

How to help someone dealing with depression

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There is little that is harder than watching a loved one struggle with depression. So what can you do?

More than you might think, experts say.

First, [depression](#) is a mood disorder that can affect anyone, regardless of age, race, socioeconomic status or gender. Symptoms ranging from mild to severe and it impacts the way you feel, think and behave, according to the [American Psychiatric Association](#).

Here are a few simple facts about depression, also known as [major depressive disorder](#). According to the [U.S. National Institute of Mental Health](#) (NIMH):

- It's common. An estimated 21 million adults have experienced major depression at least once. It's one of the most common mental health disorders in the United States.
- It's serious. Major depression leads to impairment that impacts your ability to function on a day-to-day basis. Simple activities like eating, sleeping, working and concentrating can become almost impossible. It can lead to feelings of guilt and worthlessness and suicidal thoughts or attempts.
- It's treatable. Depression is treated with psychotherapy and/or medication. Experts at NIMH remind patients that treatment is a process. It can take time to find a regimen that's effective.

When someone you care about is experiencing symptoms of depression, it can be hard to know what to do, what to say, or how to help.

"The most important thing we can offer is ourselves, our time," said [Melissa Gonzalez-Strick](#), who counsels people with depression in Flossmoor, Ill.

Gonzalez-Strick has helped clients on both sides of the coin: the person feeling depressed and the family member or loved one who wants to help.

She stresses that what the person experiencing symptoms of depression needs more than anything is "for you to walk beside them."

What does that look like?

Here are a few suggestions from Gonzalez-Strick on how to help someone with depression.

- **Educate yourself.** Learn about the signs, symptoms and treatment options for depression. Understand that it can impact people in different ways. "It affects adults differently than it affects teens and children. It can look different," Gonzalez-Strick said. She pointed out that when you're fact-finding and gathering information, consider reputable sources like Mayo Clinic and the American Psychiatric Association.
- **Be present.** It's important to show you care by validating feelings and acknowledging and respecting how they feel. Active listening is one way to do this. This means making eye contact, asking open-ended questions, listening to understand, and holding back on making judgments.
- **Be a partner.** There are times when depression interferes with activities of daily living, like making a meal or doing laundry. Offer to cook dinner or do laundry *with* your loved one. It's a great way to encourage them to be active and avoid isolation. Working side-by-side on a task can be an opportunity for a discussion on a deeper level. "People generally disclose more when they engage in some kind of activity. It's more casual," said Gonzalez-Strick.

- **Keep them connected.** Isolation is a symptom of depression. You might notice your friend or family member spending more time alone. But, Gonzalez-Strick warned, "The more isolated the person is, the easier it is for that depression to get worse. You want that person to stay connected with life as much as possible." She suggests enticing them to join you to get out, even if it's for a short period of time. For example, invite them on a quick trip to their favorite store or the drive-thru at a fast-food restaurant. Remember, you aren't forcing them to do something they don't want to do—you're walking beside them.
- **Encourage healthy activities.** Exercise, eating a [healthy diet](#) and meditation can help ease symptoms of depression. But the person you love might not feel like exercising or meditating. The goal is to invite them to join you in one of these activities. You can provide support by engaging in healthy activities *together*, like going for a short walk or following guided mediation on YouTube.
- **Support them in seeking professional help.** As frustrating as it can be, you can't force your friend or family member to get help. However, you can encourage them to seek help and be there when they're ready. One way is to help them research therapy options or offer to sit with them while they make those important calls.

It's critical to understand if your loved one discloses they want to end their life or talks about suicide, "that's the time you need to intervene," Gonzalez-Strick said. Call or text [988](#) immediately for free and confidential help available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Living with depression is challenging, and watching someone you love go through depression is tough, too. Supporting them makes the journey a little easier for both of you.

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