



HOW TO TALK TO COLLEGE STUDENTS ABOUT DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

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Things Ministers Should Know

- **Know your personal limitations.** Do not try to counsel in areas where you are not trained. Personally vet counselors in your area that you can trust to share faith based counsel with your student. Does your church or ministry have funds to help financially support professional help for your student?
- **Know your student's medical history.** Is their depression or anxiety situational or chronic? Are they presently on any type of Rx? If they have been on Rx in the past, why did they stop? When was the last time they saw their primary physician?
- **Know your student's relational history.** Most depression or anxiety is relationally oriented. Has there been a history of feeling either depressed or anxious? Depression can be confused with poor self-esteem and anxiety "could" be confused with ongoing irresponsibility or procrastination. Could their feelings of depression actually be grief? If so, then walk with them through their grief. Are their feelings of depression related to some form of abuse in their history?

Things Ministers Should Be Prepared For

- **Educate yourself on the issues.** Know what depression is and what it is not. The same is true for anxiety. True depression or anxiety is chronic in nature. This means symptoms did not begin when they arrived at college. This also means that both are a result of psychological and physiological complications. Depression or an anxiety disorder can be a result of experiencing a recent trauma. Resulting in what is called PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)
- **Take any talk of threat of suicide seriously.** From a legal perspective, if your student talks about past or present thoughts of suicide write a report of your conversation concerning what the student said and the counsel you gave them. Do not keep this information to yourself. Share it with your supervisor. Knowing a good counselor will help here.
- **Do not be afraid to teach openly about the symptoms of anxiety or depression.** Disciple your student ministry to be aware of the symptoms in their friends and how to encourage them to get help.

Things Ministers Can Do or Say

- Aim to focus on the causes of the depression or anxiety not just the symptoms.
- Many times situational anxiety or depression is a result of being **unable to measure change**. The feeling of being stuck, unable to move forward or backward, inability to see the path ahead, the fear of exposure, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, and the feeling that their world is out of control are all emotional symptoms. Ask your student which of these emotions they most feel and why? Ask your student if they have an image of what they would be doing or saying if they were not anxious or depressed.



- Give them **small ways to measure change** or movement in their feelings. Sometimes simply encouraging your student to make up their bed 3 days in a row can be a way of identifying movement and change.
- Explore and help your student know the four **most important questions of sanity**. What am I in control of? What am I NOT in control of? What am I responsible for? And what am I NOT responsible for?
- Help your student identify ways they are **depending on their feelings** to determine truth. Feelings of depression or anxiety will not change until their core beliefs change. Proverbs 23 says, "*Whatever a man thinks in his heart, so is he.*" It did not say, "*feels in his heart,*" it said, "*thinks.*" Challenge what they have placed their hope in that is failing them over and over again.

Scriptural References

- **Abraham** (Genesis 15)
- **Jonah** (Jonah 4)
- **Job** (Book of Job)
- **Elijah** (1 Kings 19)
- **King Saul** (I Samuel 16:14-23, etc.)
- **Jeremiah** (Book of Jeremiah)
- **David** (Psalms 6, 13, 18, 23, 25, 27, 31, 32, 34, 37-40, 42-43, 46, 51, 55, 62-63, 69, 71, 73, 77, 84, 86, 90-91, 94-95, 103-104, 107, 110, 116, 118, 121, 123-124, 130, 138, 139, 141-143, 146-147)

References:

- David A. Seamands, *Healing for Damaged Emotions*
- David Murray: *Reset*
- Chris Williams: *I'm Not Supposed to Feel Like This*