Don’t Ask Me How I’m Doing

March 26, 2010 By David Evans

One of my favorite cartoons from The New Yorker is one where a man is stomping off into the distance away from a woman who’s shouting, “Why did you ask how I was doing if you didn’t want to know the answer!”

I try not to go over-board on the self-confession, but I have to say that I was moved with so much empathy for one of the bloggers I follow who expressed something similar recently. So as not to put my own words and thoughts into her mouth, here’s how she concluded her post:

> “I’m simultaneously beyond aggravated at the requirements of typical shallow human interaction and the weight of loneliness. Only professionals can stand me. And I really don’t want to stand them. They have outlived their usefulness. Paying people to hear me talk. Not helpful.”

It’s terrible to dread people asking the noxiously ever-present question, “How are you?”

It couldn’t be more obvious that you’re supposed to say, “fine,” because they really don’t care in a meaningful way, and you just happened to run into them in the elevator and you made eye contact and it would be so drama-filled or rude to ignore them. So then you get to the floor where one of you is going and you both smile and say, “Take care,” or “See you,” after which they promptly forget that they’ve seen you at all.

Which is when the full weight of the shame and self-loathing sets in. The shame, because you feel like a fraud for pretending that the world doesn’t suck. The self-loathing, because you can’t handle

an innocuous social moment without falling apart. Finally the excrutiating reality descends that you feel thousands of miles away from the rest of humanity--or as the blogger puts it, “the weight of loneliness.” I too remember what it was like to have the people you “pay to hear you talk” be the only people to whom you can come close to telling the whole truth.

I have no great wisdom about what to do when depression is that intense, other than to keep slogging on and doing the hard scary things like remaining emotionally connected to the people you care about, and sticking with therapy (provided your therapist is a good one) and meds until you just don’t feel that way anymore, which does happen for most us, eventually.

For those not in the midst of crushing depression, I offer only one bit of advice: try to mean it the next time you ask someone you really care about how they are doing, and stick with them if you get an answer you didn’t expect.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.sanemag.com/blog/ask