

KNOW THYSELF

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Living in denial of depression can worsen mental health. An insight into the individual's personality traits is crucial to fight it

The first step in solving any problem is to identify and become intimately familiar with it, much like learning swimming; you got to know the nature of water to be able to swim. This is as true for overcoming depression and anxiety, as it is for cracking any other problem.

"Emotions, thoughts and behaviour are all related. How you behave is a sum total of how you feel and how you think. To be

able to change the behaviour, if it is causing problems, is to know what is making you behave like that," says Dr Kala Balasubramaniam, counselling psychologist at Inner Dawn Counselling.

Knowing yourself is beyond figuring out your favourite colour or your favourite music album.

It is process of understanding you - the human being - on deeper levels than the surface. It brings you face-to-face with your deep self-doubts and insecurities. It makes you take a serious look at the way you are living your life and put it to question.

Unfortunately, when people look at their personal difficulties, they often have blind spots that they don't even know are there. Although people may not be aware of their blind spots, but those around them, are. Dr Padma Narayan, an Independent clinical psychologist says that when people are unaware of what they are doing, diagnosis of the problem is difficult. For instance, when a client came to therapy because his wife insisted that he had anger problem, he took it as an overreaction. At one point,

Narayan experienced what his wife was talking about his anger. "I commented that he really sounded angry, which he resolutely denied. After a few similar interactions, he paused after my comment; then smirked and said, 'I guess I am angry.' After that, he could acknowledge his anger before it became explosive," she says.

What Narayan's client came to understand, after much discussion, was that he was unconsciously avoiding conflict with his wife out of a deep fear that she would leave him. This was the first time he had been able to really pin point a

reason for his anger.

Much like him, people often protect themselves by closing off awareness to scary or painful experiences. So, while they can sometimes acknowledge the problems that arise due to this method of coping they are blind to what is really causing those problems.

As Balasubramaniam puts it, "Anger is an outburst which can be caused by several reasons like jealousy, hurt or disappointment.

It is important to understand these sub-plots to diagnose the root cause of anger."

Mr Anoop Alex, psychologist and founder of Mind Vidya says that self-awareness is an important step towards curing depression. "I need to know that I am distressed to seek help on my own". "In our practice, developing insight is often the first goal, helping the person become aware of their condition and how they are being affected by it. It helps them take responsibility for themselves to make an effort at changing, and then occurs intellectual and emotional understanding as to how this change can happen through therapy," Alex says. Being mindful in various life circumstances across time is key to self-awareness. It's a preventive factor, and also a maintenance factor for wellbeing, even after chronic depression is treated, he adds

Though different models of therapy such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy or Psychodynamic therapy, approach it differently, in the end, successful approaches help people to fully acknowledge those denied experiences. The treatment focuses on the psychological roots of emotional suffering. Its hallmarks are self-reflection and self-examination.

By slowly acknowledging the experiences and working the edges of them, much like slowly wading into cold, deep waters, people can get to know, tolerate, and accept those aspects of themselves, Dr B S Padmavati of Gayatri Psychology Clinic says. She points out that a lot of people, even after being diagnosed with depression, live in denial, "as they start enjoying the extra care shown by their loved ones." The agenda is to explore those aspects that they have been denying; or have never really known. And, with this exposure, they can begin to experience and understand themselves in new ways; freer to make healthy changes.

Over the past 10 years, psychologists have focused on a new field of research called narrative identity. As Dan McAdams, Northwestern University psychology professor, explains, "Your narrative identity is the story of your life; but it's more than just a story. How you understand your narrative frames both your current actions and your future goals." As research shows, writing about difficult life experiences improves our physical and mental health. How much you confront your life's challenges defines your level of self-awareness.

But reflection takes many forms. Some keep a journal, some pray, and others take a long walk or jog. Time spent alone in thought can be positive - a rich environment for personal growth and creativity, but it can also be dangerous when we are negatively turned against ourselves. Introspection can be a process of healthy self-reflection, examination, and exploration, which is good for your well-being and your brain.

"It's only when we are in the realistic point of view of our "real self," we can have positive self-reflection," Alex says.

SELF SEARCHING

»Understanding your own personality is the key. Analyse and interpret you personality. Have a self-image. Get to know your personality inside out.

»Get to Know Your Core Values or morale codes that you hold near. These core values play a big role in decision-making, influencing, persuading, conflict-resolution, and living your day-to-day life.

»Get to Know Your Body. Know your abilities and limitations. Don't set unrealistic targets like having a zero size figure, when your body can't take it.

»Get to know your dreams. Your dreams and hopes create the pathway into your future. They help you build the life you can be proud of living. »Get to know your likes and dislikes. Take the time to define your likes and dislikes, and don't put it up for a vote among family and friends. You decide.

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