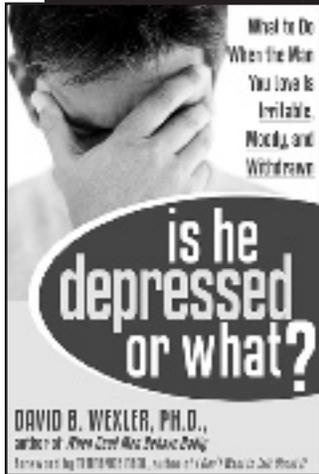


new book tells women everything they need to know about men and depression



I just wanted to wait it out. I knew that I couldn't be going through something like this. I was a strong guy. And I didn't want anyone to know what I was feeling inside.

The guy in your life is irritable, moody, and withdrawn. When you try to talk to him about it he brushes you off with banalities, like "I'm just tired," or "Nothing's wrong with me—I'm fine." It looks sort of like depression, but you're not sure. You start to ruminate about what's going on and find yourself asking, "Is he depressed or what?"

It's a question psychologist David Wexler hears often from the partners of depressed men. In fact, he hears it so often that his new book is called *Is He Depressed or What?: What to Do When the Man You Love Is Irritable, Moody, and Withdrawn*. He wrote it not only because he knows how underdiagnosed male depression is—one study found that a staggering 65 percent of all cases go undetected—but also because he knows that depression in men can look very different from depression in women.

depression in men & women: they're not the same

"Male depression often shows itself very differently from female depression..." says Wexler. Most of us are familiar with the symptoms of *typical* or *overt depression*, which include despair, anxiety, and lethargy. Women are usually beset with this type of depression. While men can also suffer from typical depression, they are more likely to have symptoms of what clinicians like Wexler have labeled *male-type depression*. This means that they feel the same difficult emotions, but their expression of them is notably different.

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Depressed women often: Express feelings of sadness and hopelessness; express anxiety and fear; disengaged from social activities; suffer from sleeping or eating irregularities; have *anhedonia*, or an inability to feel pleasure; overanalyze and ruminate on negative thoughts; experience fits of crying for no apparent reason.

Depressed men often: Complain about the physical symptoms of depression, such as headaches and stomachaches; mask their depression with workaholism or substance abuse; become compulsive about time and order; have affairs; have difficulty verbalizing their feelings; cast blame and behave antagonistically, especially toward their partners.

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Next: More about Male-Type Depression

Is He Depressed or What?: What to Do When the Man You Love Is Irritable, Moody, & Withdrawn

by David B. Wexler, Ph.D., ISBN: 1-57224-424-0, \$15.95, Published in January 2006

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more about male-type depression

"To put it very simply, women tend to think and process their feelings when they are depressed and men tend to act," says Wexler. Sometimes they can act in ways that are healthy and that help to dispel the depression. Other times, though "this particular male pattern of avoiding uncomfortable emotional states...leads to avoidance, denial, minimization, and acting out." This, in turn, plunges a man deeper into depression, and leaves the woman in his life baffled about what's really going on. The behavior patterns of male-type depression tend to cluster into four categories.

1. Exaggerated behavior. "Hidden depression in men, even if only barely leaks through into consciousness, presents a profound and intolerable threat to traditional masculinity. In response, many men unconsciously turn to exaggerated, hypermasculine behaviors," says Wexler. These behaviors include substance abuse, anger, addiction, having too much sex, and having affairs. Here's what George, one of Wexler's clients says:

My escapades with her were so hot, I would sneak out any chance I could get. I would get up early in the morning, tell Andrea I was going to the gym, and sneak over for a quickie. Finally, my lover got tired of it. She knew I was trying to use her to self-medicate. She told me that it was too much pressure to be responsible for my unhappiness.

2. Antagonism and blame of others. "The covert depression...when unnamed and unclaimed often leads down a dangerous path of blame...(and) this spells trouble for those close to these men," says Wexler. Because so many men experience depression as so fundamentally unmasculine and so threatening to their self-image they tend to look to the outside to find it's source. This takes form in going into attack mode when they're hurt, unabiding suspicion and mistrust, blaming others for their mistakes or misbehavior, demanding respect, and being hypersensitive to any perceived slight. Stuart is a client of Wexler's and a married father of a teenage daughter. One day he came home and found her in tears. When he discovered what was upsetting her he suggested a solution he was convinced would make everything better. When his daughter responded to it with a resounding "no" he left the house in a huff and didn't return until the next day. Here's how he describes the experience.

I felt like I had to take charge. Nobody listens to me anymore! I started thinking that I would be unloved and disrespected if I couldn't make a difference here. It was all about feeling powerless.

3. Avoidance and escape. "When you know that your husband or boyfriend is acting erratically, withdrawing emotionally, or making crummy decisions to prove to others that he is a strong and independent person...you are probably observing a pattern of behavior designed to avoid and/or escape bad feelings," Wexler says. Avoidance and escape behaviors can include zoning out in front of the TV, mentally withdrawing from conversations that may arouse difficult emotions, having a phobic-level fear of sadness, and refusing to enter situations that are emotionally risky. This is how Wexler's client Mikhail describes his emotional withdrawal.

It felt like a wall kicking into place that insulated me from what I was hearing.

4. Discontent with self. "One of the primary features you are likely to see in your partner's male-type depression is a profound unhappiness with himself," says Wexler. This can include harsh self-criticism, shame for feeling depressed, and guilt about *imaginary crimes* (the belief that they have or will cause damage to their families). Wexler's client Deon explains his guilt about imaginary crimes this way.

When I was little, I desperately tried to save my mother as she fought off the cancer that finally killed her...Because of this I ended up with a script that said "You really have to help fix the women in your life." Now, in my relationships, I've ended up choosing wounded women who need a lot of help, and kept trying to fix them. But I kept getting mad at them because they would not get fixed. And they have always complained because I seemed moody, unhappy, and unsatisfied. The sad thing is, they were right.

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quiz: is the man in your life secretly depressed?

Here's a questionnaire to help you assess whether the man in your life is suffering from male-type depression. Next to each question, score 0 if the item is not a problem, 1 if it is something of a problem, and 2 if it is very noticeable or serious.

DISCONTENT WITH SELF

1. Does he subject himself to very harsh self-criticism?
2. Does he seem very sensitive to the possibility of being shamed or looking bad?
3. Does he have a very limited vocabulary to describe his feelings?
4. Does he avoid putting himself in situations where it might appear that he is failing?

ANTAGONISM AND BLAME OF OTHERS

5. Does he blame others for his bad moods?
6. Does he demand respect without behaving so as to earn respect?
7. Does he think all of his problems would end if only you would behave differently?
8. Is he guarded and suspicious?
9. Does he have frequent angry outbursts?

EXAGGERATED BEHAVIOR

10. Does he crave sex desperately?
11. Is he (or has he been) having an affair?
12. Does he abuse substances, TV, video games, or the Internet to self-medicate?
13. Does he engage in high-risk behaviors (driving fast, inappropriate flirting, reckless business ventures, etc.)?
14. Is he a workaholic?
15. Is he compulsive about time and order?
16. Is he perfectionistic?

AVOIDANCE AND ESCAPE

17. Does he have difficulty grieving when he suffers a loss or disappointment?
18. Does he suffer from the "I Don't Want to Talk About It" syndrome? Does he express feelings of worthlessness? Does he seem especially discouraged about the future?
19. Does he shy away from hearing about your problems because they might bring him down? Does he complain that everything is going wrong no matter how hard he's trying?
20. Does he insist that everything is okay, even when it is obvious that it's not?

SCORE

Now, add your scores. A total of 10 or above may indicate male-type depression, and anything over 20 should serve as a major red flag.

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depression loves company: how his depression affects her

"Depression loves company, and depression often stimulates the projection of blame. A man who is depressed and who cannot successfully identify, tolerate, or take responsibility for what he is going through often has a remarkable capacity to make his partner feel as if it's all her fault. It's as if there's no other rational explanation for his level of unhappiness or moodiness than an external one: "You must be making me feel this way," says Wexler.

In *Is He Depressed or What?*, Wexler identifies a number of common caustic messages that those with male-type depression transmit—either directly or indirectly—to their partners. He also offers strategies to keep them from eroding a woman's self-esteem and sense of well-being. Here's just a few examples of these messages.

"You're so stupid." Communication patterns that are aimed at making a woman partner feel stupid are common in depressed men. Wexler offers examples and strategies for countering them.

"It's all your fault." This message is sent in any number of ways. Wexler shows women how to stop believing it.

"You're a bitch." Depressed men may accuse their partners of being too critical or exaggerate what are real flaws in their partners. Wexler shows women how to effectively respond to this criticism.

remember, it's his depression: how a woman can take care of herself

Living with a depressed man can be all-consuming. His behavior can be erratic, his moods intense, and his personality radically different from the guy you used to know. Trying to avert the next blow-up or pull him out of the latest slump can be a full-time job—one that leaves many women spent and without the energy to care for themselves. In *Is He Depressed or What?*, Wexler gives women strategies for making their well-being a priority even in the face of a partner's depression. These include:

- **Assessing the impact his depression has on you;**
- **Establishing clear and consistent boundaries;**
- **Coping with the effect his depression has on your sex life;**
- **Ways to maintain perspective and keep his depression from overshadowing everything else in your life;**
- **Ways to effectively prepare for emotionally rocky exchanges and episodes; and**
- **Tips for talking to friends and family about what you're going through.**

help, don't enable: do's and don'ts to avoid enabling

"You want to support the man in your life—without crossing over the toxic line into being an enabler..." says Wexler. That's why he gives women the information they need to determine if they've crossed that all-too-fine line. He then gives them a set of do's and don'ts to step back or stay safely behind it. These include:

- **Don't make excuses or cover up for his bad moods or bad behavior;**
- **Remember that you can't control what he thinks, feels, or does;**
- **As best as possible, do not allow his moods to interrupt your normal family routines.**

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the broken mirror: a critical concept you've never heard of

Your man has a secret...and so does nearly everyone else. "The secret about men that a lot of women don't really understand is that men are extremely vulnerable to how they are viewed by women," Wexler says. "Mirroring" ourselves in others is something that both men and women do. We all need to believe that others, especially those we love, see us as worthy, but men are typically less aware of how powerful this need is and are more likely to withdraw or act out when it is not met. When a man perceives that his partner sees him as incompetent, unworthy, or unnecessary (even if this is a distorted perception) he is looking into what psychologists call a "broken mirror." Since depressed men are particularly sensitive to feelings of unworthiness, they may hear the glass shattering all around them. Understanding this is critical to being able to effectively communicate with a depressed man. In *Is He Depressed or What?* Wexler tells you everything you need to know about the broken mirror phenomenon.

suggested interview questions for david wexler, ph.d.

1. Your new book is written for women, but it's about men—depressed men, in particular. In it you talk about "male-type depression." What is this? How does it differ from "normal" depression and do all depressed men have this sort of depression?
2. What are a few things about depression in men that you think every woman should know and why?
3. What does the latest research tell us about why depression can manifest itself so differently in men than women?
4. You say that depression in men is under-recognized. Why?
5. In the introduction to your book you talk about your own experience with depression and how it affected your relationship with your wife. Can you tell us a bit about this and do you think the experience of you and your wife is a common one for couples in which the man is depressed?
6. What is the "broken mirror" and why is it so important that the partners of depressed men understand this concept?
7. There's a fine line between supporting a depressed man and enabling one. What do you think constitutes enabling when we're talking about depressed men and how can a woman know if what she's doing is enabling rather than helping her partner?
8. What effect can depression have on a couple's sex life?
9. In *Is He Depressed or What?* you stress the importance of not letting a man's depression interfere with a partner's emotional well being. How do you do this when your partner is constantly irritable, moody, and withdrawn?
10. The final chapter of your book is entitled "Knowing When to Leave." How can a woman tell when she's done all she can do

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about david wexler, ph.d.

David B. Wexler, Ph.D., is the founder and executive director of the Relationship Training Institute in San Diego, an organization designed to help relationships in conflict. The California Psychological Association has honored Dr. Wexler with the Distinguished Contribution to Psychology award. He is the author of several books, including *When Good Men Behave Badly*, *Domestic Violence 2000*, and *The Adolescent Self*. Dr. Wexler lives in San Diego with his wife and two children. Visit him at: www.RTIprojects.com.

Wexler is has appeared on *The Today Show*, *Dr. Phil*, and local television. He is frequently quoted in national print media including *Cosmopolitan*, *O, The Oprah Magazine*, and *The Washington Post*, and has been interviewed by dozens of local and national radio shows. In addition, Wexler is a much-sought-after conference presenter.

"Dr. Wexler tells your listeners how to spot a good man behaving badly. His insight give you tools to heal and create a more fulfilling relationship. His grasp of the bad boy image and narcissistic pull helped us identify the wrong relationship decisions in our lives. I can't wait for *Good Women Behaving Badly*."

~**Ella Speakes**, host of *Ella Speakes You Prosper Show*, KTLR AM

"David Wexler is outstanding. He has a gift for sustained interest and enthusiasm in his presentation. The information he gives is absolutely tops."

~**Joan Winchell**, conference organizer, May 2004

"Dr. Wexler is clearly the most professional, competent, knowledgeable, talented presenter, researcher, teacher, etc. Fabulous!"

~**Loretta Goldrich**, conference attendee May 2004

praise for *is he depressed or what?*

"*Is He Depressed or What?* is invaluable for anyone who is in a relationship with a depressed man...I highly recommend it."

~**Rosalind Wiseman**, author of *Queen Bees* and *Wannabees*

"Wexler gives us a uniquely useful guide for the partners of depressed men, men whose symptoms may not include sadness and whose coping skills many not include talking about it..."

~**Frank S. Pittman III, MD**, author of *Man Enough: Fathers, Sons, and the Search for Masculinity*

praise for *when good men behave badly*, wexler's earlier book

"I highly recommend this book to all men trying to understand themselves in the context of relationships..."

~**From the Foreword by William S. Pollack, Ph.D.**, author, *Real Boys, Real Boys' Voices*

"David Wexler has worked with men and their families for well over twenty years and it shows. His book is clear, practical, insightful, and useful..."

~**Terry Real**, author, *I Don't Want to Talk about It*

Wexler has provided a much needed guide for men whose values and behavior don't match, which is ruining their relationships. This book provides a mirror for men to take a look at themselves and to change."

~**John Gottman**, author, *The Relationship Cure*

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"...This book will open men's minds and hearts to a very different way to approach male-female relationships."

~**Ronald F. Levant, Ed.D., ABPP**, Co-Editor, *A New Psychology of Men*

"David Wexler has brilliantly filled a gap in the literature. He has taken clinical experience and insight and mixed it with great writing and a keen sense of what is important, to produce an accessible and insightful book on males. A really great book."

~**Don Dutton, Ph.D.**, author, *The Abusive Personality*

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