

## Why Family and Friends are Important

*In recognizing and managing depression*

Family and friends are essential in helping those who are depressed. Sufferers of depression are often unable to function and need family and friends to help recognize and manage their condition. Health care coverage may not provide enough psychiatric visits or hospital stays. Family and friends are left to fill the void.

Unfortunately, family and friends operate with little knowledge and guidance on how to recognize and cope with depression. Clinicians normally focus on the depressed patient, not family and friends. In the past and even now, families are often blamed for causing the depression. Social stigma associated with depression causes many families to live in secrecy, afraid and unprepared to talk about the condition openly.

Family and friends are very much affected by depression. In helping a depressed person, they take on additional responsibilities at home and work. Depression symptoms, including withdrawal, irritability, and hopelessness, strain relationships. Those living with someone who is depressed are much more likely to become depressed themselves.

The good news is that when families and friends are armed with knowledge of depression and find support, they are able to improve treatment results and cope effectively. According to research, families that discuss depression and increase their understanding of the condition achieve long-term positive change in family functioning and increased resiliency in children. By learning about depression and about ways to help your depressed loved one and handle your own emotions, you can effectively manage depression over time.

Depression is not just a biological illness, it is also a family illness because it affects relationships with children, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, and even friends.

- Dr. William Beardslee, physician-in-chief and chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at Children's Hospital.

**For more information, contact Families for Depression Awareness, (781) 890-0220.**