

Living with Someone who is Depressed

Imagine being able to make a positive difference in the daily life of the depressed person with whom you live.

It's not uncommon to **FEEL HELPLESS** in your efforts to care for someone who is depressed.

More than a bad mood, depression impacts your thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and relationships. Though research estimates 17% percent of Americans will experience major depression at some point, it looks different for each person. Some people experience intense sadness, while others grow irritable, anxious, or angry. Other common symptoms include difficulty concentrating, changes in sleeping and eating patterns, lacking energy, losing pleasure in activities once enjoyed, and even suicidal thoughts.

CHALLENGES OF LIVING WITH A DEPRESSED LOVED ONE

Living with a depressed loved one is not always easy. People can struggle to understand the disorder and how to navigate through life. If your loved one is dealing with depression you might experience the following:

- Guilt and anger about the disorder
- Seeing the depressed person as needy or ungrateful
- Feeling like your own relational needs are not met
- Fears of expressing your frustration about the disorder

Overcoming depression is no easy task. It can be tempting to tell your loved one to cheer up or snap out of it. You might think if they would summon enough willpower they could get out of bed and go to work. These suggestions, while they might feel good, are never helpful. In fact, they will likely be met with irritability and hostility.

ACTION STEPS

- ✓ **Communicate** - Express to your loved one that you understand depression is a disorder and not a personal failing. Reassure them you know they're not weak or choosing to feel this way.
- ✓ **Involve them** - As much as possible, include your loved one in the decision-making process. Instead of saying, "Let's get outside today," you could say, "I'd like to go outside today. Would you rather go for a walk or ride our bikes in the park?" They may refuse, and it's

important not to force your loved one to do anything. Remember to praise them for the small successes.

- ✓ **Use "I" statements** - "You" statements sound accusatory. Instead, "I" statements tend to leave people less defensive. There's a big difference between, "I value your health and want to see you happy" versus "You never take care of yourself."

- ✓ **Practice self-care** - Because depressed people are dealing with a disorder that can drain all their energy and focus, you may need other friends and family members for support. It's vital to take care of your mind, body, and other relationships. Counseling or a support group can be a helpful resource to learn more about depression and positive coping skills.

KEEP IN MIND

The majority of people with depression will improve with treatment, but it takes time and patience. Encourage your loved one to seek help. Above all, remember to stay hopeful.

What positive steps will you take today to get the guidance and support you need to best serve the depressed person with whom you live?