

SUPPORTING SOMEONE WITH DEPRESSION

When depression hits, the person with the illness is not the only one affected; everyone involved in his or her life also feels the impact. Having the consistent support of friends and family members can play an important role in a depressed person's ability to cope. Mental health organizations and those working in the field of depression have offered a number of tips for friends and family:

- **Learn as much as you can** to understand depression and keep informed about new advances in treatment.
- **Encourage** your depressed loved one to seek professional help. If they are already in treatment, encourage them to continue with it.
- **Accept and love** your family member. Offer the assurance that you are there for them and that you love them no matter what. Make sure that your words and actions convey love and support.
- **Be willing to listen.** Talking about their feelings often helps depressed people.
- **Don't criticise or be negative.** Never blame someone for being depressed. Remember that depression is an illness, not a choice.
- **Don't minimize** a depressed person's feelings or experience. Avoid making statements like, "How can you be depressed with everything you have going for you?" Avoid preachy statements like, "You need to count your blessings" or "Just have more faith." Be sensitive of the fact that the person is in pain.
- **Be willing to accompany your loved one to doctor appointments** if necessary and help remind him or her about medication the doctor may have prescribed. Depressed people often have difficulty staying on top of things so helpful reminders can be beneficial.
- **Help set realistic expectations about treatment.** Treatments for depression often require weeks or months to achieve desired results.
- **Encourage participation** in some of the activities your depressed loved one used to enjoy, but don't force it. Sometimes a little encouragement is what's needed, but there are times when activities or outings can seem overwhelming.
- **Encourage exercise.** While physical exercise can be a challenge for someone experiencing depression, the endorphins released during exercise act as natural mood-elevators. Gently encourage your loved one to go for walks or do whatever physical activity he or she enjoys most.
- **Realise that anger often accompanies depression** (particularly in children and adolescents). Don't take it personally. If your loved one's anger is excessive or abusive, speak with his or her therapist to develop strategies to help you deal with it.
- **Offer practical help.** People with depression are easily overwhelmed. Everyday tasks —cooking meals, doing laundry, taking children to after school activities, grocery shopping—can seem monumental to someone with depression. Sometimes practical help can make a big difference.
- **Allow your loved one time to recover.** Remind them that it takes time to get back on one's feet after an illness. Encourage them to take it easy.

- **Be patient.** Appreciate the progress your loved one makes, no matter how slow.
- **Have a crisis plan.** Suicide is a very real risk of depression. If your friend or loved one seems preoccupied with thoughts of death or talks about suicide, get help immediately. Do not leave the person alone. Remove any weapons or large amounts of medication. Contact his or her physician or therapist, go to the hospital emergency room, or call 911.
- **Take care of yourself.** Living with, and caring for, someone with depression can be very stressful. It's important that you pay attention to your own needs as well, in order for you to be there for your loved one. Here are some strategies that may help you:
 - Be sure to eat properly, exercise, and get enough rest.
 - Try to gather a small group of family members or friends willing to support you and help shoulder some of the responsibilities.
 - Take time to de-stress, regularly. Do something you find relaxing.
 - Make sure you have supportive, life-enhancing relationships and spend time with these people regularly.
 - Don't be afraid to seek professional help for yourself. You may benefit from individual counselling, family therapy, or a support group where you can connect with people in similar situations.
 - Know your limits. There is much you can do to help your loved one but you can't do everything and you cannot make them well.
 - Stay hopeful.

Sources:

“Supporting Someone With Depression.”
<http://www.cymbalta.com/depression/understand/support.jsp?reqNavId=1.8> (accessed April 16, 2007).

“Helping a Depressed Loved One.” www.webmd.com/content/Article/106/108347.htm (accessed April 16, 2007).