

## Should Your Group Members Take Antidepressants?

As a DivorceCare leader, at some point you may be asked your opinion on taking antidepressants to help ease the depression experienced in separation or divorce.

I want to start with a caution. As nonmedical lay volunteers, DivorceCare leaders are not qualified to give advice on the use/nonuse of medications. In fact, to do so might create legal liability for you and/or your church.

That said, here is some information to help you better understand the issues. Remember, this is for information and background only. DivorceCare leaders should not offer counsel or direction on this topic.

1. One of the most common reactions to separation or divorce is a general feeling of sadness or depression. In most cases, this kind of depression passes without one needing to consider medication.
2. Feelings of depression can also be caused by poor diet, lack of exercise or lack of sleep. Keep in mind that those who are grieving a marital breakup, often, understandably, neglect self-care. Making changes in these areas can help one feel better.
3. Other medical problems/disorders can cause depression. Having those issues diagnosed and treated may make one feel better.
4. Some depressions are caused by chemical imbalances in the brain. Modern science has created medicine that can moderate or eliminate these imbalances.
5. Some depressions are caused by the effect one's thoughts (hopes, desires or interpretations of reality) have upon his/her emotions. For example, an abandoned spouse who incorrectly interprets her situation as a punishment from God may enter into a deep depression.
6. Sometimes it can be difficult to be sure which came first: a chemical imbalance leading to depression or thoughts that trigger an emotional state known as depression, evidenced by, amongst other things, a chemical imbalance in the brain.
7. It's possible that some people, even strong Christians, experience such deep, tragic and profound pain that they are unable to cope on a daily basis

Find helpful books in the DivorceCare bookstore under “Depression”: [www.divorcecare.org/bookstore](http://www.divorcecare.org/bookstore)

Including:  
*Will Medicine Stop the Pain?*  
by Elyse Fitzpatrick and Laura Hendrickson, M.D.

The authors are seasoned biblical counselors. The book includes stories and advice on how to address the issue of medication with one’s doctor.

without prescribed medication, combined with classic faith disciplines of prayer, counsel, Bible study and the support of fellow believers.

8. Sometimes taking antidepressants gives people the clarity of mind and strength to find other solutions for their depression. This can be tricky, however, as coming off of antidepressants can introduce side effects that cause one to think his or her depression is returning.

9. Antidepressants don’t address the thinking (hopes, desires, interpretations of reality) that can cause depression. For example, a grieving Christian woman concludes that God has abandoned her and enters into depression. While medication may help her feel better, it won’t ignite faith or deepen her understanding of God’s character and provision.

10. Your doctor’s anthropology will determine his methodology. This means that if one’s doctor thinks that a patient is solely a physical creature—nothing more than a series of chemical reactions, he won’t explore the possibility that spiritual issues may be causing the depression. If other physical or medicinal causes are ruled out as the source of the depression, the doctor will likely prescribe medications to treat the diagnosis: a chemical imbalance that is causing the depression.

11. If the root cause of one’s depression is a spiritual issue or the result of one’s thinking (hopes, desires, interpretations of reality), treating it solely with medication is not ideal. In such situations, it’s wiser to receive counsel and support from those who’d encourage the individual to pursue God.

12. In a multitude of counselors there is wisdom. Get multiple perspectives on your situation from people who have the ability to distinguish between the potential causes of depression. For example, one may need to see a Christian counselor/psychologist, see a physician and talk with his/her pastor.

To be sure, there are those who are on antidepressants who don’t need to be. And undoubtedly, there are those who are suffering needlessly because they’ve concluded that taking antidepressants is a sin or a sign of spiritual immaturity (when in fact, when used wisely and appropriately, can contribute to healing). Let’s avoid the temptation to make sweeping judgments and pronouncements on this issue and focus on the unique circumstances of the individuals we care for.

Finally, as you consider this issue, do so humbly. For even if we are fully convinced of our positions on this subject, we have no right to judge our brothers or sisters who think differently. For as Paul writes in the book of Romans: “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand” (Rom. 14:4).