4 Ways to Support Someone Experiencing Depression

by BRITTANY DA SILVA

How to Support a Friend With Depression

If someone you love has depression, it can be difficult to know how — or if — you can help. Whether you have dealt with mental health issues yourself or not, there are a number of simple things you can do to support a friend with depression, or any loved one for that matter.

What is Depression?

Understanding what depression actually is should be the first step you take in helping someone else cope. If you are unsure of what the other person is going through, it is difficult to determine the best course of action to take to assist them.

It is important to understand that depression is much more than simply feeling blue or being sad. It is a mental illness that impacts every aspect of someone's life.

Some of the most common symptoms of depression include:

- Feeling hopeless or empty.
- Anxiety, agitation or restlessness.
- Irritability, frustration and angry outbursts.
- Loss of interest in usual activities, like hobbies, sex or time with friends.
- Lack of energy and extreme tiredness.
- Oversleeping or insomnia.
- Slowed thinking, speaking or movements.
- Feelings of guilt and worthlessness.
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating, decision making and remembering.
- Thoughts or attempts of suicide.

A loved one with depression will have symptoms noticeable enough to cause issues in their daily lives.

What Are the Risk Factors?

There are certain risk factors for depression. However, it is possible to develop depression without these factors. If you or a loved one have a number of the risk factors below, your likelihood of developing depression is greater.

- Family history of mental illness.
- Chronic physical or mental disorders.
- Psychological factors.
- Major life changes and stress.
- Female gender.

- Old age.
- Low socioeconomic status.
- Little to no social support.
- Sleep disorders or insomnia.
- Certain medications.

As stated above, having little to no social support is a contributing factor to developing depression, which is why it is so important to help those around you whenever possible.

How Can You Support Someone With Depression?

Although challenging, there are many things you can do to support a friend with depression. Learning and understanding the symptoms is an important first step, so that you can begin to appreciate what it is they are going through.

1. Listen

The most important thing you can do as a friend to those with depression is to listen and be there for them, should they reach out. Someone with little to no social support is more likely to experience depression, so it is imperative that you show your loved ones that you are there for them.

Even if you do not have depression yourself, you can show your loved one support by listening carefully to how they feel and being understanding of what they are going through, without offering your own advice or opinions.

Often times, providing feedback or advice can be more harmful than helpful, and it is not what the person speaking wants from you. Simply being there and listening is more than enough.

2. Help Them With Daily Tasks

Offering assistance to your loved one is helpful, as depression may interfere with their ability to complete certain tasks. Let them know you are willing to help by offering to cook or clean for them, if needed.

3. Encourage Appropriate Treatment

Encourage your loved one to seek treatment or continue with treatment, especially if they are struggling. Remind them of appointments and encourage them to take their prescribed medications or attend their therapy sessions.

4. Make Plans

Make plans with your loved one so that you can keep in touch regularly and encourage them to get out. Attending a movie, going to dinner, or simply going for a walk goes a long way to making someone feel appreciated.

Never force someone to do something they are not comfortable with. Just let them know you are available, willing to listen and interested in spending time with them.

What Doesn’t Help

Those suffering from depression often judge themselves harshly and find fault in everything they do. For this reason, stick to positive reinforcement by reminding them of their positive qualities or how much they mean to others.

Telling someone with depression that they don’t have it as bad as others is only going to make them feel worse and guilty. Someone with depression cannot just think on the bright side or stop being pessimistic, so avoid judgments to this effect.

Remind yourself to validate your loved one’s feelings or emotions, but avoid offering your own advice. It is frustrating when someone you love seems flippant, asking if you have tried "going outside to get some vitamin D" as a way to treat your depression.

It is important to remember that depression is not just sadness. Depression cannot be cured by optimism, simply thinking good thoughts or getting sunshine.

Understanding the Individual Situation

Everyone is unique, including those with depression. Something that might work as a treatment option for one person may not have the same results for another person.

Be patient with yourself and your loved ones. Symptoms of depression improve with treatment, but it can take some time. Finding the treatment option that works best is often a trial-and-error process that can be lengthy and frustrating.

Always communicate with your loved one and ask them how you can best support them. Depression is difficult for everyone involved, and if you have never dealt with it before, it is hard to know how to help.

When you support a friend with depression, your actions are appreciated and necessary to the treatment process, but make sure you also take time for yourself to recharge and avoid burn out.

What Are Some Common Misconceptions Surrounding Depression?

Despite the number of people who currently experience symptoms of depression, there are still many misconceptions surrounding this disorder. Some of the common misconceptions surrounding depression are explored below.

Depression is Not a Real Disorder

There are still many who believe that depression is not a real disorder or medical condition, believing it is just a personality trait or choice that individuals make. This is simply untrue.

Anyone who has experienced depression will tell you that it is definitely not a choice. Depression severely impacts your life and your ability to carry out the functions of daily living.

Depression has been linked to a mixture of psychological, biological and environmental factors by medical professionals.

Only Medication Can Treat Depression

Although antidepressants are prescribed to many who have depression, it is certainly not the only way to treat the disorder.

Medication is used to improve the way your brain processes the chemicals that control stress and mood. Although they prove beneficial in many situations, they are certainly not for everyone.

In most cases, medication is generally never prescribed alone as a cure for depression, as it rarely works on its own. Medication in combination with psychotherapy and lifestyle changes is a common tactic to manage depression.

Depression is a Part of Growing Up

Everyone has growing pains, as adolescence is rarely a pleasant stage of life for anyone. However, not everyone experiences depression during this time. Adolescence affects you emotionally, psychologically and socially, which

can be mistaken for depression, due to the similarities in these symptoms.

If symptoms seem worse than typical adolescent blues, it is worth discussing with a doctor to see if it is depression. No one should have to suffer in silence.

Depression is a Part of Aging

Just like adolescence, although there are symptoms of aging that overlap with depression, this does not mean that everyone develops depression as they age.

Many older adults develop other serious medical conditions as they age, such as heart conditions, cancer or Parkinson’s disease. These conditions can give rise to depression, and many medications used to treat the symptoms of such illnesses can cause side effects that also increase the risk of depression.

Despite these connections, depression is not normal in older adults, nor should it be taken lightly. Anyone who experiences the symptoms of depression should speak to a doctor on how to treat it.