



INFORMED CHOICES ABOUT

# DEPRESSION

## Helping a friend or family member

### Key Points:

- People usually look to friends or family first for information and help.
- Friends and family can play a key role in helping a person who is depressed.
- At times people do not realize that the problem is depression or that help will make a difference.

### What can I do to help?

- Listen without giving advice, opinions or making judgments.
- Discuss the options for getting help.
- Help them find resources or professional support.
- Offer to go to an appointment with them.
- Keep in regular contact to listen and talk.
- If they are reluctant to seek help, see someone yourself who knows about treatments for depression (a family doctor or a counselor). They may be able to make helpful suggestions for how you can help.
- Make plans together to do something they enjoy (e.g., go see a movie, go for a hike, etc.).
- Stay alert for warning signs of suicidal behaviour.
- If you are really concerned, let their family or another trusted person know.
- If your friend or family member appears to be in immediate risk of harming themselves get them to a hospital emergency department immediately, or call 911.
- Remember to take care of yourself too.

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## Helping a friend or family member

During difficult times, most people will turn to a trusted friend or family member to talk about what they are going through. Friends and family members can play a key role in helping a person who is feeling depressed.

### Listen

- Some people who are depressed keep it to themselves and want to be alone. Others want to talk about how they are feeling.
- Let them know it's alright to talk about their thoughts and feelings; and that you are here to listen and support them.
- Let them talk. Listen without judgment. Offer neutral comments and acknowledge their feelings. They probably don't want advice at this point.
- If they don't want to talk, let them know they can touch base with you later when they need someone to talk to.
- You can support them in other ways – e.g., do something together that they enjoy. Exercise, sports and other activities (e.g., hike, bike, walk, yoga, basketball, arts and crafts, etc.) can help reduce feelings of depression.

## Learn about depression

- Depression is a common and serious health problem and not something your friend or family member can 'just snap out of.'
- Everyone occasionally feels sad but this usually passes within a couple of days. When you have depression, it lasts two weeks or longer, interferes with daily life, and stops you from enjoying the things you usually enjoy.
- More than 1 in 20 people will have serious problems with depression in any year and 1 in 6 will cope with depression at some point in their lifetime.
- Depression responds well to various treatment options.

**Disclaimer:** Information in this pamphlet is provided for educational purposes only. Always consult a qualified health care professional for your specific care.

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## Seek help together

- Seeking help can be a difficult task for someone who is feeling depressed. As part of the problem some people think that nothing will help. You can help support your friend or family member through this process in many different ways:
- Encourage them to see their family doctor or a counselor. Discussing the problem will help them find the treatment they prefer.
- Go with them to the appointment if they want extra support.
- Help them prepare a list of questions to discuss with their doctor or other professional.

## Stay alert for warning signs of suicide

- Severe depression needs to be treated as soon as possible.
- If you are really concerned, let their family or another trusted adult know.
- Stay alert for warning signs of suicidal behavior (e.g., talking about wanting to harm themselves).
- If your friend or family member appears to be at immediate risk (or has a plan) of harming themselves or someone else get them to a hospital emergency department immediately, or call 911.

## Take care of yourself too

- Although you might be worried about your friend or family member it's really important that you continue to take care of yourself too.
- Make sure you still take time to do the things that you enjoy.
- If you are feeling overwhelmed or frustrated, seek support from a trusted friend or relative or speak to a doctor or counselor yourself. Your local mood disorders association may have supports for family and friends.

**For more fact sheets and information about depression and its treatment please visit: <http://depression.informedchoices.ca>**



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**Source:** This summary provides scientifically accurate information. It was prepared in a research review by researchers and young adults with the Mobilizing Minds Research Group. The researchers are based at six universities: Manitoba, York, McMaster, Brock, Brandon, and Université Laval. Our core community partner is [mindyourmind.ca](http://mindyourmind.ca) located in London, Ontario. Our young adult team members are located all across the country. Last revised: 12 March 2013.

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