

REAL LIFE SOLUTIONS



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Depression: Supporting a Family Member or Friend

If someone in your life has depression, you may feel helpless and wonder what to do. Learn how to offer support and understanding and how to help them get the resources to cope with depression.

Learn the signs and symptoms of depression

Depression signs and symptoms vary and can include:

- Feeling sad, down or "empty"
- Losing interest in activities that were once a source of pleasure
- Feeling hopeless, worthless or helpless
- Feeling irritable or restless
- Changes in appetite, and losing or gaining weight unintentionally
- Sleeping poorly or oversleeping
- Feeling tired or having less energy
- Having persistent feelings of guilt
- Having trouble thinking, concentrating or making decisions
- Decreased capability and performance
- Having thoughts of suicide
- Abusing alcohol or drugs

Encourage treatment

People with depression may not recognize or acknowledge that they're depressed. They may not be aware of signs and symptoms of depression, so they may think their feelings are normal. Some people feel ashamed about their depression and mistakenly believe they should be able to overcome it with willpower. But depression seldom gets better without treatment and may get worse. With the right treatment approach, the person you care about can get better. Here's how you can help.

- Talk to the person about what you've noticed and why you're concerned.
- Explain that depression is a medical condition and that it usually gets better with treatment.
- Suggest that they see a professional — medical doctor or mental health provider.
- Express your willingness to help by setting up appointments or going with the person.

If the person's illness is severe or potentially life-threatening, contact a doctor, hospital or emergency medical services.

Provide support

Remember that your support and understanding can help.

- **Encourage treatment.** If your friend or family member is in treatment for depression, help him or her remember to take prescribed medications and to attend appointments.
- **Listen.** Listen carefully and avoid giving advice, opinions or making judgments. Listening and being understanding can be a powerful healing tool.
- **Give positive reinforcement.** Remind them about their positive qualities and how much they mean to you and others.
- Offer assistance. Offer suggestions about specific tasks you'd be willing to do, or ask if there is a particular task that you could take on.
- **Help create a low-stress environment.** Offer to make a schedule for meals, medication, exercise and sleep, and help organize household chores.
- **Locate helpful organizations.** A

number of organizations offer support groups, counseling and other resources for depression, such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

- **Encourage participation in spiritual practice.** For some people, faith is an important element in recovery from depression — whether it's involvement in an organized religious community or personal spiritual beliefs and practices.
- **Make plans together.** Ask your friend or family member to join you on a walk, see a movie, or work with you on a hobby or other activity he or she previously enjoyed.

What you can do for yourself:

- **Learn about depression.** The better you understand what causes depression, how it affects people and how it can be treated, the better you'll be able to talk to and help the person you care about.
- **Take care of yourself.** Ask other family members or friends to help, and take steps to prevent becoming frustrated or burned out. Find your own time for hobbies, physical activity, friends and spiritual renewal.
- **Be patient.** Depression symptoms do improve with treatment, but it can take time. Finding the best treatment may require trying more than one type of medication or treatment approach. For some people, symptoms quickly improve after starting treatment. For others, it may take longer.

Source: Reprinted from the MayoClinic.com article "Depression: Supporting a family member or friend" (<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/depression/MH00016>)

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