How to Help Your Spouse With Depression

by LANA BARHUM

Depression in a Relationship: When Your Spouse Is Depressed

When your spouse has depression, your marriage or relationship can become strained. And it is not easy loving someone who is always unhappy and negative.

What's worse is when a depressed spouse won't admit they are depressed and refuses treatment.

Here is what you need to know about living with a depressed spouse, coping when your partner is depressed, helping them, and what to do when they refuse help and push you away.

What Depression in a Relationship or Marriage Looks Like

When one spouse is depressed, it takes a toll on the entire marriage or relationship. This is because depression affects every aspect of the marriage or relationship, from finances to household responsibilities, and to emotional and sexual intimacy.

Research from the *Readers Digest Marriage in America Survey* finds that 42 percent of people report depression as one of the bigger challenges in their intimate relationships.

The harmful effects of depression are not limited to the depressed person. The partner of the depressed person is equally affected, especially because depression disrupts communication and social patterns in romantic relationships.

The mood of the depressed spouse contributes to the mood of the partner who is not depressed. For example, the spouse who is not depressed may make excuses when the depressed spouse doesn't participate in family functions or must take over most of the family responsibilities.

Caring for a depressed spouse can feel lonely and emotionally draining. You might blame yourself or feel hopeless, or even consider walking away.

It is normal for you to feel angry and frustrated, especially when your depressed spouse constantly pessimistic and angry. Or he or she doesn't help with household chores, getting the kids to bed, or ask how you are doing or acknowledge how you have been trying to hold everything together alone.

All the stress starts a cycle that leaves you burned out, doesn't help your partner, and further strains your relationship.

You want to protect your relationship and help your depressed spouse, but you don't know where even to start, and if it is possible, especially when spouse won't admit they need help or outright refuses help.

How to Deal With a Depressed Spouse

It is understandable you want to help your partner, but the first you need to do is help yourself. Here are five things to keep in mind as you cope with the depression of a spouse or partner.

Don't Take It Personally

Your partner's behavior and mood have nothing to do with you, so don't take it to heart. Even if you are being rejected emotionally or sexually, it has nothing to do with anything you have done.

When someone is depressed, the depression takes over and forces them to take out their anger and sadness out on the people they love most.

Unless your partner is hurting you or your children by saying or doing hurtful things or being abusive, there is not a lot you can do control the situation. And if there is abusive or hurtful behavior, you have a right to stand up for yourself and not be a punching bag.

Educate Yourself About Depression

It is important to learn all you can about depression, especially the symptoms, the different types of depression, and treatments. It is up to you, the person who isn't depressed, to do the research and help the one you love.

Be Realistic and Ask for Help

You cannot cure depression or make it go away. All you can do is be supportive and understanding.

If your partner were physically ill, you wouldn't hesitate to ask for help, and asking for help in this instance shouldn't be any different. Ask loved ones for help so that you don't end up burning yourself out.

Next page: More tips on how to help your spouse with depression, and more.

Take Care of You and Your Children

If your partner is deeply depressed, you may end up being their caregiver. But you cannot take care of someone else without taking care of yourself first.

You should take care of yourself physically, by eating healthy, sleeping well, and being active. Take care of your emotional health by making time for yourself and handling stress in healthy ways.

When one parent develops depression, it is not usual for their children to develop it as well. Make sure children's needs are still being met and keep an eye out for symptoms of depression to make sure this is addressed as soon as it becomes apparent treatment is needed.

You should also consider your partner is not the only one who needs therapy. A therapist can help you cope with your partner's depression and deal with the challenges of managing your current family life.

When Your Spouse Won't Get Help

Some people who are depressed will refuse help and treatment. Either, they don't think they need it, feel they are not as affected by their depressed mood as others think, or they think they cannot afford treatment or even have time for it.

It is also possible your spouse may not want to seek help because of pride. In most people's minds, depression equal weakness, and that level of pride – especially when you are a breadwinner or the ones who take care of

everyone – leads to not getting the help that is desperately needed.

Regardless of the excuses used, all you can do is express your concern, listen, and encourage your partner to seek help. Show your support by offering to attend therapy sessions and doctor visits.

A person in a relationship has the option of attending therapy alone or having their partner come along for couple's therapy. The decision about the types of treatment will depend on what help the relationship needs with communication and intimacy, and this can be assessed and discussed with the help of a therapist.

When Your Partner Pushes You Away

Most people are not skilled enough to understand how they can truly help someone who is depressed. It is not even harder if your loved one refuses help and pushes you away.

The truth is, there is not a lot you can do when your depressed partner pushes you away. The one thing you can do, however, is to continue to be there for them.

Most depressed people deal with depression by shutting their closest loved ones out, generally because they feel they have failed loved ones by being depressed. They may feel also feel ashamed for needing help.

You can help your spouse by talking to them about their pushing you away and encouraging them to reach out. ou can help yourself by trying not to feel angry at or resentful of your spouse.

Decide How Much You Can Handle

If you are staying with a partner who has become angry and abusive, are you helping or hurting?

While the decision to support your spouse is yours alone, you must decide whether doing so is hurting you or your children.

It is important to note that if your spouse is refusing help, threatening to walk away may not help anyone, and could hurt in the long term. Therefore, it is important to figure out your priorities, and how much of what you do is realistic, helpful or even harmful.

The Bottom Line

Depression in a relationship can take a toll on even the best relationships. But when you have committed for better or worse, the last thing you want to do is give up on the person you love most.

Good treatment, support, and caring are the keys to helping a partner recover from depression. And with good communication and encouragement, your relationship will also survive the effect of depression and may even become better than it was before.

Most importantly, don't forget to take care of yourself, especially your emotional health, and don't lose yourself caring for someone else.

Last, never tolerate and ignore the abusive and hurtful behavior. Depression is not an excuse to allow yourself to be a punching bag.