



Depression

These notes are taken from the course notes for 'Understanding How to Help'. Click for further details of the [Understanding Yourself](#) courses.

Understanding the [Melancholic](#) is the key to understanding depression. We need to remind ourselves of the difference between Phlegmatic collapse and Melancholic depression. The symptoms appear similar, but the root is different.

The principles shared here can help the person experiencing a relatively short period of 'feeling down' through to someone who feels locked into deep depression over a longer time.

Why Melancholic?

A Melancholic comes into this world with the question, 'Am I worth anything?' The Phlegmatic feels unsubstantial, but the Melancholic can feel worthless. A Phlegmatic's instinct is to protect his vulnerability while a Melancholic assumes that they are at the bottom of the pile. A Phlegmatic gets pulled towards the centre of his ever-shrinking circle, but the pull for the Melancholic is downward.

The answer to the question, 'What am I worth?' can provide insight into the depth of the depression. If there is a positive element in the answer, then the person may well be coping with that downward pull, but if he has concluded that he is worth little or nothing, then he will be troubled by depression, even if he attempts to conceal it by living in his extrovert. When he wakes up at the beginning the day, his perspective as he anticipates the day will be determined by what he feels he is worth. If he is strongly aware of his value, he can go forward into the day with confidence. If he is unsure of his value, then the day itself can be a challenge and pressure. If he feels he has no value, then what is the point of even getting out of bed? This is true depression, and this person needs serious help.

By nature, a Melancholic is negative towards himself, and if nurture reinforces that message, then he really is in trouble. What could be better than a positive Choleric working with a positive Melancholic? However, the opposite can also be true. If nurture is negative, a damaged Choleric can add to the negativity in the Melancholic, thus pushing him towards depression. In a Choleric Melancholic, the Choleric feels he needs to be at the top if he is to have any value. However, the Melancholic 'knows' he is at the bottom, so an internal negative loop of self-criticism is easily established.

When a person's childhood has been positive and affirming, at least he has an alternative view of himself that he can choose to believe.

How to help

As you begin to engage with the depressed Melancholic, there are two important questions to ask yourself.

1. Life experiences

Have his life experiences reinforced that naturally negative view that he has of himself? If so, what are those experiences?

2. His response

How has he responded to those negative experiences? In other words, what has he done with what he feels about himself?

Let's look more closely at each of these.



1. Life experiences

a. connections

- What was his relationship like with his father?
- Were there proper connections in the home, or did he get missed? If a child gets missed, they will naturally conclude that they are not worth bothering with.
- Did his parents live in their introverts sufficiently to know what was going on inside him?
- Did he 'have a voice' as a child? Not being heard sends a powerful message to a Melancholic about their value.
- Was there anyone he could talk to? Was he ever able to express what he really felt or thought?

b. place in the family

- Was he seen as 'different' in the family? If so, he would join up the dots to turn that into a negative.
- What were the parents' attitudes towards him – understanding, frustration, anger?
- Was there a strong sibling who dominated family proceedings?
- Was he able to get his own space, or did he have to remove himself?
- What was the family home like – was there order or the pressure of chaos? Were there good standards in the family, morally and practically?

c. general

- Was he encouraged to develop his creativity? What are his interests, hobbies, career?
- Was there abuse of any sort?

2. His response

It will be important to know what he did with the negatives that he feels about himself – and what he does in the present.

a. his attitude to himself

What does he really feel about himself? How strong are his negatives? Has he turned anger against others into anger against himself? Does he blame himself for everything and feels he is never good enough? Does he misuse his sensitivity and turn it into subjectivity?

It is easy to see how deep self-loathing would lead to depression.

b. how is his attitude to himself expressed?

If you don't like yourself and feel you have done wrong, then you will look for a punishment. If someone doesn't do it to you, you will do it to yourself. If he is a Sanguine, he may well punish himself by self-harming; if a Choleric, his punishment will be in his mind.

Both extroverts can distract themselves from the pain and reality of situations by going to excess in sport, careers, food, alcohol or possibly even drugs.



If a Choleric, then the strength of the Choleric and his ability to repress emotions could result in endless mental activity, logical arguments, ambitious goal-setting, or Chronic Fatigue. It will be important to help him understand the connection between what he feels about himself and the many ways that will express itself. Both extrovert temperaments are capable of pushing themselves hard, avoiding what goes on in the Melancholic until the activity ceases. That is danger time. What he feels about himself needs resolving rather than indulging in endless distractions or substitutes.

Delivering help

1. Stay focussed

It will be important for him to make the connection between many of the effects of his depression and the root cause of that depression – i.e. the ‘worth’ issue. Many hours could be wasted in dealing with complex expressions of the underlying cause. Clearly, there are times when the problems created by the depression have to be addressed but they must not distract from the main purpose of the help given.

2. In the know

Make sure that you are thoroughly conversant with the Melancholic temperament. Get to know your own introvert if that is who you are and get to know others who have the same temperament. Get into the feel of the temperament, so you are not imposing who you are on to them. He will only be open to change if he knows you understand him and are not condemning or judging him.

3. Deal with the self-worth issue

The dislike of self will have to be dealt with step by step. There is a lot of information in Steps One to Four that will help you to do this. Remember it is a journey. Travel with this person and be consistent in not accepting his negative view of himself. Share the illustrations. Help him to see that what he feels about himself can be the result of a negative internal loop, as with the Choleric Melancholic, or the wrong messages that were sent by people whose issues spilt out onto him. They are not an accurate comment on who he is.

4. Remember Will

As with each of us, there will come a point where the Melancholic will have to exercise his will in order to make the changes. Help him to see that he can choose to trust, choose to take responsibility and to reach out. He must not stay in the trap of making his negatives his identity. He does not have to indulge emotions and live in a place of self-absorption. He can allow his self-sacrificing qualities to be put to good work rather than focusing on ‘not being good enough’ or isolating himself.

5. Be practical

The creativity of a Melancholic is the path to his heart. Always suggest something creative that he can do. Remember to ask him the next time how he is getting on. It might be useful to ask if there was anything creative that he had ever wanted to do. It could be art or music, or you could suggest simply painting a room or tidying a kitchen. You will know what is appropriate.

If you can see unnecessary pressure points that can be removed, then encourage him to do so. For example, his environment needs to be orderly, his day needs routine, and he will want the satisfaction of some achievement in each day, however small. He will need to have space without isolating himself. He needs to get outside, walk, exercise and appreciate what is around him. Changing lifestyle can make a major contribution to breaking depression.