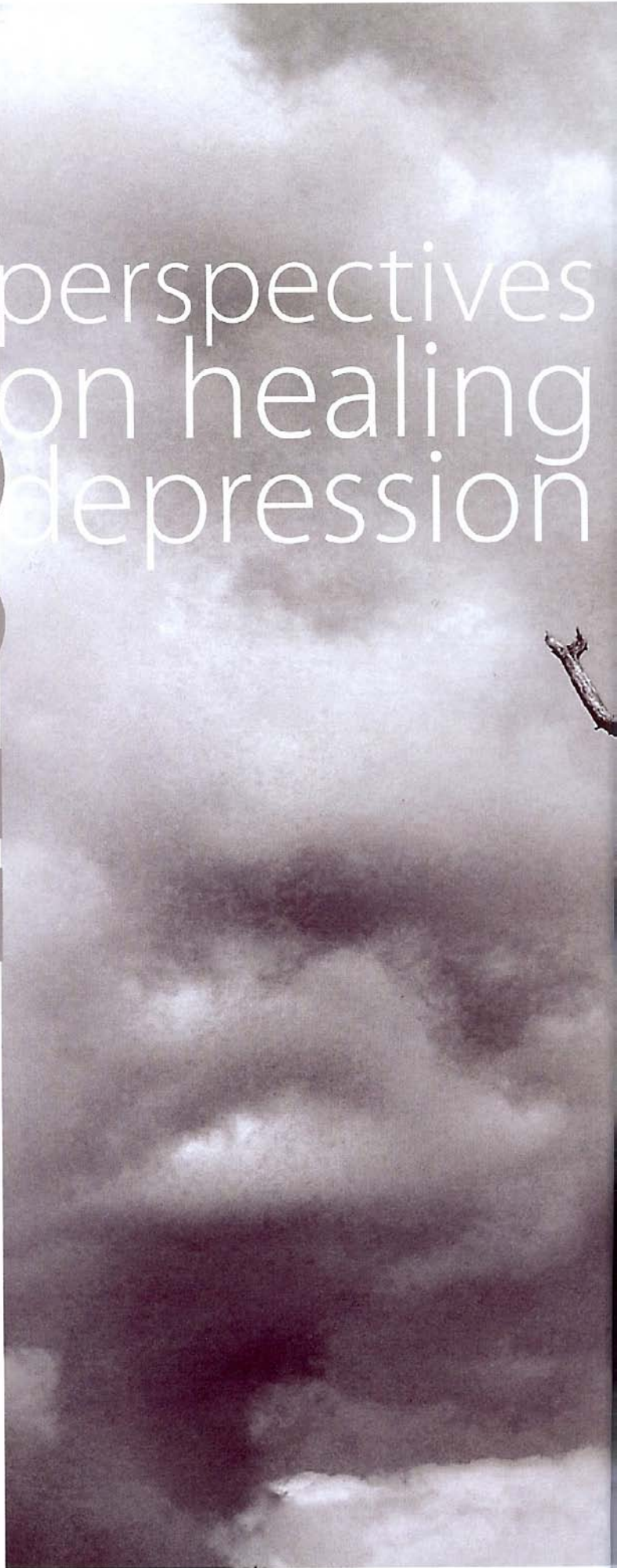


fresh perspectives on healing depression

Karen Ross sheds new light on understanding depression and the possibility of overcoming this sometimes debilitating condition.

Allison used to describe herself as 'slightly depressive'. Outwardly to many people she was cheerful, friendly and successful. Close friends knew she had the odd low moment although they didn't know how often those moments came along. She'd have felt ridiculous had they'd known. Some mornings, she would feel so low and unable to help herself that she would sit in the living room and cry instead of driving to work.





Depression – at least some of us have experienced a depressed mood at some point in our life, or know someone who suffers from it. At times it can feel almost impossible to snap out of, and it affects the most successful of people. Fortunately, with recent media campaigns, it seems that the stigma around depression is slowly dissipating, and people are finding it easier to talk about it and ask for help. The downside to this is that the label 'depression' is being used profusely to describe all sorts of issues, such as:

- Chronic (long-term) tiredness
- Unresolved grief and trauma
- Ongoing stress and/or dissatisfaction at work
- Long-term relationship problems.

And the list goes on. Often this leaves the person feeling as if their problem is overwhelming, very difficult to overcome and therefore something they're going to have for a long time. However, from the field of Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), we have some new ways of thinking about what depression means and how we can change it.

NLP is a field of study based on the belief that all behaviour has a structure which can be learnt, taught or changed. It helps us understand how our brain works, how we use language consciously and unconsciously, and how we create habits with our thoughts. With this in mind, there are a couple of ideas associated with 'depression' that are helpful to dispel:

- a) Depression is something someone has.
- b) It takes a long time to overcome depression.

1 Depression is not something someone has, but something they do.

We know our mind controls everything we do: how we think, feel and act with our body. In fact, there are six things we can do inside our head: we can create and remember pictures, sounds, feelings, smells, tastes, and we do self-talk. This means that everything you do, whether it's admiring a beautiful sunset or remembering a sad event, is done in one or more of these six ways.

This suggests that depression isn't so much something a person has, but rather something they do. What if they could learn how to do something else instead?

In my experience, when someone is doing depression there are usually two main things happening. The person has unresolved emotions such as anxiety, sadness, chronic stress or

fear. The person will also be running certain thought patterns, such as making unpleasant pictures in their head of something bad that has happened or could happen, which in turn causes a negative feeling such as sadness or anxiety.

The good news is that with techniques from NLP, emotions can be healed and released and patterns of thinking and behaviour changed. It is possible to experience less of those negative emotions and feel positive ones such as lightness and joy more and more often.

So how does NLP work?

It's helpful to understand that automatic patterns of feelings and behaviours are usually running at an unconscious level of the brain. When you tie a shoelace you are relying on that part of your brain that learned to do this many years ago. You do it without conscious thought; it just happens. You've also learnt many more things since then that are much more complex.

Likewise, the negative patterns of depression are running at an unconscious level, even though the person may also be consciously aware of them. It follows then that we want to be able to make changes at that level. That's where NLP techniques come in; they allow us to gently change the 'instructions' in the mind to transform negative patterns. Utilising language, questioning, visualisation, gentle and deep trance, it is the structure of the techniques that change unconscious patterns – and always in line with what the client wants.

2 It doesn't have to take a long time to overcome depression. Depression has been resolved within days, weeks or months.

A common perception is that it takes a long time to overcome depression, especially for those who have suffered from it for many years. In my work with clients, some learn to change their emotions and thought patterns in just a couple of sessions, and for some it takes several more. It is usually a huge relief for them after years of counselling and/or anti-depressants.

It's not that those who let go of depression and learn how to do more positive feelings never feel down again. After all, it is entirely human to experience the full spectrum of emotions. However, they do have a renewed ability to cope, solve problems and feel happy.

Furthermore, how long the patterns have been running does not determine how long they will take to change. For example, if you were to write out a recipe for a cake in pencil, and after making it once decided to change an ingredient, you could erase a word and write another. You could probably make that change the day after you'd written out the recipe or five years

later. It would be just as easy to change. So it is neurologically. Changes can be made to both old and new patterns within the brain.

And what of Allison? A year since she began NLP change work she is still the outwardly cheerful, successful person people know her to be. Inside she has changed. Her emotions are steady; her sadness has gone. She feels grounded and in tune with what she does and doesn't want in her life. She's busy, enjoys her work and knows she can feel joyous inside. She also knows now that she is not a 'depressive person'.

We each of us want to live a full life, to enjoy who we are, our families and our achievements. Depression is something people can learn and choose to let go of. In turn, they can experience lightness, hope and a sense of possibility. That is the least we should expect of this extraordinary life we have been given.

What can you do right now?

1 Start by looking after yourself. Look for ways to take pressure off yourself at home or work. Eat healthily, drink plenty of water, take walks, spend time with friends. Have them cook for you! This isn't about being self-indulgent. It's about self-nurturing and being gentle on yourself. Self-berating is not allowed!

2 Talk to people – friends, family, those who will be supportive and encouraging. Not sharing the problem creates a vacuum, which can make it seem even more insurmountable. Talking about depression naturally breaks it down into what you're experiencing, when it happens, what triggers it, and what you feel in your body.

3 Start learning to pay attention to what you want instead. To begin with, it's likely this won't feel easy to do. That's because in doing it you're creating new neural pathways, which is exactly why it's helpful. Ask yourself, if a miracle happened in the night and when I woke in the morning this problem had disappeared completely, what would be different? What would I be feeling? Saying to myself? What would I be doing differently? It might take a few attempts before some clear answers come through. That's fine. Just explore one question at a time and see what happens.



By Karen Ross

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