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## Depression: Strategies for family and friends

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Sadness is usually a normal and natural reaction. It happens at every age, even for children and young people. Many things cause sadness - like losing important people, conflicts, problems, dissatisfaction and other experiences and situations. Children and young people in particular have many difficult life situations and developments to cope with. It is not always easy to tell if a sad mood has developed into an illness that might need treatment. You can read more about the signs of depression here (URL: <http://www.informedhealthonline.org/index.559.en.html>).

Depression is a taboo topic in many communities, and many people do not like to talk about it. People with depression, as well as their family and friends, might be ashamed of the illness. But depression is simply an illness, like many others.

When a person is depressed, they can feel very down and sad, and sometimes be distressed, unsure of themselves and anxious. These feelings and negative thoughts usually go away over time, but sometimes will get even worse.

Depression often means that a person cannot enjoy activities as they used to, or even do not want to do them at all any more. They see no way out for themselves.

This can worry family and friends, and leave people feeling anxious and not knowing what to say. Some would like to help, but just do not know how. Just what the best thing family and friends can do is not something that has been studied enough yet.

Here, though, are some ideas and suggestions about how family and friends who are worried might help a person who is depressed:

- Treat the person with respect and dignity
- Be attentive and listen carefully
- Positive body language such as a welcoming posture and a friendly and understanding facial expression might help influence the atmosphere and wellbeing
- Don't just dismiss people's feelings of guilt, because this often very real to the person
- Accept the reality of the person's world
- If talking is difficult or the person reacts angrily, try to stay calm, open and honest
- Encourage and support the person if they are getting professional help, for example helping make doctors'

appointments or going with them to counselling or therapy

- Support the person carrying through with the treatment or strategies they have chosen
- Take talk of suicide seriously and find professional help
- Help them not to make important decisions while they are depressed
- Support them with the ordinary everyday things: getting exercise, eating regularly and having social contact - like going for a regular walk at a pre-specified time
- Be careful with well-meaning advice
- Keep an eye out for other family members and friends
- Learn more about depression, such as the causes, what happens with the illness and about treatment options
- Last but not least: look after yourself and if necessary talk about your own experiences and feelings with other friends, family members or experts

It is important to know that every person is different and behaves differently, and works through experiences in his or her own way. That is why there are no 'one size fits all' recommendations.

**Glossary**

## depression

Depression is one of the most common mental illnesses, and it can be mild, moderate or serious. There are several different types of depression that can be recognised by different signs. Which symptoms of depression occur and how strong and frequent they are vary from person to person. People in any social or age group can be affected, both women and men. If someone has had at least two of the following symptoms for longer than two weeks, it might mean that they are depressed: deep sadness; listlessness; loss of interest in the things they usually care about.

## **Sources**

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Our information is based primarily on systematic reviews of the effects of health care. Systematic reviews are necessary to gain an objective picture of health care. In order to do this, a clear question is formulated. Researchers then find all the relevant studies that could answer this question. They then evaluate those studies.

You can find a list of the evidence and other scientific literature on which this information is based at **[www.informedhealthonline.org](http://www.informedhealthonline.org)**

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