

Understanding Your Feelings

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Having diabetes can add to the already stress-filled life that most people experience as they juggle work, family, social, and volunteer activities. Sometimes these feelings are called “diabetes distress.” Managing diabetes means making changes in eating and physical activity habits, possibly taking medicines, and dealing with the emotions that come with having a chronic disease. Support for coping with emotions is part of the services that people with diabetes can receive through accredited or recognized programs that offer diabetes self-management education and support (DSMES) services.

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Discuss at least three positive coping strategies.
- Identify at least five signs of depression.

MODULE 3

 **DISCUSSION TIME**
45-60 minutes

-  **OUTLINE**
1. Emotional effect of diabetes
 2. Healthy coping strategies
 3. Diabetes and depression

☆ KEY MESSAGES

1. It is normal to experience a range of emotions when living with diabetes.

2. Awareness of feelings and emotions is an important first step. People can do this by taking frequent pauses throughout the day to see how they are feeling.

3. Healthy coping strategies can help a person with diabetes manage his or her emotions and take actions that support healthy behaviors.

4. People can develop healthy coping strategies by adjusting how they think, feel, and act in daily life and when faced with stressful or upsetting situations. Asking for help is important too.

5. It is important to recognize the signs of depression and get help, if needed.

🔗 CONNECTING THREADS

Connecting Threads are topics that can be incorporated into *New Beginnings* sessions depending on the goals and needs of your participants.

Recommended Connecting Threads:

- [Facilitating *New Beginnings* Online](#)
- [Commit to Quit: Stopping Smoking](#)
- [Building Social Connections in Family and Community Circles](#)
- [Spirituality as a Guide and Support](#)

🖱️ GOING VIRTUAL TIPS

- The video stories for this module can be played by sharing your screen (and computer audio) through your video teleconferencing platform. Another option is to share the links to the videos with your group members by email before the session starts.
- The audio stories can be inserted into the [New Beginnings PowerPoint template](#) along with images that reflect the story.



MATERIALS

Suggested stories for this module:

- [Yvonne's Story A](#): Yvonne talks about how she learned she had type 2 diabetes and overcame denial to make the lifestyle choices to manage her diabetes. (Audio: about 4 minutes)
- [LyCynthia and Terry's Story](#): LyCynthia and Terry talk about the importance of family support in managing diabetes. (Audio: about 4 minutes, 14:30–18:00)

Handouts:

- [Healthy Coping Strategies Worksheet](#)
- [Chronic Illness and Mental Health: Recognizing and Treating Depression](#)
- [How to Help a Loved One With Diabetes When You Live Far Apart](#)

Group Discussion

This session will focus on identifying healthy ways to cope with the emotional effect of diabetes.

Emotional Effect of Diabetes

GROUP LEADER INSTRUCTIONS

TALKING POINTS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



SAY:

It is normal for people with chronic diseases to experience a range of emotions. They may feel emotional at different times and for different reasons related to diabetes and how it affects their lives.

- A person who just learned they have diabetes may be in denial because they feel overwhelmed.
- A person who has been managing diabetes for a long time might have a health setback that brings on feelings of anger or depression.
- Other areas of our lives also affect our emotions. These include the ups and downs of dealing with finances, work, family, and friends. Any of these issues can be overwhelming when combined with managing diabetes.
- Other factors that can affect our emotions include high or low blood sugar levels or being tired or ill.

Let's listen to one person's experience.



LISTEN:

[Yvonne's Story A](#) (Audio: about 4 minutes)



ASK:

Let's begin by taking a pause for a minute to sit quietly and check in with ourselves to see how we are feeling about the story we just heard.

- How did Yvonne react to her diagnosis initially?
- How did denial about her diagnosis affect Yvonne's life and health?
- What are some other emotions a person with diabetes might have?

Think about how you might be able to relate to Yvonne. Maybe when you were diagnosed, you found it difficult to come to terms with the news that you had developed diabetes. Maybe you felt guilt or shame about the diagnosis, or shock, anger, anxiety, or fear. Think about the different emotions you've had in your experience with diabetes.

Other examples that participants might give include shock, sadness, depression, grief, anxiety, fear, anger, low self-esteem, guilt, and shame. They may also discuss positive emotions such as hope, relief at being diagnosed, acceptance, or feeling good about making improvements.



ACTIVITY:

Think-Pair-Share:

Pair up with a partner and share some of the emotions you've experienced since being diagnosed with diabetes. We might all be at different stages in our journey with diabetes, so you might share something you're going through currently or something you've gone through in the past. Talk about it with your partner and take a moment to acknowledge the emotional struggles that often come with this experience.



SAY:

Life with diabetes—as a person with the disease or as the loved one of someone with diabetes—will have its ups and downs. You can't always control what upsets you, but you can control how you cope with your emotions. Finding healthy ways to cope includes recognizing and addressing your thoughts, feelings, and actions when faced with an emotionally stressful or upsetting situation.

The more you take care of your body with eating healthy, moving more, getting enough sleep, and taking the time to pause and be mindful of your feelings, the better you will become at being resilient during stressful situations. Coping with emotions takes practice, and healthy habits give your body the strength to cope.



ASK:

When you take the time to take care of yourself, you are building up your strength (emotional and physical) for any challenges that may lie ahead. Imagine it is like putting aside money into savings, so you have it when you need it. What is one thing that you could do for your health that would be a good investment for the future?

Healthy Coping Strategies



SAY:

These emotions are normal, but they can become a problem if a person uses unhealthy coping strategies to deal with them.

Coping is how a person deals with their emotions when facing a challenge.

Positive coping strategies help people deal with emotions in ways that help them manage a situation and take care of their health without further harming themselves. Positive coping strategies can help a person deal with his or her emotions in a way that helps them manage the situation and take care of their health.

Coping strategies are not healthy if they have you in denial about how you're feeling, cause you to be stuck in an emotion, or have you doing things that are bad for your health.



ASK:

What are some examples of unhealthy coping strategies?

Examples: Drinking too much alcohol, smoking, avoiding talking about diabetes, or not taking prescribed medicines.



ASK:

What are some coping strategies that might be helpful for Yvonne?

Examples: Going to a support group, prayer, talking with family members, or being physically active.



SAY:

Healthy coping strategies help you deal with your emotions and take care of your health.



ASK:

What are some healthy coping strategies?

Examples: Talking about what you need, taking control of the situation, humor, or finding a positive outlet.



ASK:

Can some strategies be both healthy and unhealthy? For example, humor might be a positive way to cope with a difficult situation, but it is not helpful if it is used to avoid addressing the problem.



SAY:

It is important for people with diabetes to find and use healthy coping strategies.



ACTIVITY:

Think-Pair-Share:

Thinking about the emotions that you shared earlier with your partner, pair up again and take turns brainstorming some ideas about healthy coping strategies.

Ask one person from each to group to share the ideas they came up with. Write the responses on flipchart paper.



SAY:

As we've heard in our discussion, there are many ways to cope with feelings of sadness, anxiety, and anger.

Each person will have their own strategies that will help. It is important to focus on positive strategies that help people deal with their emotions in ways that helps them manage the situation and take care of their health.

Diabetes and Depression

GROUP LEADER INSTRUCTIONS

TALKING POINTS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



SAY:

Let's look at this handout [Chronic Illness and Mental Health: Recognizing and Treating Depression](#).



ASK:

Did you know that people with diabetes are twice as likely to have depression as people without? Does this surprise you?



SAY:

Everyone has times when they feel sad. But depression is a serious mental health issue that affects your quality of life. Mental health is just as important as physical health, and they go hand in hand to help us feel our best at work or home.

Depression is a serious issue because it can make it harder for you to manage your diabetes, which could lead to complications. Poor blood sugar management, medicines, and other physical problems can also lead to symptoms of depression. It is important for you to be aware of the signs and symptoms of depression and to talk to your health care team about how you feel. Depression can be treated if you get help.



SAY:

Signs of depression are listed in the handout:

- Having ongoing sad, anxious, or empty feelings.
- Feeling hopeless.
- Feeling guilty, worthless, or helpless.
- Feeling irritable or restless.
- Loss of interest in activities or hobbies that were once enjoyable, including sex.
- Feeling tired all the time.
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details, or making decisions.
- Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, a condition called insomnia, or sleeping all the time.
- Overeating or loss of appetite.
- Thinking of death and suicide or suicide attempts.
- Ongoing aches and pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems that do not ease with treatment.



SAY:

If you have signs of depression, it is important to talk to your health care provider so you can get help. Take it seriously when someone threatens to hurt themselves or other people. Get them help right away.

CLOSE THE SESSION

- Take final questions.
- Thank the group for their participation.
- Explain the at-home activity, if applicable.
- Remind participants about the next session. Ask if they have specific questions or issues they would like addressed.
- Ask participants to do the session evaluation.

AT-HOME ACTIVITY

- Ask participants to do the [Healthy Coping Strategies Worksheet](#).

OR

- Ask participants to start a journal, either in print or electronically. Tell them to write down how they are feeling at different points in the day (morning, afternoon, and night) and what makes them feel better or worse. They can then review the journal to see that they are using positive coping strategies. A journal can help people become more mindful and understand their feelings better.

RESOURCES

Use these resources to learn more about depression, expand the discussion, or provide additional resources to participants.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
 - [Diabetes and Mental Health](#)
 - [Ten Tips for Coping with Diabetes Distress](#)
- National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases
 - [Diabetes Distress and Depression](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health](#)
- [MentalHealth.gov](#)
- Association of Diabetes Care & Education Specialists
 - [Healthy Coping](#)



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