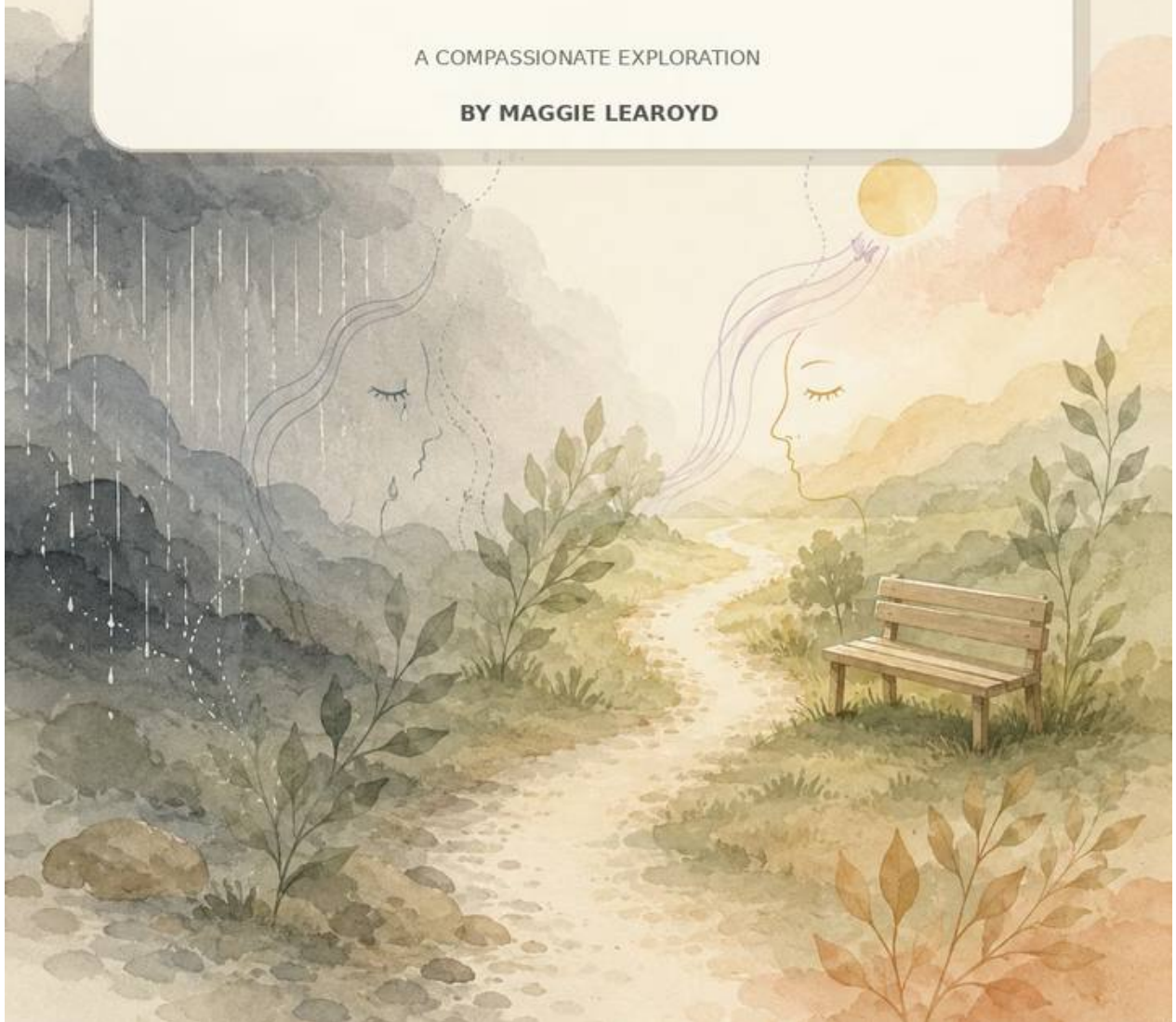


UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION · ARTICLE 2

AM I DEPRESSED OR JUST HAVING A BAD TIME?

A COMPASSIONATE EXPLORATION

BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



Introduction

Everyone experiences difficult days. Life brings disappointment, stress, grief, setbacks and periods where we feel overwhelmed. Feeling sad, frustrated or emotionally drained after a challenging experience is a normal part of being human. But sometimes people begin to wonder whether what they're experiencing is something more.

If you've been asking yourself, "Am I depressed, or am I just having a bad time?", you're not alone. Many people struggle to tell the difference because the two experiences can feel similar at first. Understanding how they differ can help you decide whether you might benefit from additional support.

Feeling Sad Is a Normal Human Emotion

Sadness is a healthy emotional response. It often develops after a loss, disappointment, conflict or another difficult life event. Although sadness can be painful, it usually changes over time. There may still be moments where you laugh, enjoy time with others or feel hopeful about the future.

Sadness often has a clear cause. As circumstances improve or you begin to adjust, the intensity of those feelings usually reduces. This doesn't mean the experience wasn't significant; it means your emotional system is doing what it is designed to do.

Feeling sad does not automatically mean you have depression.

What Makes Depression Different?

Depression is more than sadness. It is a mental health condition that affects the way you think, feel, behave and function in everyday life.

Rather than simply feeling low, many people with depression describe feeling emotionally "stuck." Even when positive things happen, they may struggle to experience enjoyment or hope. Activities they once looked forward to may no longer bring pleasure, and tasks that used to feel routine can become exhausting.

Depression can also affect your body. You may notice changes in your sleep, appetite, energy levels or ability to concentrate. These symptoms often continue for weeks or months and begin to interfere with work, relationships or everyday responsibilities.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Reflecting on your experience may help you understand what you're going through.

Ask yourself:

Have I felt this way most days for at least two weeks?

Have I lost interest in activities I usually enjoy?

Am I finding it difficult to manage everyday tasks?

Do I feel tired most of the time, even after resting?

Have my sleep or eating habits changed significantly?

Am I becoming increasingly withdrawn from other people?

Do I often feel hopeless, guilty or worthless?

Are these feelings affecting my work, education, relationships or home life?

Answering "yes" to several of these questions does not confirm a diagnosis, but it may indicate that it would be helpful to speak with a healthcare professional.

Why It Can Be Difficult to Tell the Difference

Depression doesn't always begin suddenly. For many people, it develops gradually. They may initially believe they are simply tired, stressed or having a difficult few weeks. As time passes, they adapt to feeling low and may not realise how much their mood, thinking and behaviour have changed.

Some people continue working, caring for their family and meeting responsibilities while privately struggling every day. Others find they can no longer maintain the same level of functioning. Depression affects everyone differently, and there is no "right" way for it to look.

What Can Help?

If you're unsure whether you're experiencing depression, you don't have to work it out on your own.

Helpful first steps include:

Talking to someone you trust about how you've been feeling.

Keeping a simple mood diary to notice patterns over time.

Looking after your basic needs, including sleep, food and hydration.

Continuing with small daily routines where possible.

Making an appointment with your GP or another qualified healthcare professional if your symptoms are persistent or affecting daily life.

Seeking help early can often prevent symptoms from becoming more severe.

Common Misconceptions

"If I can still go to work, I can't be depressed."

Many people continue to work while experiencing depression. Functioning externally does not mean someone is not struggling internally.

"Something bad has to happen for depression to be real."

Although difficult life events can contribute to depression, some people develop depression without a clear trigger. This does not make their experience any less valid.

"I should be able to deal with this on my own."

Depression is a health condition, not a personal failure. Reaching out for support is a positive and proactive step.

Reflection

Think back over the past few weeks rather than just today.

Have your feelings been passing and changing with events, or have they become a constant companion that is beginning to affect your daily life?

There is no judgement in your answer - only information that may help you understand yourself more clearly.

Key Takeaway

Everyone has difficult days, but depression is more than a temporary low mood. When feelings of sadness, emptiness or hopelessness persist and begin to affect everyday life, it may be a sign that you need additional support.

You do not need to wait until you are at crisis point before asking for help. Understanding what you're experiencing is an important first step, and support is available.

A gentle reminder

This resource offers general information and reflection. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individual medical or therapeutic care. If you are worried about your safety or someone else's, seek urgent professional support.

Maggie Learoyd
Psychotherapist | ADHD, Autism & ARFID Specialist
Founder of Space to Breathe Therapy