



Do You Love Someone with Depression?

If you have a partner or are close to someone who struggles with depression, you may not always know how to show them you love them. One day they may seem fine, and the next they are sad, distant and may push you away. It is important that you know that as a person who is close to them and trusted by them, you can help your friend or partner have shorter, less severe bouts of depression. Mental illness is as real as physical illness and your partner needs you as much as they would need to be cared for if they had the flu.

Your relationship may seem one-sided during these times, but by helping your partner through a very difficult and painful affliction, you are strengthening your relationship and their mental health in the long term.

1. Help them keep clutter at bay.

When a person begins spiraling into depression, they may feel like they are slowing down while the world around them speeds up. The mail may end up in stacks, dishes can pile up in the sink, laundry may go undone as the depressed person begins to feel more and more overwhelmed by their daily routine and unable to keep up. By giving your partner some extra help sorting mail, washing dishes or using paper plates and keeping chaos in check in general, you'll be giving them (and yourself) the gift of a calm environment.

2. Fix them a healthy meal.

Your partner may do one of two things when they are in a depressed state. They may eat very little, or they may overeat. In either case, they may find that driving through a fast food restaurant or ordering a pizza online is just easier than fixing a meal. Eating like this, or neglecting to eat will only degrade your partner's health, causing her to go deeper into her depression. Help your loved one keep her body healthy, and her mind will follow.

3. Get them outside.

The benefits of getting outside for a depressed person are huge. And it is possibly the last thing on earth your partner will want to do. Take them to be somewhere in nature.

Pack a picnic and lie in the sun, take a leisurely hike (exercise is an effective mood booster!) or plant a garden. Being barefoot in the dirt, or “earthing” helps ground the body and reverse the effects of living in a world of emf’s, and digging in soil can actually act as an antidepressant, as a strain of bacterium in soil, *Mycobacterium vaccae*, triggers the release of serotonin, which in turn elevates mood and decreases anxiety. Sunshine increases Vitamin D production, which can help alleviate depression.

4. Ask them to help you understand what they’re feeling.

If your partner is able to articulate what they are going through, it will help them and you better understand what you are dealing with, and may give insight into a plan of action for helping your partner. Also, feeling alone is common for a depressed person and anything that combats that feeling will help alleviate the severity and length of the depression.

5. Encourage them to focus on self-care.

Depressed people often stop taking care of themselves. Showering, getting haircuts, going to the doctor or dentist, it’s all just too hard, and they don’t deserve to be well taken care of anyway in their minds. This can snowball quickly into greater feelings of worthlessness since “Now I’m such a mess, no one could ever love me”. Help your loved one by being proactive. Tell them “I’m going to do the dishes, why don’t you go enjoy a bubble bath?” can give them the permission they won’t give themselves to do something normal, healthy and self-loving.

6. Hug them.

Studies show that a sincere hug that lasts longer than 20 seconds can release feel-good chemicals in the brain and elevate the mood of the giver and receiver. Depressed people often don’t want to be touched, but a sincere hug with no expectation of anything further can give your partner a lift.

7. Laugh with them.

Telling a silly joke, watching a comedy or seeing a stand-up comedian will encourage your partner to laugh in spite of herself. Laughing releases endorphins and studies show can actually counteract symptoms of depression and anxiety.

8. Reassure them that you can handle their feelings.

Your partner may be feeling worthless, angry and even guilty while they are depressed. They may be afraid that they will end up alone because no one will put up with their episodes forever. Reassure them that you are in the relationship for the long haul and they won’t scare you away because they have an illness.

9. Challenge their destructive thoughts.

A depressed person's mind can be a never-ending loop of painful, destructive thoughts. "I'm unlovable, I'm a failure, I'm ugly, and I'm stupid". Challenge these untruths with the truth. "You're not unlovable, I love you. You aren't a failure, here are all the things you've accomplished."

10. Remind them why you love them.

Look at pictures of happy times you've had together. Tell them your favorite things about them. Reminisce about your relationship and all the positive things that have happened, and remind your partner that you love them and they will get through this.