

Tips for How to help someone RECEIVE treatment

For Family Members and Friends

If your family member or friend seems to suffer from depression, it is very important that the person is evaluated by a medical professional (e.g., primary care physician, psychiatrist, psychologist), who can rule out other causes and make the correct diagnosis. Since you see your depressed family member or friend often, you observe the person's symptoms more than their medical professional may. Therefore, you are invaluable in helping the medical professional become aware of the depressed person's symptoms and in helping receive the proper diagnosis.

Families and friends often are unsure how to convince their loved ones to see a medical professional. In a compassionate way, explain to the person that you are concerned that he or she may have symptoms of depression, a treatable medical condition. Often, people with depression feel very relieved to learn that they are suffering from a medical condition. Ask the person to see a medical professional, offer to make an appointment, and make sure to go with the person or call the medical professional in advance to state the person's symptoms. Below are some helpful tips.

- **Show you care.** Depressed people feel isolated in their pain and hopelessness. Tell your depressed family member or friend how much you and others care about the person, want the person to feel well, and are willing to help. Listen and sympathize with the person's pain.
- **Acknowledge the relationship impact.** In a caring way, let the person know that the depression affects you and others in the family. Your relationship, including intimacy, household responsibilities, and finances are all adversely affected when someone is depressed.
- **Be informed.** Read a brochure, *Family Profiles* (see www.familyaware.org), a book, or watch a video on depression and share the information with the depressed person. Tell the person that depression is a treatable, medical condition, like diabetes or heart disease, not a sign of weakness. Assure the person that people with depression do feel better with treatment.
- **Use a symptom list.** Go through the depression symptom list with the person who is depressed or have the person take a confidential evaluation that will guide you towards medical help. Take the symptom list to the appointment to discuss with the medical professional.
- **Reach out.** Find other people to help you get your loved one into treatment, especially medical and mental health professionals, such as your primary care physician, or a psychiatrist, psychologist, or social worker. Think of others who the depressed person will listen to, such as family members, relatives, teachers, friends, a clergy person, then enlist their help.

When to seek immediate help

If at any time your depressed family member or friend talks about death or suicide or may be harmful to you or others, seek immediate help. Contact your doctor, go to your local emergency room, or call 1-800-suicide or 911.

What not to do

People with depression are suffering from a medical condition, not a weakness of character. It is important to recognize their limitations.

- Do not dismiss their feelings by telling them to ‘snap out of it’ or ‘pull yourself together’.
- Do not force someone who is depressed to socialize or take on too many activities that can result in failure and increased feelings of worthlessness.
- Do not agree with negative views. Negative thoughts are a symptom of depression. You need to continue to present a realistic picture by expressing hope that they will get better.

When your help is refused

Often when you try to help someone who is depressed, your help is declined or nothing you do seems to help. You end up feeling rejected and discouraged that there is nothing more you can do.

Depressed people may reject your help because they feel they should be able to help themselves, and feel worthless when they can't. Instead, they may withdraw or start an argument in an effort to resolve their difficulties. In addition, people with depression have negative thoughts and feel so hopeless that they do not see recovery as a reality.

Lack of insight

50% of bipolar patients have a lack of insight, meaning that they do not realize they are ill.

Fifty percent of people with bipolar disorder have a lack of insight, so they do not realize they are ill. For example, people with bipolar disorder may believe they are a ‘high-energy person’. This makes family involvement in seeking and managing treatment even more critical.

With these difficulties in mind, what can you do if your help is turned away?

- **Provide consistent support.** Over time, if you consistently show support, the depressed person will see that you are resolute and may accept your help. Continue trying some of the tips discussed in ‘Helping someone receive treatment’.
- **Discuss your feelings.** When your help is refused, restate how much you care for the person. Let the depressed person know how you feel, *gently*, by stating an example of support you have offered and how it makes you feel when it is rejected.
- **Focus on behaviors.** If the depressed person is reluctant to seek help, then don't try to convince the person that depression is causing the problems. Instead, talk about the depressed person's behaviors and how treatment can help. For example, after you have listened and sympathized with the depressed person's feelings, try to agree on wellness goals (e.g., consistent sleep and feeling less irritable). Then, try to assign some action steps that you can agree on to reach these goals (e.g., after 2 weeks, if the person does not improve, you will set up a medical evaluation).
- **Agree on professional help.** It is important to make sure you get the professional help you need. Sometimes a primary care physician can seem less threatening, or an appointment for psychotherapy, or a couple's therapist.

Helping someone who is depressed and reluctant to seek treatment can be very trying and frustrating. As much as possible, try to get the help of other family members, friends, and medical professionals to assist you in this process.

Helping children and teens

Each year, 3 to 6 million children and teens under age 18 in the United States suffer from depression. Although the symptoms of depression are the same as those for adults, children and teens may not be able to express their feelings or may exhibit their feelings in other ways. Look for signs of declining school performance, poor grades, or frequent temper tantrums, outbursts of crying, or unexplained irritability.

It is very important for your child to receive treatment for depression. Children need to learn how to continue to develop and find ways to cope. In addition, teens suffering from depression are at risk for committing suicide. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among 15 to 24 year olds.

Treatment of depression for children and teens includes psychotherapy and medication. Psychotherapy helps children and teens learn how to express their feelings and gain critical communication skills. The use of medication is an emerging field in child psychiatry. There are medications approved for children in certain age groups.

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