



Caring for Carers -

When a Friend or Family Member has Depression

Caring for someone with Depression

When somebody becomes ill with Depression, it not only has an effect on their life, but on those of their friends and relatives too. It can be difficult loving someone with Depression, because of the effect the illness has on the individual and on your relationship with them. However, Depression is a treatable condition and it is very likely your friend or relative will recover given time.

How does Depression affect relationships?

Depression is characterised by negative thinking, such as "I'm rubbish", "nobody loves me", "I've no future", "there's no point going on". In addition, Depression can make a person feel more irritable and grumpy and difficult to communicate with. There may be more arguments or the person may just become withdrawn and uncommunicative.

Another symptom of Depression is a lack of interest in things that used to be pleasurable, and on top of that they may be coping with loss of energy and tiredness. It is common for people with Depression to experience anxiety as well. These symptoms may mean that your friend or relative no longer wants to participate in the activities you used to do together, from fun days out to cleaning the house.

You may find the behaviour of the Depressed person difficult to understand. It can be hurtful and frustrating when you are trying to help someone and they are relentlessly negative or refuse to do chores or anything fun. The good news is that the person you love is still there, but they have an illness. Once they start to recover from their Depression, these problems will start to ease. By supporting them in their recovery, you may even build a closer and more satisfying relationship with them.

How can I help someone with Depression?

There are many things that you can do to help someone with Depression. Here are some ideas:

- Learn as much about their condition as you can. Our website has information about Depression and useful links to other sites or, if you would prefer, we'll be happy to send you information. Our contact details are at the end of this factsheet.
- Encourage the person to seek help and support and offer to accompany them to appointments if they are anxious about going.



Some Signs of Depression

Symptoms may include:-

- Feelings of hopelessness
- Feeling inadequate
- Anxiety
- Feeling negative about your life
- Not liking yourself, feeling ugly
- Feeling unable to enjoy things that you used to like doing
- Feeling guilty or bad
- Feeling agitated
- Feeling unhappy, miserable and lonely a lot of the time
- Feeling irritable or moody
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Loss of energy or motivation
- Loss of sex drive
- Disturbed sleep
- Poor concentration
- Frequent minor health problems, such as headaches or stomach-aches
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide

If symptoms are present for more than two weeks and are affecting your life, or that of your friend or relative, contact one of the organisations listed on this factsheet or talk to your GP.

- Remember, Depression is an illness, so don't expect them to recover straight away. Encourage them to look after themselves and not expect miracles.
- Reassure them that they are still loved and cared for. Sometimes, a hug can be the most helpful thing you can do for your friend or relative.

Your mental health is important too

Helping a loved one with Depression can put a huge strain on you. It is important to acknowledge this. You may feel you can't take time out for yourself and feel guilty if you do so. These feelings are common and natural, but looking after yourself is essential; otherwise you may become overwhelmed, stressed or Depressed yourself.

- Make sure you make time to do the things you enjoy, such as hobbies and seeing other friends. If you feel it is all getting too much, take a break.
- Get support. This can be informally through other family or friends or from carers' organisations. Many local carers' organisations run support groups for people caring for people with Depression and other mental illnesses. There is a list of such organisations at the end of this factsheet.
- You are entitled to ask your local Social Work Department for an assessment of your own needs in terms of benefits and support. There may be extra support to which you may be entitled. They can also help you if either of you need a break.



What if they won't seek help?

At Depression Alliance Scotland, we get a lot of enquires from people who are worried that someone close to them has Depression and are concerned that the person won't seek help or accept any support.

There are many reasons why someone with Depression may not want to get support. These may include the fact that there is still a lot of stigma around the condition and this can make people reluctant to admit that they have it. Or they may be fearful of what a diagnosis of Depression could mean for them. For example, they may not want it on their medical records or for their employer to find out. Also, the person may feel so hopeless that they feel there is no point in trying to get help or support.

You can't force someone to seek help if they don't want to, but here are some ideas that may help:

- Ask them if they will tell you why they don't want help. Hearing your perspective on the situation may change their mind.
- Encourage the person to find out more about Depression. This may help them to realise they aren't alone and that people do recover.
- If the reason is that they don't want to go to their GP, there are a lot of other self-help options available. These include support groups - contact us for details of groups in your area, self-help books and online courses, which are totally anonymous. They could also consider seeing a counsellor privately or through a voluntary agency.
- If you are very concerned, you could write to their GP and let them know what is going on for your friend or relative. The GP will not be able to discuss details of the person's case with you, but they will be aware of the problem when the person next visits.
- If they won't even see you, why not write them a letter or send them a card, just to remind them you are there and you care.
- Finally, if you think that they are in danger, don't feel frightened to call an ambulance.

For Help and Support

- **Depression Alliance Scotland** 0845 123 23 20, info@dascot.org, www.dascot.org

Other Helplines

- **SANEline and SANEmail** 0845 767 8000, sanemail@sane.org.uk, www.sane.org.uk
- **Samaritans** 08457 909090 (24 hours), jo@samaritans.org.uk, www.samaritans.org.uk
- **Breathing Space** 0800 83 85 87 (6pm - 2am 365 days a year), www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk

Carers

- **Princess Royal Trust for Carers** 0141 221 5066, infoscotland@carers.org, www.carers.org
- **Carers Scotland**, 0141 221 9141 or 0808 808 7777, info@carerscotland.org, www.carerscotland.org
- **Crossroads Scotland** 0141 353 6504 carerssupportline@crossroads-scotland.co.uk
www.crossroads-scotland.co.uk

Books

- **How You Can Survive When They're Depressed : Living and Coping with Depression Fallout** by Anne Sheffield (Crown Publications)