medina county board of developmental disabilities

- Health Services Message -

Don't Be SAD This Winter

Every year on February 2, we celebrate Groundhog Day. Many tune into forecasters in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania waiting for the famous groundhog, Punxsutawney Phil, to emerge from his temporary home to see if he will see his shadow. According to tradition, if Phil see his shadow, then it is predicted that we will have six more weeks of winter. If Phil does not see his shadow, then an "early spring" is predicted.

Groundhog Day became even more famous after the release of the 1993 Bill Murray movie, "Groundhog Day." Bill Murray plays the character Phil Conners, a weatherman that covers the events in Punxsutawney and suddenly when he wakes up the each morning, he is shocked to see that it's Groundhog Day…again! Phil finds himself reliving February 2 over and over again. This is exactly how many people with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) feel. They are stuck and find themselves reliving the same things over and over, every day.

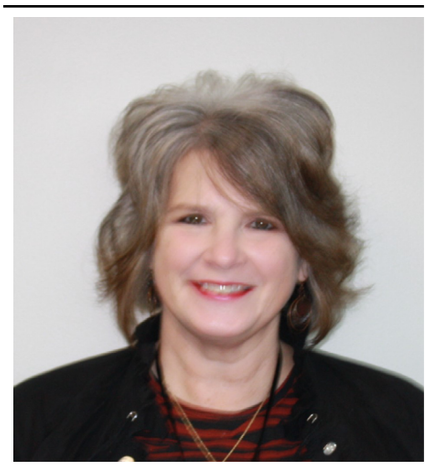
Although Groundhog Day is a cultural tradition that predicts the coming of spring, it also has an interesting parallel with Seasonal Affective Disorder. Just as people wait for the groundhog to predict the end of winter, those with SAD anticipate the change in seasons, hoping for relief from their symptoms with the arrival of longer, sunnier days. The groundhog's prediction is more than just a folklore to those affected by SAD. It represents the universal hope for an early spring and relief it brings from the shadow of winter depression.

SAD is real and is accepted as a defined disorder by the American Psychiatric Association. SAD leads to depression and feelings of sadness. It is known that depression can be debilitating, leading to loss of interest in pleasurable activities, feelings of being stuck and unable to be productive, feelings of being hopeless, helpless, or worthless, anxiousness, weight loss or gain, and even thoughts of suicide.

While SAD can be challenging, there are strategies to prevent its onset and manage symptoms effectively. Early intervention is key in reducing the severity of symptoms.

- Regularly using light therapy starting in early fall, before symptoms typically begin, can help prevent them from taking hold.
- Connecting with friends and family, joining support groups or participating in community activities can provide emotional support and reduce feelings of isolation.
- Maintaining a healthy lifestyle through regular exercise, a balanced diet and sufficient sleep can mitigate symptoms.
- It may also be necessary to contact your physician or counselor to help you get through the winter months.

For a bit of movie therapy: Bill Murray in Groundhog Day doesn't get unstuck until he starts working on himself. "Change Your Paradigm, Change Your Life."



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If you have any questions or are in need of resources, please reach out to Pam Wheeler, at 330-725-7751 x 234 or pwheeler@mcbdd.org.

Pam Wheeler,
Health Services Coordinator