

Depression

Depression (also known as major depression, major depressive disorder, or clinical depression) is a common but serious mood disorder. It causes severe symptoms that affect how a person feels, thinks, and handles daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or working. Nearly three in ten adults (29%) have been diagnosed with depression at some point in their lives and about 18% are currently experiencing depression, according to a 2023 national survey. Women are more likely than men and younger adults are more likely than older adults to experience depression. While depression can occur at any time and at any age, on average it can first appear during one's late teens to mid-20s.

Symptoms of depression symptoms can vary from mild to severe and can appear differently in each person. These symptoms can include:

- Feeling sad, irritable, empty and/or hopeless.
- Losing interest or pleasure in activities you once enjoyed.
- A significant change in appetite (eating much less or more than usual) and/or weight (notable loss or gain unrelated to dieting).
- Sleeping too little or too much.
- Decreased energy or increased tiredness or fatigue
- Increase in purposeless physical activity (e.g., inability to sit still, pacing, handwringing) or slowed movements or speech that are severe enough to be observable by others.
- Feeling worthless or excessively guilty.
- Difficulty thinking or concentrating, forgetfulness, and/or difficulty making minor decisions.
- Thoughts of death, suicidal ideation, or suicide attempts.

Please note that it is normal to experience moments of sadness or feeling “down in the dumps” or the blues as part of the human experience. However, a diagnosis of depression requires that the above symptoms occur for most of the day, nearly every day, for more than two weeks, along with a clear change in day-to-day functioning (e.g., in work/school performance, personal relationships, and hobbies). Fortunately, depression is very treatable.

Anxiety

Experiencing occasional anxiety is a normal part of life. However, people with anxiety disorders frequently have intense, excessive and persistent worry and fear about everyday situations. Often, anxiety disorders involve repeated episodes of sudden feelings of intense anxiety and fear or terror that reach a peak within minutes (panic attacks).

These feelings of anxiety and panic interfere with daily activities, are difficult to control, are out of proportion to the actual danger and can last a long time. You may avoid places or situations to prevent these feelings. Symptoms may start during childhood or the teen years and continue into adulthood.

Common anxiety signs and symptoms include:

- Feeling nervous, restless or tense
- Having a sense of impending danger, panic or doom
- Having an increased heart rate
- Breathing rapidly (hyperventilation)
- Sweating
- Trembling
- Feeling weak or tired
- Trouble concentrating or thinking about anything other than the present worry
- Having trouble sleeping
- Experiencing gastrointestinal (GI) problems
- Having difficulty controlling worry
- Having the urge to avoid things that trigger anxiety

Anxiety disorders are treated with psychological therapy, pharmacology, or a combination of both. Cognitive behavioral therapy can be regarded as the psychotherapy with the highest level of evidence.

DCPP Cases

Child Protection and Permanency is New Jersey's child protection and child welfare agency within the New Jersey Department of Children and Families. Its mission is to assist all New Jersey residents to be safe, healthy and connected. CP&P is responsible for investigating allegations of child abuse and neglect and, if necessary, arranging for the child's protection and the family's treatment. The Child Abuse Hotline (State Central Registry) receives reports of child abuse and neglect 24-hours a day, 7-days a week. Reports requiring a field response are forwarded to the CP&P Local Office who investigates.

About reporting child abuse CP&P contracts with community-based agencies throughout the state to provide services for children and families. Services include counseling, parenting skills classes, substance abuse treatment, in-home services, foster care and residential placement. If a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm, CP&P may ask the county family court to place the child in foster care. Foster homes are provided by caring individuals who have completed an extensive licensing program.

PCG is currently contracted with DCPP as an approved vendor to provide psychological and evaluation services. We provide psychological evaluations to determine a mental health diagnosis as it relates to an individual's psychological needs. This evaluation involves formal questionnaires, checklists, psychological testing, and surveys as well as psychological interview. Responses to questions are used to determine family, medical, social, environmental factors, and current stressors. Psychological testing is also conducted to attain a better realization of the current related presenting problem. We conduct all these services within a culturally competent framework to families with a Middle Eastern background and/or those whose native language is Arabic.

PCG also provides individual or family therapy on-site or through telehealth. We provide the court with opinions relevant to parenting capacity. Our evaluations are impartial, structured, and transparent.

Marital Conflict

Marital conflict is a natural byproduct of two people deciding to live together, each with their own complexities and idiosyncracies and baggage, and expecting themselves to live harmoniously. Marital conflict refers to the frequency of verbal or physical hostility between couples, or more broadly, how couples handle their differences.

Marital conflict has deleterious effects on mental, physical, and family health. It can be about virtually anything. Couples complain about sources of conflict ranging from verbal and physical abusiveness to personal characteristics and behaviors. Marital conflict may arise at perceived inequality in a couple's division of labor, or due the tendency for the male to withdraw in response to conflict.

Conflict over power is also strongly related to marital dissatisfaction. Spouses' reports of conflict over extramarital sex, problematic drinking, or drug use predict divorce, as do wives' reports of husbands being jealous and spending money foolishly. It is natural to expect that the greater the severity of the marital problems, the more the likelihood of divorce. Even though it is often not reported to be a problem by couples, violence among couples is a predictor of divorce, as is psychological aggression (verbal aggression and nonverbal aggressive behaviors that are not directed at the partner's body).

The ten most common causes of conflict in marriage are:

- Intimacy issues including lack of passion, sexual problems, and shutting down emotionally
- Projecting negative emotions on the partner and using him/her as a punching bag
- Miscommunication whether stemming from unclear expression of thoughts or feelings, selective listening, or unspoken assumptions
- Jealousy can turn a marriage into a dreaded daily battle
- Abuse in all its forms, physical, emotional, and psychological
- Money problems that is based on differences in opinion about saving and spending money
- Communication breakdown is the most common source of marital conflict
- Infidelity is not always about physical cheating but can also be marked by emotional connections with someone outside the marriage
- Problematic behaviors could encompass a wide range of actions, such as dishonesty, manipulation, aggression, substance misuse, or neglect

Assessment

Assessment is used to evaluate an individual's cognitive abilities, such as memory, problem-solving skills, and intellectual functioning. Psychological assessment can identify the underlying causes of an individual's symptoms and provide a basis for developing a treatment plan that is tailored to their needs.

During the assessment, the healthcare professional will discuss with you your needs. The conversation might cover: mental health symptoms and experiences, feelings, thoughts and actions.

Assessment may be gathered through interviews, observations, standardized tests, self-report measures, or other specialized procedures.

There are three major issues in psychological testing: reliability, validity and bias. Reliability is when a test consistently delivers the same results, either over time or across psychologists. Validity is when a test accurately measures what it's supposed to measure.

Learning Disabilities

A learning disability is a disorder in one or more basic psychological processes that may manifest itself as an imperfect ability in certain areas of learning. It affects the ability to understand, or use spoken or written language, do mathematical calculations, coordinate movements or direct attention.

Learning disabilities occur in very young children, yet they are usually not noticed until the child reaches school age. Learning disabilities can be lifelong conditions. In some people, several overlapping learning disabilities may occur. Other people may have a single, isolated learning problem that has little impact on their lives.

No one really knows what causes a learning disability. Often, learning problems can run in families (genetic), but environmental factors can play a role too. Disabilities occur because there is an enormous range of variation that occurs normally in people's cognitive strengths and weaknesses.

The most common treatment for learning disabilities is special education. Specially trained teachers may perform a formal assessment to understand the child's academic and intellectual potential. They will also look at the level of academic performance. Once the evaluation is complete, the basic approach is to teach learning skills by

building on the child's abilities and strengths while correcting disabilities and weaknesses.

The top seven most common learning disabilities are:

- Dyslexia
- Dysgraphia
- Dyscalculia
- Auditory processing disorder
- Language processing disorder
- Nonverbal learning disabilities
- Visual perceptual/visual motor deficit.

Each of these conditions can present with a range of symptoms and can be diagnosed through a combination of medical and educational assessments.