solve one problem.
- Learn something.
- Help someone.
- Complete something you've been avoiding.

Don't measure the activity by how impressive it is.

Measure it by whether it provides evidence that: **“I can still influence something.”**

Activate PLEASURE

Depression can reduce our ability to anticipate or experience pleasure. This is sometimes referred to as **anhedonia**, a theme identified in the original resource.

Instead of asking: **“What sounds fun?”**

Try asking: **“What used to feel good, interesting, calming, funny, or enjoyable?”**

Experiment with:

- Music
- Humor
- Food
- Nature
- Art
- Games
- Hobbies
- Play
- Movies
- Physical affection
- Sensory experiences
- Something novel

You aren't demanding that the activity make you feel better.

You're **testing and learning** what your system responds to.

Build Your Personal Switchboard

You don't need every strategy.

You need to discover **your switches**.

When I notice...I am staying in bed or on the couch more than usual.

My switch might be:

When I notice...I am avoiding people.

My switch might be:

When I notice...Everything feels overwhelming.

My switch might be:

When I notice...Nothing sounds enjoyable.

My switch might be:

When I notice...I feel powerless or stuck.

My switch might be:

When I notice...My thoughts become increasingly negative or self-critical.

My switch might be:

When I notice...I don't feel like myself.

My switch might be:

Create Your Experiment

Instead of trying to fix everything, choose **one or two switches** to experiment with.

Switch #1

- What have I become disconnected from?
- What is one small action I can take?
- When will I try it?
- What happened afterward?

Switch #2

- What have I become disconnected from?
- What is one small action I can take?
- When will I try it?
- What happened afterward?

The goal isn't: **“Did this cure my depression?”**

Instead ask: **Did anything shift—even 5%?**

- Did my energy change?
- Did my mood change?
- Did I feel more connected?
- Did I experience accomplishment?
- Did I feel more capable?
- Did I learn something about myself?

If something helped, **practice it again.**

If it didn't, **try another switch.**

Don't Try to Turn Everything Back On

When several parts of life have gone offline, trying to repair everything at once can create even more overload.

You don't have to:

- Fix every relationship.
- Become highly productive.
- Exercise every day.
- Completely change your diet.
- Discover your purpose.
- Solve every problem.
- Suddenly become happy.

Start smaller. **Find one switch you can influence today.** Small actions create experiences.

Experiences create information. Information helps you understand what your system needs.

And repeated small actions can gradually create momentum.

When Depression May Be More Than a Temporary Disconnect

Depression is different from simply having a difficult day or experiencing temporary sadness.

Several symptoms may be associated with a depressive episode, including depressed mood, significantly diminished interest or pleasure, sleep changes, fatigue/loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt, difficulty thinking or concentrating, psychomotor changes, weight changes, and recurrent thoughts of death or suicide. Symptoms may cause meaningful impairment and not be better explained by substances or another medical condition.

Grief and sadness can also overlap with depression while representing different experiences. Your current resource appropriately flags the importance of differentiating them rather than assuming every experience of sadness or loss represents depression.

If symptoms are persistent, worsening, interfering significantly with everyday life, or difficult to manage independently, consider talking with a qualified mental health or medical professional.

If you are experiencing thoughts of suicide or believe you may be in immediate danger, seek immediate professional or emergency support.

Final Reflection

Instead of asking only: **“Why am I depressed?”**

Experiment with asking:

- **What has switched off?**
- **What has become overloaded?**
- **What have I become disconnected from?**
- **What does my system need more of?**
- **What does my system need less of?**
- **What is one switch I can influence today?**

You don't have to turn everything back on at once.

Find one switch. Test it. Learn from it. Then decide what to try next.