Things You Shouldn’t Say to Someone Living with Depression

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What Not to Say to Someone Who Is Suffering

Fighting the stigma against mental health should play an important role in today’s society. Depression, just like any other mental illness, is a real and incredibly difficult part of people’s lives that cannot go untreated or unheard.

Statistics show that millions of people worldwide are currently suffering from some form of depression regardless of gender, age or cultural background. So, why are people simply being told to “pull yourself together” or “snap out of it” instead of being recognized that they are suffering? You wouldn’t tell someone with a broken leg to simply get back on their feet and carry on walking. So why do some people treat depression as a trivial thing?

In a previous article, I wrote about my experiences with opening up about my depression and telling the people around me about my diagnosis. I mentioned that there were some people who reacted negatively towards this. I had a strong fear that I would not be taken seriously and in some cases I wasn’t. I was told to “just cheer up” and get on with my life. I was also told that I was “attention seeking”, to stop “faking it” and “it’s not that hard”. Even though this hurt and affected me in a negative way, it also motivated me to raise awareness about depression and mental health and to make people see that depression is real and even though it is not a pain you can physically see it causes real problems and pain to those who suffer from it. However, for other people with depression comments and attitudes like the ones above can affect their recovery and movement towards a happier and healthier future. Some people will become more reclusive and avoid telling their problems to anyone with the idea that they will not be taken seriously. Some will lose trust and hope in those around them and their depression can lead to a downward spiral of hopelessness. Others will believe the comments made at them and that they don’t really have a problem. These are the wrong ways to cope with depression and for help and support to become more available to everybody suffering, awareness should be a main point of focus to every society.

It is important for everyone to acknowledge that this isn’t “just a phase” that you can get over. Despite negative comments and stigma from other people, depression is a genuine health condition and if you know someone who has depression you should make yourself more aware of what they go through on a daily basis. Even though those who do not have depression may not understand how it feels to have it and cannot experience the struggles and pain of those that are, they can still make themselves more aware of it and what it is like for those who do. If a fully trained and qualified doctor can diagnose and seek treatment for someone who has depression, why can’t people accept and support those with it?

Next page: how to help someone with depression.

If you are someone who knows or believes you know someone who may have depression, here are some things you should and should not say and do towards them:

- **Accept that depression is real:** they are not just going through a short-term rough patch. Suffering from depression is not something that can just go away if you ignore it is there. There is a difference between

being temporarily sad/feeling low or having a bad day and suffering from depression.

- **Do not tell them to just “cheer up” or “get over it”:** this can make things worse for someone who has depression as they will feel a worse sense of hopelessness from their inability to simply “get better”.
- **Do not make judgments:** If someone with depression or believes they have depression has the trust and confidence to open up to you about their worries, do not judge them for it. Don’t pass it off as them going through a hard time and dismiss their problems; encourage them to seek help and the appropriate treatment available to them.
- **Do not assume it isn’t there because they do not mention it:** Some people living with depression do not like to discuss their issues. Saying things like “well you never mentioned it until now” does not help them. Not everyone is comfortable discussing their problems with depression with others, despite how close your relationship with them is. However do not force them to talk about their feelings if they do not want to. Continue to support them even if they don’t always want to be open about their depression, it’s a constant problem in their lives even if they do not verbally express this, so it should not be ignored, avoided or dismissed.

- **Think before you speak:** Saying the wrong thing to someone with depression, regardless of whether you meant it or not will affect the person more than you may know. Even if they are not verbal of the affect it has on them does not mean it has not made things worse for them.
- **Research:** Look into what depression is, how it is caused, what the symptoms are and how you can support someone with it. Even though you do not know first-hand what they go through on a daily basis, you can sympathize that they are suffering and you can support them to the best of your ability.

Even though a person’s belief may be that depression does not exist, the simple fact is that it is a medically recognised health condition, whether they want to accept it or not. Even though depression is a mental illness, it can lead to physical problems and even death. Knowing what is appropriate and what is not to say to someone with depression can make a massively significant difference in their recovery and every day coping. The more negative things said to a person living with depression will ultimately make life worse for them. They will feel like there is no help available to them, increasing the feeling of hopelessness and stress. It can also lead them to believe that their depression is not real and they are just over-exaggerating, increasing their feelings of self-loathing and stress.

Even though in my personal experience I did receive negative comments about my diagnosis, I also had a positive and accepting atmosphere from others which continues to support me throughout my life. This should be available to everyone living with depression and not only will saying and doing the right things support a person’s treatment and recovery, it may also save their life and is crucial to a person living with depression.