

How to support a partner with depression

Last reviewed Thu 20 June 2019

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Many people find themselves supporting a partner with depression at some point in their lives. The support of family and friends can play an important role in the treatment of mental health conditions.

[Depression](#) is a condition that affects around [16 million](#) adults in the United States each year. Depression can take its toll on relationships and may cause loved ones to feel helpless, frustrated, or fearful.

In this article, we explore ways in which people can support a partner with depression in their journey toward

recovery.

Questions to ask about symptoms



The support of family and friends is important in the treatment of mental health disorders.

To understand the severity of a person's depression, it can be helpful to explore how the symptoms affect their life.

Asking about symptoms also shows the person that their partner is interested in their feelings and experiences.

Useful questions to ask include:

- Can you help me understand how you are feeling?
- What activities do you find enjoyable right now?
- Do you enjoy spending time with others?

- How are your energy levels?
- Are you sleeping more or less than usual?
- Are you eating more or less than usual?
- Are you able to concentrate on things right now?
- Do you have thoughts of death or suicide?

Questions to avoid

Avoid asking questions that seem judgmental or place blame on the person with depression. They may already be blaming themselves for their symptoms, and they need support instead of further judgment.

It is also essential not to trivialize depression, which is a serious medical condition.

Examples of questions to avoid include:

- Why can't you just cheer up?
- Don't I make you happy?
- When will you feel better?
- Can't you understand that this is all in your head?
- Why are you making such a big deal about this?
- Are you aware that others have it much worse than you?



What does depression feel like?

Learn more about how depression can feel here.

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Ways to support a partner

Those supporting a partner with depression may wish to:

Learn about depression

Becoming educated about depression can make it easier to support those with the condition. Learning about the symptoms often helps people recognize them in their loved ones.

Symptoms can range from mild to severe, and they may vary over time. However, the [American Psychiatric Association](#) state that symptoms need to last for at least 2 weeks before a doctor can diagnose depression.

Symptoms of depression can [include](#):

- feelings of sadness, worthlessness, or guilt
- loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities
- changes in appetite or weight
- changes in sleeping habits

- **fatigue** and loss of energy
- difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- thoughts of death or suicide

Understand and validate their feelings

It is important to listen to the person with depression and express empathy, which is the ability to understand and share someone else's feelings. One way to demonstrate empathy is to reflect what the person says.

For example, if they say, "I just feel like things will never get better," their partner can reflect that by saying, "It sounds as though you are not hopeful about the future."

Continually trying to cheer the person up is not helpful as this invalidates their condition and their feelings.

Phrases such as "tomorrow will be better" or "try to cheer up" do not take into account the nature of the illness.

Ask them what they need from you



A person can support their partner by accompanying them to their therapy sessions.

To show further understanding and support, ask the person what they need. They may need:

- reminders to take medication
- company when visiting the doctor or attending therapy
- home-cooked meals
- encouragement to socialize or exercise
- a hug or a hand to hold
- to be left alone sometimes

Helpful questions to ask include:

- What can I do to help?
- Would it be helpful if I ...?

Encourage treatment

Depression can cause a person to lose their motivation, which can be a barrier to seeking treatment. However, according to the [National Institute of Mental Health](#), most people with depression need treatment to recover. Those supporting someone with depression can play an important role in their recovery by encouraging them to seek help from a doctor or [mental health](#) professional.

To inspire a partner to seek treatment, a person can try:

- documenting and sharing their partner's symptoms with them
- sharing concerns and thoughts
- expressing a desire to help
- discussing treatment options, such as therapy, medication, and lifestyle modifications

Another way to encourage treatment is to make an appointment on behalf of the person with depression,

but only if they make this request. It can also be helpful to accompany them to appointments.

Provide support during recovery

While recovery from depression is possible, it can be challenging at times. To support a partner during the recovery process:

- help them keep track of their appointments and medications
- do some physical activity together most days
- plan and prepare healthful meals together
- try to reduce stressors in the home
- make goals small and achievable
- encourage them to socialize with others
- plan fun activities together
- point out the person's progress on their journey to recovery
- avoid forcing treatment on the person

Let them know that they are not alone by saying things such as:

- I am here for you.
- We will deal with this together.

It may also be helpful to attend a support group for family members of those with a mental health condition. Couples may also benefit from couples therapy or family-based counseling.

Accept that there will be bad days

People with depression have good days and bad days.

To deal with the bad days:

- expect that they will happen
- understand that this is a normal part of depression
- do not withdraw love or support during these times

- take some time out and do something enjoyable, either alone or with others
- remember that not every day will be like this — there will be good days too

Look after yourself



When a person is supporting a partner with depression, it is essential to make time to enjoy hobbies and other activities.

Caring for a partner with depression can be draining, frustrating, and frightening.

Research indicates that having a spouse with depression increases a person's risk of developing depressive symptoms. This risk is particularly high in cases where a man is supporting a woman with depression.

Those looking after someone with a mental health condition also need to take care of their own mental

health. They can do this by:

- trying to stay positive
- having realistic expectations about the recovery process
- knowing that they also have a right to be heard and respected
- taking time out and engaging in enjoyable activities and hobbies
- socializing with others besides their partner
- asking for help from friends or relatives
- exercising regularly
- eating a healthful diet
- getting plenty of sleep and rest
- attending a support group for families of those with depression

How and when to get professional support

Professional treatment is an important part of the recovery process. The first step is often to see a doctor who can recommend medication, psychotherapy, or both.

For particularly severe depressive symptoms or in life-threatening situations, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.

Warning signs of suicide

People with depression may be at risk of suicide. According to the [American Foundation for Suicide](#)

Prevention, more than half of those who die by suicide have major depression.

Partners of those with depression should be aware of the warning signs of suicide so that they can take swift action if necessary. Warning signs include:

- talking about death or suicide
- having a suicide plan
- preparing a means of suicide, such as collecting pills or buying a gun
- preparing for "when they are gone," for example, by drawing up a will
- giving away belongings
- saying goodbye to family and friends
- engaging in risky or reckless behavior
- having extreme changes in mood or personality
- withdrawing socially

If a person suspects that someone is at immediate risk of suicide, they should seek emergency assistance.

If someone believes that a loved one is considering suicide but is not at immediate risk, they should contact that person's doctor and seek support from other family members or a support group.

Summary

Supporting a partner with depression, both emotionally and practically, can help them go through the recovery process.

While it can be rewarding, caring for someone with a mental health condition is also challenging. Caregivers

should practice regular self-care to look after their own mental well-being.

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