

- Find other ways to express loving feelings when sexual contact is limited or non-existent.
- Don't look outside the relationship for sexual intimacy—you risk destroying the chance of the relationship recovering when your partner's condition improves.
- Choose healthy lifestyles—get enough rest, eat balanced meals, exercise regularly, and keep up your own social network.
- Talk regularly with someone who will listen without giving advice unless you ask for it—this could be a trusted friend, clergy, or therapist.
- Share the care-giving responsibilities with other family members.
- Don't be a martyr—give freely and without resentment while also taking time for your own needs.
- Give yourself time alone and with friends to socialise and have fun.
- Identify your own needs and boundaries and express them clearly.
- Remember that depression is a treatable condition and that, with time and assistance, your loved one will improve.

In summary, live with a depressed person, remember the airlines advice to put on your own oxygen mask before you try to help another—you will be unable to help your loved one if you collapse under the burden of helping. Don't get dragged down by the other person's depression—take care of yourself. This is not an act of selfishness, especially if it allows you to continue to love and care for the other person.

Data courtesy NIMH and Helpguide.org

Resources

Irish Association of Suicidology
www.ias.ie

Mental Health Ireland
www.mentalhealthireland.ie

Samaritans
www.samaritans.org.uk

GROW
www.grow.ie

Aware
www.aware.ie



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Living with a **depressed** person

Introduction

People who are depressed are not behaving this way intentionally. They did not cause the problem, nor can they just “snap out of it,” any more than someone can just stop having cancer or stop being in a cast with a broken leg. They are not trying to do anything to their family or loved ones, but that does not mean it is easy to live with a depressed person.

Normally, partners are sources of understanding, fun and intellectual stimulation, and support with difficulties. In a love relationship, they are also your partner in sexual intimacy. But when your loved one is depressed, he or she is not available to provide you with these usual resources. You still have these needs, and for a time may have to find other appropriate sources for fun, support and stimulation: time with family, friends or colleagues; enjoyable hobbies or activities; and perhaps counseling for yourself.

There are several things you can do to help a depressed friend or family member, and there are also things you can do to take care of yourself in the process. Keeping yourself mentally healthy is not selfish—it is essential for your own safety and for you to continue to be helpful to your loved one.

Things you can do to help the depressed person:

- Learn about the disorder so you will have a better understanding of what is happening.
- Try to be supportive, loving and empathic.
- Offer kindness and attention, even if it is not reciprocated.
- Keep reaching out, calling, and letting the person know you care—even if he/she does not respond to your invitations.
- Don't be hostile or sarcastic when the person makes meagre attempts to be responsive—accept their efforts as the best they have to offer at that time.
- Offer assistance with chores.
- Don't make promises you can't keep.
- Don't take over things that the other person CAN handle, as this will further erode self-confidence.
- Focus on the positive aspects of the other person and the relationship.
- Listen non-judgmentally.
- Don't push the other person's buttons.
- Don't abandon him/her if you can find ways to help without creating your own health issues.

- Remind the person that this is an illness, that he/she is not to blame for feeling “down.”
- Don't lie or make excuses for his/her behaviour—this may only delay getting assistance.
- Insist that the person get a complete medical exam to rule out any organic source of depression (such as a thyroid or endocrine imbalance).
- Encourage the person to get professional assistance—for both of your sakes.
- Accompany the person to a doctor's appointment as a way of facilitating getting professional help. Take notes, as the person's concentration and recall are likely to be affected by depression.
- Be patient—treatment for depression takes time.
- At a time when he/she is less depressed, try to reach agreement with the depressed person to outline ways you can be helpful when depression sets in.
- Take suicidal comments seriously and call for emergency help, if needed.
- Continue to offer reassurance that things will get better with time and help.

Things you can do to help the children of a depressed person:

- Reassure children that they did not cause their parent's depressive illness.
- Give children extra attention and kindness, as they are likely to be missing that from a depressed parent.
- Encourage children to have activities with other family members and friends so their emotional state is not totally dependent upon their parent's mood.
- Find one of the many children's books devoted to helping young readers understand mental illness.
- Seek family counselling to help all individuals to better understand and support each other.

Things you can do to help yourself if your loved one is depressed:

- Don't take the other person's actions personally—they are not directed toward you, even if it feels like they are.
- Do your best not to feel guilty. You didn't cause the other person's depression and you can't “cure” it.
- Don't try to “rescue” or “save” the other person.
- Know that your feelings of guilt, frustration, anger, and exhaustion are completely normal and understandable.
- Express your feelings without blaming or shaming the other person.
- Let go of your anger—frustration is very understandable but is not helpful to anyone.
- Don't read rejection into your partner's sexual unavailability—even though it feels bad, it's not a reflection on you.

