

CONNECT NEWSLETTER

WINTER EDITION 2024

Welcome to Connect Newsletter!

We're delighted to bring you **Connect News**, a resource designed to support you on your mental health and wellness journey. Each edition is packed with practical insights, empowering tools, and research-backed strategies to help you lead a balanced, fulfilling life. Our mission is to provide reliable information on topics that matter most to our callers to the helpline, from managing mental health challenges to embracing life's changes with positivity.

In this issue, we explore Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and how it can be an effective way for managing anxiety and depression. CBT is widely recognised for its ability to help individuals recognise and shift unhelpful thought patterns, and we'll share techniques used by CBT therapists. We will also discuss positive ageing—how you can approach each stage of life with optimism and purpose. By learning how to embrace ageing as an opportunity for growth, you can find renewed purpose and joy, regardless of age or circumstance.

Additionally, this issue provides compassionate insights on coping with grief and loss, guiding you through healthy ways to process emotions, build resilience, and find support during challenging times. For those who struggle with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) as daylight wanes, we'll offer practical tips on managing symptoms and maintaining well-being during the darker months.

Connect News is an additional resource to our helpline to help you discover new ways to nurture your mental health and feel empowered to live well at every stage of life. Thank you for joining us.

I am capable of managing my thoughts and feelings, and I choose to focus on positivity and joy.





SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER – SAD – DIAGNOIS AND TREATMENT

As daylight decreases with the recent time change, we enter the official winter season. For some, this reduction in natural light triggers a shift in mood, known as Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD. You may have heard of SAD, but what exactly is it, and how can we manage its effects?

SAD impacts millions of people worldwide, with symptoms typically emerging during specific seasons. This recurring form of depression can make everyday tasks feel daunting for those affected. Recognising what seasonal affective disorder is and understanding its patterns is crucial in taking the first steps towards managing this common condition.

People with SAD often feel less interested in things they used to like, have trouble focusing, and sleep differently at certain times of the year. These issues, often called winter blues, can be mild or severe and last for varying periods.

SAD – What is it?

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a form of depression that happens at the same time each year. Unlike other types of depression, SAD comes and goes with the seasons, with symptoms starting and stopping as the seasons change.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF SAD

- Winter-pattern SAD: This is the more common type, usually starting in late autumn or early winter and ending in spring. People often call this 'winter depression' or 'winter blues' because it happens when there's less daylight.

- Summer-time pattern SAD: This type is less common but still important; about 30% of people with SAD report low mood during spring and summer. This shows that seasonal depression isn't just about the winter months, as many people think.
- SAD affects different groups of people differently. Women are four times more likely to be diagnosed than men.
- SAD usually starts between ages 18-30.
- People living far from the equator tend to get SAD more often.
- SAD often occurs alongside other mental health problems, especially in those with major depression or bipolar disorder.

SIGNS OF SAD

SAD differs from normal mood swings. It shows clear symptom patterns that affect daily life. Knowing these signs helps doctors diagnose and treat SAD properly. Winter SAD typically starts in late fall or early winter.

Main symptoms include:

- Feeling sad or down most of the day, nearly every day
- Feeling very tired and low on energy despite sleeping more
- Increased appetite and weigh gain
- Gaining weight and struggling to eat normally
- Having trouble focusing and decision making
- Feeling hopeless or worthless

These symptoms often make people act like they're "hibernating" - sleeping more and social isolation.



Common signs of summer SAD

Summer SAD is less common but shows different symptoms. It usually begins in late spring or early summer and involves:

- Feeling more anxious and restless
- Having difficulties sleeping
- Reduced appetite and losing weight
- Feeling irritable and agitated
- Sometimes acting aggressively

The difference between winter and summer SAD shows how complex this disorder is. It reveals how changing seasons can trigger opposite symptoms in different people.

COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY – WHAT IS IT AND HOW CAN IT HELP ME?

Understanding CBT: A Powerful Tool for Anxiety and Depression

In the realm of mental health treatment, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) stands out as a highly effective approach for managing anxiety and depression. This blog post will delve into the fundamental principles of CBT and explore how it can be a game-changer for those struggling with these common mental health challenges.

I don't need anyone's permission to prioritise my well-being



The Foundations of CBT

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is based on the premise that our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are interconnected. By identifying and modifying negative thought patterns and behaviours, we can significantly improve our emotional well-being.

The core principles of CBT include:

1. Cognitive restructuring: Identifying and challenging distorted thoughts
2. Behavioural activation: Engaging in positive activities to improve mood
3. Skill development: Learning coping strategies to manage symptoms

CBT is a structured, goal-focused therapy that emphasises the present rather than exploring past experiences. This makes it particularly effective for addressing current challenges and developing practical solutions.

CBT Techniques for Anxiety

When it comes to anxiety, CBT offers a range of powerful techniques:

- **Cognitive reframing:** This involves identifying anxious thoughts and replacing them with more balanced, realistic alternatives. For instance, changing "I'm going to fail this presentation" to "I've prepared well and will do my best."
- **Exposure therapy:** Gradually facing feared situations in a controlled manner to reduce anxiety over time.
- **Relaxation techniques:** Learning and practicing methods such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and mindfulness meditation to manage physical symptoms of anxiety.
- **Worry time:** Scheduling a specific time to address worries, which can help contain anxious thoughts and prevent them from dominating the entire day.

CBT Approaches for Depression

CBT is equally effective in treating depression, employing techniques such as:

- **Activity scheduling:** Planning enjoyable or meaningful activities to combat the tendency to withdraw and isolate oneself.
- **Thought records:** Keeping a log of negative thoughts and learning to evaluate their validity objectively.
- **Behavioural experiments:** Testing the accuracy of negative beliefs by gathering evidence in real-life situations.
- **Gratitude practice:** Regularly acknowledging positive aspects of life to counteract the negative bias often associated with depression.

CBT vs. Other Therapies

While there are numerous therapeutic approaches available, CBT distinguishes itself through its:

1. **Evidence-based approach:** Extensive research supports its effectiveness for various mental health conditions.
2. **Short-term nature:** CBT typically involves 12-20 sessions, making it a relatively brief intervention.
3. **Focus on skill-building:** Clients learn techniques they can continue to apply long after therapy ends.
4. **Structured format:** Clear goals and homework assignments provide a sense of progress and direction.
5. This is not to say that other therapies are ineffective; different approaches may be more suitable for different individuals or conditions. However, CBT's practical, present-focused nature makes it particularly well-suited for addressing anxiety and depression.

Embracing CBT for Better Mental Health

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy offers a powerful toolkit for managing anxiety and depression. By learning to identify and challenge negative thought patterns, develop coping skills, and gradually face fears, individuals can experience significant improvements in their mental well-being.

If you're struggling with anxiety or depression, consider exploring CBT with a qualified CBT therapist. Remember, seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. With the right support and tools, it's possible to manage the challenges of anxiety and depression and move towards a healthier, more fulfilling life.

Grief, Loss and Change

Grief is the response to any loss and is a common human experience. When we think of Loss and Bereavement, we automatically think of loss through death, but there are many losses throughout our lifetime that can trigger a grief response, such as loss through a separation, divorce, loss of a pet, home, job, loss of health, and Aging, loss by redundancy or retiring from work plus more. For most of us, the death of someone close will be our biggest loss.

Some losses are hidden where the grieving person believes they do not have a right to grieve, for example, abortion and infertility; for those who lost a loved one during the pandemic, either to COVID-19 or not, experiencing hidden loss where families were unable to visit their loved one at a hospital or intensive care unit without the barrier of protective clothing and masks. People could not attend funerals, express their grief and say goodbye—the lack of physical and spiritual support from family and friends.

Losing someone you love is painful, and grief is the cost of love; the only way to avoid grief is to avoid love. Our grieving process is trying to make sense of what has happened while learning to live your life without that person.



What impacts how we grieve

Many factors affect our grief, such as how close you were to the person who died, previous losses, personality, family and cultural influences, circumstances, and sudden or traumatic loss. While grief is a universal experience, it is also a very unique experience, as unique as your relationship with your loved one. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, and grief does not follow any stages as once thought. The death of a loved one brings lots of other changes to a person's life, such as a change of role in the family, financial, social and identity changes.

Grief is strong at the start of the grieving process, which is normal, as losing a close relationship affects us in many important ways: our self-esteem, sense of safety, and interest in learning, growing, and exploring our world. You may experience a sense of shock and disbelief when somebody dies, even if you expected it. You may appear to be coping well but often feel detached and almost as if you are in a dream. This initial reaction is a protective device that allows you to shut down in some ways as you prepare for what lies ahead.

As the reality of the loss comes into focus, so too does the pain of your loss. You may experience all kinds of difficult and surprising emotions. You may feel confused, sad, angry and lonely. You may feel guilty and regretful about things you might have done or not done. You may feel relief that the person's pain is over or that the difficult parts of caring are over. Some feelings can be intense; you may feel like you are 'going mad'. These are normal reactions to loss. You may find that your attention and concentration are poor. Or that you become absent-minded. Your appetite and sleep patterns may change, and you may experience headaches, low energy levels, and tightness in your throat or chest.

There is no set time for grieving. Some grievers need to talk about and express feelings, while others do the grief by problem-solving and responding through activity or work. It is important not to judge others' grief when we all grieve differently. While strong grief lessens over time, grieving can be a lifetime process, with some feelings returning many times. You may feel a 'dip' around important dates such as anniversaries and birthdays. It can help to acknowledge and accept all feelings.

What can help with grief?

- Allowing yourself to notice and accept all feelings, even conflictual feelings of relief, you are not disloyal; you still loved and valued the person who died.
- Try to rest, eat well, and keep some routine for your day. Talk to a close friend or family member, or write down your feelings.
- Accept any help from friends and family, whether practical or emotional.
- Seek help from a professional if you feel you need extra support.
- Developing new routines, meeting with friends, and taking up new hobbies may help combat isolation and loneliness.
- Grief comes and goes; you may be coping quite well most of the time and sometimes feeling sad and upset. Everyday reminders of your loved one, hearing their favourite song on the radio, their favourite TV show, seeing their picture or hearing their voice on your mobile can trigger grief, which is the normal process of grieving. It's important to allow yourself to feel your loved one's loss when triggered rather than avoiding triggers to avoid pain, which can upset the natural process of grieving.

Your life has been changed forever by the loss of your loved one; both loss and grief are permanent. Death ends a life, not a relationship. The person who died can still be important in your life. Try to find meaningful ways to keep a connection to them, such as telling stories about them, looking at photos of them and including their name in your conversations.

If you want information about Bereavement Support in your area, contact your GP or phone the free national bereavement support line at 1800 80 70 77, Monday to Friday, 10 am to 1 pm or visit www.bereaved.ie.

**I can release all anxiety
and embrace calmness
and peace.**



A GUIDE TO POSITIVE AGEING

As we journey through life, the concept of ageing often carries a negative connotation. But what if we could reframe our perspective and embrace the golden years with positivity and purpose? Welcome to the world of positive ageing – a holistic approach that celebrates the wisdom of years while nurturing our mental, social, and personal growth.

Nurturing Mental Well-being and Cognitive Health

The cornerstone of positive ageing lies in maintaining a sharp mind and a resilient spirit. As we age, our brains continue to adapt and grow, a phenomenon known as neuroplasticity. Embrace this incredible ability by:

- Engaging in **mentally stimulating activities** like puzzles, reading, or learning a new language
- Practicing **mindfulness and meditation** to reduce stress and improve focus
- Maintaining a **balanced diet** rich in omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants

Remember, it's never too late to start caring for your cognitive health. Every small step counts towards a more vibrant, mentally active future.

Cultivating Social Connections and Relationships

Human beings are inherently social creatures, and our need for meaningful connections doesn't diminish with age. In fact, strong social ties are crucial for positive ageing. Here's how you can nurture your social well-being:

- **Reach out** to old friends and make an effort to stay in touch
- **Join community groups** or clubs that align with your interests
- **Volunteer** for causes you care about, connecting with like-minded individuals

I choose to let go of what I cannot control and focus on what brings me peace.



By fostering these connections, you're not just enriching your own life – you're creating a support network that can bring joy and comfort in your golden years.

Embracing Lifelong Learning and Personal Growth

The pursuit of knowledge and personal development doesn't have an expiration date. Continuing to learn and grow as we age can bring immense satisfaction and a sense of purpose.

Consider:

- **Taking up a new hobby** or revisiting an old passion
- **Enrolling in online courses** or attending local workshops
- **Sharing your own knowledge** and experiences with younger generations

Remember, every day presents an opportunity to learn something new and expand your horizons. Positive ageing isn't about denying the realities of growing older – it's about embracing the journey with optimism and purpose. By focusing on mental well-being, nurturing social connections, and committing to lifelong learning, we can transform the ageing process into a rewarding and fulfilling experience.

connect

Connect Counselling is open out of hours, 5-9pm Wednesday to Sunday for adult survivors of childhood abuse neglect or trauma.