

This week has been Depression Awareness Week, run by the Depression Alliance who are a relatively small charity and therefore this week has not had as much coverage as other awareness weeks. Yet this is a really important issue and deserves attention, not just because it helps reduce the stigma around wider mental health matters but because there is often little understanding about what depression actually is.

We throw terms like depressed around all the time. It is a word that is used liberally in conversation and more often than not incorrectly. We all do it. Someone asks how we are and we reply with “I am a bit depressed” when often we are just down. It is similar to saying we have the flu when actually we just have a cold.

But what does depression look like? It doesn't look like anything. The person with the sad face could be fine while the person with the happy face could be the victim of a darkness that no-one would ever suspect. Depression shows no prejudice. It neither targets the poor or rich, working or unemployed, professional or trade, black or white, young or old. It shows no discrimination because it can affect anyone at anytime. It can strike at any time. It can creep up on you or it can come as a complete surprise. Its triggers can be obvious or they can be totally unexpected.

The most important thing is that someone who is suffering from depression is supported. It can be hard to help a victim because sometimes they feel ashamed, which in itself can exacerbate the condition. Our local health services are getting much better, especially in West Kent where mental health is being prioritised, but what also works is someone showing they understand, care and being willing to listen. And that is where we can all help.