

1. **NewsHealth And Wellness** How easily do we slip into depression and how do we get out of it

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Our proactive objective is to consistently create and reside in thoughts that empower us, says mental health therapist Rachna K

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Seeking approval, seeking significance is the mind's attempt to deny failure. The mind tends to go back to what is familiar. (Source: Freepik)

Depression is usually a continuum of four possible processes. It begins with the harsh critical words we say to ourselves: "I can't get anything right," or "I'm so stupid." It stems from not being able to follow our heart's desire: "I wanted to be a photographer but became an engineer; it pays the bills" or "I wanted to be a doctor, but my parents insisted I get married." The third stage is when you are not able to find connections: "No one understands me" or "I don't belong here." The last stage is when we feel the situation won't change: "I have to stay in this relationship with my abusive husband forever" or "I always disappoint my family."

When anyone repeatedly experiences these thoughts, the mind loops into depression.

During a therapy session, a young girl told me, "I feel a pressure to perform." This pressure originated from a well-meaning parent, pushing her in the early years to do better, because she was capable. Somewhere, pushing to do better made her feel pressured. But any performance that may have not met her standard, led her to believe she had disappointed her parent, and herself. Disappointment brings about guilt and shame.

"My teacher gave me this amazing opportunity to be a great artist. I disappointed her. I should be ashamed of myself," she said. The talented girl stopped trying at art. She never finished the project. The mind leads us to believe, "If I've never tried, then I've

never failed.” Or “If I’ve never finished, then I’ve never failed.” The other side of fear of failure is, “I’ll only do it if I succeed.” It’s all or nothing.

She wants to start a project but instead, procrastinates. The mind procrastinates probably because doing the project is overwhelming. The mind’s logical response then is: “Stop. There is too much to take on.” The mind’s emotional response to being overwhelmed: “I can’t solve the problem. I feel like a failure.” It’s not our fault, it’s the way the mind works.

To compensate for the feeling of “not being good enough”, we start to do things to feel good enough. The young girl would spend time organising her notes. She felt a sense of accomplishment in doing familiar tasks.

After tiring herself out with these tasks, she felt worse because she didn’t start the project. In feeling disappointed, one is constantly looking for approval. “I can miss class today, right Mom?” Or one needs to feel significant: “I’m waiting for the right, big opportunity. That will prove I’m not a failure.”

Seeking approval, seeking significance is the mind’s attempt to deny failure.

The mind tends to go back to what is familiar. If feeling “disappointed” is familiar, the girl may not be able to accept praise. Suddenly she’ll “make a mistake.” Her mind is making her do this, because the familiar pattern of “I’m a disappointment” needs to play out. The negative thoughts, feelings and behaviours in the mind become closely linked together: “I feel pressured to succeed; I’m a disappointment; I’m not good enough; I’m a failure; it’s overwhelming, I don’t want to try; I don’t want to finish; it has to be perfect; I feel shame; I feel guilt; I need approval; I want significance.” She repeats the harsh critical words to herself. This gets her into depression. It can happen to anybody, at any time.

The mind needs intervention. Someone who can guide us to accept ourselves, encourage us to move forward and hear us out without judgement. We can choose our thoughts. We can override existing patterns. As human beings, our faculty of choice is our greatest asset and our greatest liability. Our proactive objective is to consistently create and reside in thoughts that empower us. To understand this, we must understand the way the mind works. We must understand the way we think is not our fault.

(The author is a New York, US-based mental health therapist practising Rapid Transformational Therapy (RTT, CHt) and a graduate of Johns Hopkins University, US)

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