Tips for Helping a Loved One With Depression

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Helping Someone With Depression

Has someone special in your life been acting differently? Does she seem down and more lethargic? Has she been staying in bed more and missing days of school or work? It could be that the special person in your life has signs and symptoms of depression.

This answer leads to more questions as you ask yourself: What can I do about it? Depression seems overwhelming and scary at times. You have of heard terrible things happening to people with depression. Your fear is becoming the enemy.

9 Tips to Help with Depression

The truth is that if your intentions are pure and you practice appropriate boundaries as a friend, family member or spouse, helping someone with depression can be easier than you think. As long as you establish depression as the enemy, you can find success. Following all or some of tips below will help you be more understanding and efficient in helping someone with depression. Here's how:

- **Come from a place of love.** Being a support means that your intentions are driven only by the desire to help a loved one in your life. Coming from a place of love means that you work to provide a solid understanding of your loved one's situation to better help. If you find your motivations being less than altruistic, you may want to back away. Don't choose to help someone because you think that you can obtain a reward or secondary benefit. Don't invest time in your loved one because it will be a distraction from your own hardships. If love is not your motivation, these tips will not work and you should leave the assistance to someone else.

- **Set a goal.** If love is your motivation, set a goal. What is it you want to help your loved one accomplish? The goal will serve as a direction and a course of action for you to follow. Do you want to help your loved one admit that depression has become a strong, negative influence in her life? Do you want to help her in cleaning her home? Do you want to make her happier? Avoid goals that are too broad or hard to measure. If you want your loved one to be "happier," it will be difficult to tell when this is accomplished. This leads to frustration and anger. Set small goals that are easy to attain and then set another.

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- **Know depression.** You have been observing some troubling symptoms of your loved one for some time but the criteria for being diagnosed with depression is quite complex as is depression as a whole. Biologically, many view depression as a lack or imbalance of key neurotransmitters like serotonin in the

brain. Antidepressant medications often work by allowing more serotonin to be available. Symptoms of depression and depressive disorders cover a wide array of behavioral and cognitive changes. Depression can even cause some to have delusions or hallucinations. The symptoms look differently for each person and can change over time. Perhaps, your loved one's mood is sad and then irritable later. This does not mean that they have bipolar disorder as irritability is a symptom of depression. Read trusted information and talk to others about depression to get as much information as possible. Being a valuable resource will help your loved one.

- **Know the difference.** With the complex nature of symptoms, you can easily confuse something else for depression. Likely candidates are ADHD, bipolar disorder, alcohol or drug use, physical illnesses and other causes that are a normal part of life. If your 14 year-old daughter broke up with her boyfriend, it is typical for her to be sad and staying to herself for a period of time. This would not qualify as depression. Knowing the difference means that you do not overreact to smaller issues and that you do not underreact to bigger ones. Finding this balance is not easy and takes practice. Look at your past judgments to see if they were accurate or lacking in ways. Making small, thought out adjustments will help find balance.
- **Acknowledge the depression.** If your loved one seems to match with information you have gathered, set aside time to have an honest conversation. Communicate effectively with what you have seen and what concerns you have. Be sure to attach feeling words to your statements to let the loved one know that you are invested in them. Sometimes people with depression stigmatize themselves because of the illness. They think it is a failure or character defect so they hide it while feeling ashamed. Acknowledging it helps to reduce the stigma and makes it easier to discuss.

- **Be a partner but not a therapist.** The need for solid boundaries is crucial. It is a great thing that you want to assist your loved one, but be realistic about your abilities. Therapists and psychiatrists go to school for many years and have experience helping a variety of people with a range of symptoms. Even if you have experience in mental health, trying to treat someone you have a personal relationship with is unethical and is likely to end badly. You can do more good as a partner and leaving the treatment to the professionals.

- **Encourage treatment.** Some people will get better by working hard on their own to address their depression. More people benefit from therapy and medication. Research has shown that people do best when they have a combination of talk therapy like cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and medication management. It will be a good use of your resources to encourage treatment and assist your loved one in attending appointments. If they are feeling their therapist or psychiatrist is a poor match, suggest they try again or make a switch. Building a rapport with a mental health professional takes time and may require a few trials. Talk about appointments and goals being worked on in session to the comfort of your loved one. This will help them stay engaged and will further reduce the stigma.

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- **Be a model.** Refuse a "do as I say, not as I do" approach. This only sends the message that you do not truly understand depression. If you want your loved one to go to treatment, go with them. If you suggest that they need to exercise more and eat healthier food, lead by example. Make lists and set daily goals for yourself so you can understand that barriers that get in the way. You may not know the impact of depression but you can illustrate that these activities do provide benefit. If nothing else, engaging in a healthier lifestyle means that you will feel better yourself and have more resources to help your loved one.

- **Be patient.** Depression is not a condition that improves by "force." You cannot trick, bribe or persuade your loved one to "get better." Many supports become frustrated by the lack of motivation in their loved ones. Sometimes it is easier to see them as lazy and complacent than it is to see them as depressed. Instead, frame your thinking around the concept that they have a serious medical condition that affects millions of people daily. When frustrated, return back to your initial goal. Your frustration does not help accomplish your goal.

- **Be safe.** With depression, there is always a risk of suicide. Don't wait until your loved one is in a severely depressed episode to become familiar with the law and crisis services in your area. Someone with depression cannot be committed to treatment unless they are at risk of seriously harming self and others. If your loved one is talking a lot about death, seems hopeless or has made a suicidal gesture. Consult mental health crisis services in your area for options. Depression cannot improve if your loved one is no longer able to fight. Protecting them is paramount especially when they cannot protect themselves.

Conclusion

Depression is insidious. It works to make the person with depression more depressed and less likely to follow through with beneficial actions. Depression wants more depression. Realizing that you have an uphill battle does not mean that you should be discouraged. Instead, have expectations of your loved one that are practical and likely to happen. Find ways to help them, get them to help themselves and access the people that can help them more effectively. Depression is the enemy you and your loved one are facing together. Don't let it win.