

4 Quick Tips for Helping Someone with Depression

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Most people understand the ripple effect of all mood disorders. Depression, in particular, lurks into all corners of a home, into every aspect of a relationship. Not only does it make the person who has depression feel hopeless and, sometimes, worthless, its effects impact everybody around that person too. Family, friends, loved ones — everybody feels some part of a person's clinical depression.

So it's no wonder that I'm often asked what a person should do for a depressed loved one.

Here are four quick tips that help answer that question.

1. Educate yourself.

Education is always the starting point because until a spouse or daughter or friend of a depressed person understands the illness, it is impossible to say or do the right thing to be supportive. Do your own research by going online to [NAMI.org](#) (National Alliance on Mental Illness) or [dbsalliance.org](#) (Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance), by doing your own Google search, or by reading some of the articles about depression on this site.

2. Find the right moment.

Timing is everything. The best advice will fall on deaf ears if said in the wrong moment. You know your friend or sister or mother or son well enough to pick up on the patterns of his or her behavior — when he or she is up, or down, or when nothing should attempt to enter the atmosphere. Make sure you think about timing along with your message.

3. Focus on them, not you.

If you focus on your friend's needs, chances are good that you won't offend them, and, let's be honest, offenses occur in 50 percent of discussions between a depressed person and his or her loved one.

Start with the basics: food, safety, shelter. Does she need a ride anywhere? Can you pick up some groceries for her? Would it help if you cleaned out her desk or swept the back porch? If you can identify something, in particular that he or she might need help with — instead of the vague, “Is there something I can do?” — your intention to help is better communicated.

4. Don't say anything.

Sometimes saying nothing is what is most helpful and powerful, as uncomfortable as the silence is. If your friend or brother or daughter is like the average person struggling with depression, he may merely want a listening ear to hear all of his gripes and frustrations and sadness. He may just want to vent to someone about what he is feeling without getting a lot of judgment and opinions in response.

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