



LOVE notes

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My Partner is Depressed, and it's Getting Me Down

In any given year, as many as 1 in 10 adults in the US will suffer from depression. Research shows almost 25% of adults will be diagnosed with a depressive disorder between the ages of 30 and 44. Finding yourself in a relationship with someone who is struggling with symptoms of depression is not uncommon. Marital satisfaction is often closely linked with life satisfaction, and when one or both partners are depressed, it increases the risk for poor marital satisfaction and divorce.

Depression is difficult for the person diagnosed with it, but it also takes a toll on the spouse or partner. Studies have found that depressive symptoms can be “contagious” in relationships. When your partner is depressed, you are more likely to experience symptoms of depression. Naturally, when someone you care about is having a tough time, it is not easy to be happy yourself. However, a partner’s depression has a deeper impact on your relationship, because depression impacts communication, sexual desire, and leads to a build-up of anger and resentment.

It isn’t uncommon for a person with depression to withdraw from the relationship or respond to minor conflict with anger or sadness inappropriate for the situation. When you ask your partner if he or she remembered to pick up milk on the way home and they respond with tears or yelling, chances of effectively managing difficult issues are diminished.

The first step is diagnosis

Many couples struggle with problems attributed to undiagnosed depression for months or even years. Women are more likely to be diagnosed with depression than men, but men are more likely to suffer from depression symptoms without seeking help.

Only licensed professionals can officially diagnose depression. Once diagnosed, common treatments for clinical depression include various types of talk therapy, sometimes in addition to an antidepressant medication.

Common symptoms of clinical depression:

If you or your partner experiences any of the following symptoms for two weeks or longer, it may be time to consult a professional.

- Persistent sadness or feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Irritability or anxiety
- Trouble concentrating, focusing, and remembering things
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Feeling lethargic, fatigued, or a loss of energy most days
- More than usual change in sleep or eating patterns, often leading to significant weight lost or gain
- Unexplained physical aches/pains
- Recurring thoughts of suicide or death



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We think it's depression— now what?

If you suspect that your partner is experiencing clinical depression, encourage him or her to seek treatment. Discuss what you have noticed and express your love and concern for his or her well-being. If your partner is hesitant or anxious about seeking help, offer to help set up their appointment or attend therapy together.

Once depression is diagnosed and treatment begins, you will want to do what you can to help your partner feel better. Because depression can impact your relationship, you should also find support for yourself. When you're taking care of someone else, you can only meet their needs if you take care of yourself. Focus on the basics: eat a healthy diet, be active, get at least 8 hours of sleep per night, and maintain your relationships with friends and family.

Social support can be one valuable asset. If you are going to be giving a lot of your own support to your partner, you need to make sure you are replenishing yourself through reaching out to friends and family. Also contact organized support groups for family members of people struggling with depression.

Resources for individuals struggling with depression and their families include:

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (www.dbsalliance.org)

Mental Health America
([www.nmha.org/go/
find_support_group](http://www.nmha.org/go/find_support_group))

Support for Depression
...depression recovery principals
(<http://supportfordepression.com/>)

Daily Strength Support Groups
([http://www.dailystrength.org/c/
Depression/support-group](http://www.dailystrength.org/c/Depression/support-group))

try this...

1. Be there to listen, but don't force them to talk
2. Let them know it is important to you that they seek help, and don't let them hit bottom before doing so.
3. Don't blame or criticize your partner for the depression. It is an illness that takes more than will power alone to overcome.
4. Offer to accompany him or her to seek initial help or therapy. Seeing a couple's therapist can be helpful when dealing with the impact on your relationship.
5. Think of yourselves as a team fighting against the depression together. This can help your partner feel supported and reduce feelings of guilt for the impact on the relationship.

The purpose of this publication is the dissemination of technical information. Funding is provided through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—Healthy Marriage Demonstration Grant #90-FE-0001/04-5. The opinion, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this document and associated materials are those of the author(s), and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families.

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