

When Someone You Love Is Depressed

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When someone you love is experiencing depression you may face any number of feelings, including sadness, confusion, fear, or even resentment. You may wonder whether your loved one—or your relationship—will overcome the depression. Here you can explore information to help you understand depression, offer support to someone who is depressed, and take care of yourself when someone you love is depressed.

Understanding depression

Millions of people worldwide suffer from depression, a mood disorder that affects one's thoughts and behaviours. Depression can change how people think about themselves and can have a deep impact on life, work, and overall happiness.

Though it is a treatable illness, less than half of those with depression worldwide get treatment, according to the World Health Organization. Some people don't recognize that they are depressed or that help is available. Concern for the negative impact of stigma related to mental illness may also play a role. In any case, friends and relatives can play a vital role in helping their loved ones with depression find the help they need to feel better.

Causes of depression

It's not always clear what causes depression. Factors may include:

- a painful loss, such as a: death of a close friend or relative; job loss; or financial problems
- persistent difficulties in, or end of, an important relationship
- a painful childhood experience that had a lasting impact
- a chronic and possibly life-altering physical health problem or serious illness
- a very stressful situation, such as bullying, physical or sexual abuse, or racism

Some [research](#) suggests that for some, there may be a genetic tendency toward depression.

Depression may also have other causes, some of which may be so painful that people don't want to talk about them. So, it's best to avoid assuming that you know why someone is depressed (even if the condition seems to have a clear cause). Keep in mind that there may be many things you don't know about the situation. And depression often results not from a single loss or setback but from a series of them. So, someone may feel this way for more than one reason.

Symptoms of depression

People with depression may have one or more of these symptoms:

- persistent (two or more weeks) feelings of sadness or "emptiness"
- feelings of anxiety, guilt, worthlessness, helplessness, hopelessness, or pessimism
- loss of interest or pleasure in previously enjoyed hobbies or activities
- difficulty with concentration, memory, or decision-making
- persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment (such as headaches, chronic pain, or digestive disorders)
- eating too much or too little
- fatigue or decreased energy, or feeling "slowed down"
- sleeping difficulties, such as trouble falling asleep or staying asleep or excessive sleeping
- restlessness or irritability
- thoughts of death or suicide, or attempts of suicide

Depression is not a sign of personal weakness or a condition that someone can will away. You may find it helpful to think of it as a medical condition, like asthma, that the person didn't cause and needs help to deal with successfully.

How a loved one's depression may affect you

Depression can take a toll on personal relationships. If your partner is depressed, you may miss the intimacy or sense of connection you once had. You may worry about finances if your partner can't work. You may feel angry or impatient because the person doesn't seem to be getting any better or even seeming that they don't want to make an effort to get better. You may feel your loved one is acting out on purpose or to get attention. You may feel alone and isolated, as if you're battling depression all alone. All of these emotions can have a profound effect on your own mental wellbeing as well as your relationship and your ability to cope with someone's depression.

Taking care of yourself

It is common for people who are caring for a person with depression to feel burnt out, overwhelmed, and exhausted. That's why it's important to take care of yourself when someone you love is depressed. One of the most important things you can do to help someone is to get support for yourself. Talk with a trusted friend or relative, or a professional about your thoughts and feelings.

Consider joining an online or in-person support group for families and friends of people with depression. In a support group you will meet people who are dealing with similar issues and may have helpful ideas. [The Government of Canada](#) provides a list of nation-wide resources for those in crisis; in-person support might vary based on the province or territory you live in, so it's a good idea to search online for local resources including support groups, educational classes, and therapists. You can also contact your organization's or employer's assistance program, or EAP, for support and resources.

Here are other ways to take care of yourself when someone you love is depressed.

Make time for yourself every day. Do something that refreshes you, if only for a few minutes a day. Go for a walk, read a book, or visit with a friend—do anything that gives you energy and makes you feel better able to cope.

Avoid blaming yourself. You may wonder if you did something to cause the depression. Or you may feel guilty and angry that someone isn't getting better as quickly as you'd hoped. Remind yourself that depression is an illness. It may be triggered by an event, but it can't be caused or cured by another person.

Try not to take it personally if a depressed person says hurtful things. Irritability is common in people who are depressed. They may express their frustration by lashing out at others. Keep in mind that this behaviour may be part of the illness. If you feel endangered by someone's actions, make sure that you are safe. Then ask for professional assistance immediately.

Write in a journal. Keeping a journal can be a very helpful way to express thoughts and feelings that are hard to share with others. You don't have to share it with anyone unless you feel it would help you.

Maintain your friendships. You may feel like withdrawing from your friends and family, but you need their support when someone close to you is depressed. Make time for your friends and other supportive people in your life. Remember that they truly want to help and be there for you.

Keep doing the things that make you happy. Keep pursuing your hobbies and interests. This will help you feel more refreshed and able to offer care, comfort, and support to your loved one, as well as to yourself.

Keep hope alive. Depression is treatable. It might take months, or even years for someone to get better, but most people do improve.

Ways to help

The best thing you can do for someone who is depressed is to encourage the person to seek and stick with treatment. You can also try the following.

Educate yourself. Read articles by trusted sources or visit helpful websites to learn about depression and how it can be treated and what support is also available for you.

Be a consistent and supportive presence in the person's life. You don't necessarily have to do or say anything. Sometimes just being there—listening or sitting quietly together—can send a strong message of support.

Forgive yourself and your loved one. It's normal to occasionally feel frustrated or angry at yourself or someone who is depressed when both of you must cope with the condition. If you lose your patience, apologize and forgive yourself. You may also need to forgive someone who is experiencing this illness.

Take feelings of depression seriously. Avoid brushing them off. Instead, validate them by saying things like, "I know this is really difficult right now but we are going to get through this together."

Remember that you don't have to do everything yourself. Letting others provide some of the support can greatly ease your burden. It can also give your loved one more people to rely on.

Realize that many people with depression are afraid of being abandoned. Reassure your loved one that you will work through this together.

Gently encourage activities that may make your loved one feel better. Try not to pressure the person to do things they don't want to do at the moment. But gently suggest activities and ideas that might be of interest, such as spending a few minutes a day on a hobby that was once enjoyed in the past.

Stay the course. Have faith that the person's condition can improve. Show it by saying things like, "We are going to get through this together" or "I know it may take time, but you are going to feel better."

If your loved one talks about suicide

Never ignore remarks about suicide. If someone talks about suicide, tell their doctor or therapist immediately. If you can't reach a professional, take the person to an emergency room, call **911** or contact the [988 Suicide Crisis Helpline](#) by calling or texting **988**.

Loving someone who is depressed can be a difficult journey with many ups and downs. It takes a lot of energy and can affect your mood. If you take care of yourself and learn all you can about the illness, you will be better equipped to offer the love and support a person with depression needs.

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