

## **Down, But Not Defeated: Battling Depression**

### **#WellbeingWarriors**

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When we think of warriors, we often imagine people dressed in heavy armour, with their shields and swords clashing against each other for survival on the battlefield. However, we are all warriors facing various battles, such as fighting for your degree, encountering daily challenges with friends or family, or battling against adversity. Many struggles can leave us with mental or emotional scars and bruises.

Sometimes when we are battling different challenges, we are not aware of when and how we were injured, and that we got knocked down. At times these scars and bruises affect us more than we are aware, which could impact our daily functioning. Depression can be the result of some of these emotional cuts, injuries, or scars. The struggle to try and heal our emotional wounds can lead to suicidal ideations as an attempt to end the pain and suffering.

### **Sadness and depression**

Depression is a label used daily in society to describe feeling sad or low. The phrase 'depression' is also used in clinical terms and is considered a mood disorder (Major Depressive Disorder). Being able to distinguish between sadness and clinical depression will help with managing the two effectively.

Emotions are significant in how we experience and make sense of life. Sadness, like all emotions, plays a crucial role. Its primary function is to alert us or others that we require consolation or time to recoup. Viktor Frankl said "an abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal", meaning that it's okay to feel sad when we are in a situation that brings uncertainty, anxiety, fear, or that is outside of what we regard as normal. Take the lockdown, for instance; it is an abnormal situation that impacts our daily functioning and limits our access to that in which we found comfort or joy. It is understandable if you find yourself feeling sad or despondent as a result.

If the sadness starts to significantly impact your daily functioning, and other areas of your life, this is where the clinical term 'depression' can be considered. Clinically speaking, depression refers to a psychological state where one constantly feels a sense of sadness, helplessness, and hopelessness. This state doesn't only affect a person's emotional state; it also affects their mental and physical states. Being in a state of depression can have an impact on a person's ability to perform daily tasks. Many people who suffer from severe depression may experience suicidal ideations, and some might act on this ideation.

Clinical depression is a state that can impact anyone at some point in their life; no one is immune to it. However, it is essential to know that it is manageable and treatable. If you have been knocked down by various obstacles in life and are not sure how much the battle has injured you, follow this

link to read through [symptoms of depression](#). Symptoms range from mild to severe. It is crucial to remember that although you are knocked down, you are not defeated.

### **About suicide**

Suicide is the act of killing oneself, most often as a result of depression or other mental illness. It is essential to distinguish between suicidal ideation and the intention to commit suicide. Suicidal ideation means to experience thoughts of death by ending one's own life. The suicidal intent is about how strongly a person contemplates ending their own life.

It's important to know that suicide is preventable, and that suicidal ideations are manageable and survivable. If you are or know someone who is suicidal, remember that suicide is often assumed/believed as a way of ending the emotional pain one is experiencing. Even if you are knocked down by life's challenges, know that for as long as you are alive, you are not defeated.

If you feel weak or broken for experiencing suicidal ideations, or for suffering from a mental illness, know that what you may consider as a crack or flaw is what makes you unique. In Japan, the use of gold to repair broken pottery is a common practice. Gold is usually associated with elegance and beauty and is treasured. The gold makes it easy to trace where the object was cracked, enhancing it beautifully. The reason for this is that although the pottery broke, it has not lost its value. This Japanese art is called Kintsugi. This concept of Kintsugi applies to our understanding of the emotional scars that form part of our narratives. Although the cracks remind us of what we've been through, they also remind us that we have survived our worst days.

Did you know?

The Art of Kintsugi: In Japan, broken objects are often repaired with gold. The flaw is seen as a unique piece of the object's history, which adds to its beauty.

### **Battle against depression and suicide**

Nourish your inner warrior and break through these barriers, so that you can stand tall like the warrior you are. The following are tips on holistically managing your wellbeing to successfully fight against depression and suicide.

#### **Holistic wellbeing**

We face challenges and battles in so many ways on a daily basis. Here's how to nourish and recharge your inner warrior:

##### **1. Social wellbeing**

Some fights require an army. Depression and suicidal ideations often make it difficult to want to engage with people, as you may be feeling overwhelmed with negative thoughts and emotions.

Give yourself the opportunity to disprove some of the negative thoughts and feelings by spending time with loved ones who are a source of positivity in your life.

By staying in touch with people who form part of our social support, we don't have to face battles alone. We are all social beings who need to love and feel loved. Allow yourself to engage in positive social contact with friends, family, neighbours, or people you met on campus. Even though we are currently physically distanced, we need to stay socially connected.

## **2. Physical wellbeing**

A well-rested and nourished warrior is a fierce warrior. Depression limits our energy levels, making it challenging to engage with daily tasks. Remember to take care of your physical needs; this includes making sure that you eat healthy, exercise, and get enough sleep. It's much easier to complete that assignment or write that test with a nourished stomach and being well-rested.

Quote by Buddha: "To keep the body in good health is a duty... otherwise we shall not be able to keep the mind strong and clear."

## **3. Emotional wellbeing**

A warrior who is aware of their emotions, and can understand and manage their feelings, is a warrior not easily shaken. While experiencing depression or suicidal ideations, it can seem/feel impossible to overcome this state. We can, at times, be overwhelmed by our emotional experiences. By engaging in [mindfulness](#) and allowing ourselves to locate our emotions, it becomes easier to manage our emotional experiences. For instance, if you can tell whether you are stressed, angry or sad, you can find the source of the emotional experience and address it. If you are feeling stressed, you can tap into [stress-management techniques](#). If you are feeling angry, you could allow yourself to constructively blow off some steam, or if you are feeling sad, you could reach out for social support.

## **4. Mental wellbeing**

A warrior who conquers his thoughts, feelings, and behaviour, is a mentally fit warrior. At times the negative thoughts and emotions associated with depression make it difficult to bounce back from daily challenges. Mental wellbeing is not the absence of mental illness. Instead, it is about being able to handle challenges/stress, effectively make decisions, realising your potential, and how you relate to others. It is also essential to pay attention to the messages you allow into your mental space, take the time to remind yourself of your positive attributes and practice gratitude. As a warrior fighting for your degree, it is vital to ensure that you take the time you need to give your academic work your undivided attention. To ensure this, tap into time-management skills. If you are struggling with online learning, follow the do's and don'ts provided [here](#).

## **5. Spiritual wellbeing**

Battles are with purpose. Suicidal ideations, along with specific depressive symptoms, can lead a person to question or forget their purpose in life.

Spiritual wellbeing is mainly about a person's sense of purpose and how they make meaning of the world and life. When you are continuously in-tune with your meaning, you are a strong-willed warrior. Spiritual wellbeing entails allowing yourself to engage with what fulfils your spiritual needs, from praying (alone or with others), to silent meditation.

Anonymous Quote: "Gratitude turns what we have into enough."

### **Professional assistance**

It's okay to allow others to help you readjust your armour; it's okay to ask for help when it's too hard to manage the depression and suicidal ideations on your own. You can seek professional support to fight the depression and survive the suicidal ideations by seeing a psychologist or a counsellor. You could also consult a psychiatrist or medical practitioner for psychopharmacological intervention. If you are or know someone who is suicidal, please make use (or encourage that person to make use) of the contact details provided below:

#### **SADAG Mental Health Line (24/7)**

+27 11 234 4837

#### **SADAG Suicide Crisis Line (24/7)**

0800 567 567