

## FEELINGS OF REJECTION

Everyone feels the pain of rejection once in a while, not only people who live with mental illness. But do you think the problem occurs more frequently in those who have a mental illness? I very much suspect it is. The stigma society has towards people who live with illnesses like ours makes occasional – and for many of us, frequent – feelings of rejection pretty well inescapable.

- What do you think?

But I suspect it's more than just the stigma that's at fault. I suspect it's the illness itself that causes us to easily feel rejected even when there is no *real* rejection, but only *perceived* rejection. (And perceived rejection hurts just as much as the real thing.) And, maybe the way we are – because of our illness, because of our neediness, because of our response to the world – we *are* hard to deal with and are *actually* rejected. These are some of the thoughts that came to me as I grappled with the feelings myself.

WHY DO WE EXPERIENCE FEELINGS OF REJECTION? Might it be due to:

- Oversensitivity because of our mood disorder?
- A greater possibility of reading things negatively because of our susceptibility to depression? Being ignored or rejected might only be perceived and not the reality at all. People don't always know our needs or what we're feeling. And we don't know what the people who we feel are rejecting us might be going through or thinking.
- Being less approachable because we're depressed and withdrawn?
- Our own inappropriate actions because of our mood disorder?

And yet, when we're feeling depressed and alone, how we would love for someone to say hello to us! How we could use a hug! During times we're most needy we often receive the least attention. It takes a very compassionate, understanding and caring person to draw us out at times like that. Not everyone has that gift.

I've found that feeling rejected is a huge trigger for depression. I'm a fairly outgoing person and yet, I often feel rejected or ignored in social situations. And how that hurts! It leads me to doubting my likeability. Are people afraid or uncomfortable talking to me because of what they know about me? Have I been too open about what I'm dealing with? At times like this I go home with a very lonely feeling, a blanket of gloom over me that I can't easily escape.

WHAT CAN WE DO WITH THIS PAIN?

- Talk to one or two people close to you. It helps make the pain more bearable.
- Wait it out, trying to realize that people do love you and just don't understand your needs of the moment.
- Try to bring to mind times when you've felt surrounded by love.
- Try to remember that people have limitations.
- Try not to focus on it too much, making it a bigger deal than it is. If you do, it may lead to depression.
- Know that the pain *will* wear off.

#### HOW CAN WE ESCAPE SOME OF THIS PAIN?

I emailed Dr. John Toews about this problem, especially in how it often occurs for people in church. He's the author of "No Longer Alone", a book about how the church can be supportive to people with mental illness. Amongst other things he said:

"Rejection is a complex situation. Yes, the church can do a much better job of identifying individuals who stand there alone after the service hoping that someone will notice them. I have a hard time with small talk, so I am often the one standing alone, wishing to be included. However, I have come to realize that I have to take the responsibility to make contact. If I am feeling depressed or unworthy it is very hard to do. These days one of the main reasons I go to church is to make contact with a few people that I know tend to get depressed and I need to check on how they are doing. Possibly you could talk to your group about taking responsibility for others."

#### SOME WAYS TO AVOID THE PAIN OF REJECTION:

- When you are feeling well and strong – confident about yourself – develop friendships. When you come to trust a person and find them compassionate, share the problems you deal with now and then, so he/she will come to understand you better. At the same time, get to know this person and his/her needs as well.
- At church, for example, reach out to others who you know have mood problems – or perhaps other health problems. Ask how they're doing. Show an interest. Be there for them.
- When you're feeling down, find a person with whom you've built a trusting relationship and tell her/him how you're feeling. Let them know your need. Ask for prayer. Come right out and ask them for a hug.

It is said that God allows pain to test us. To bring us back to Himself.

- How do you feel about that? Have you experienced that?