

Helping a Loved One Who Is Depressed

Dealing with depression in a family member or friend may feel like a terrifying and overwhelming task. It can be frustrating and difficult to help someone who may not understand her need for help, particularly if she is irritable, irrational ("no one loves me"), unresponsive and/or suicidal.

But steering her to appropriate professional help is the first step to ending the pain and speeding the return of the person you once knew. And someone who feels it's "all I can do to make it through the day" may not have the strength to take this first step alone. Since depression can make people feel exhausted and helpless, they will need and probably want help from others. Recovery does not happen overnight and the proper medicine, dosage and therapy may take a little trial and error to discover.

Depression is a common disease, so many resources are available to help both you and your loved one. Begin by educating yourself about the signs and symptoms of depression, special issues regarding children and teens and women or the elderly and treatment options. Consult a physician, psychiatrist, psychologist or other mental health professional for advice.

Never ignore remarks about suicide, no matter how frivolous. You may even ask the person if he thinks about suicide. Asking someone about suicide will *not* encourage a suicide attempt. Eventually, with treatment, 85 percent to 90 percent of people fully recover. Keep that in mind, and keep reassuring her that, with time and help, she will feel better.

Step 1: Help the depressed person get treatment.

- If she is suicidal, seek immediate help.
- Help her understand that she has a disease that can be treated.
- If the person resists seeking treatment and is not suicidal, be patient and supportive. Make sure she understands you are there to help when she is ready for the next step.
- Identify a doctor for him and help him understand his insurance benefits.
- Make an appointment for him.
- Accompany him to the doctor.
- Monitor his medication.
- Encourage the person to stick with treatment.

Step 2: Offer support during and after treatment.

- Be understanding.
- Do not give up on her no matter how slow the process ... or she might give up on herself.
- Offer encouragement.
- Engage him in conversation and listen.
- Do not disparage his feelings.
- Never judge or act like you "know" how she feels.

Step 3: Help him rediscover the joys of life ... slowly

- Offer diversion and companionship (for example, invite the depressed person for walks, outings, movies and other activities).
- Encourage participation in other activities that once provided pleasure.
- Be gently insistent if your invitations are refused but do not push the depressed person to undertake too much too soon.