

# Depression: How to Help Yourself or a Friend

Expert review by Jill Emanuele, PhD



## WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest that affects how you feel, think and behave. When you are depressed you may find it difficult to continue normal day-to-day activities.

**But what does depression look like?** How is it different than feeling sad or down? Signs that you, or your friend may be struggling with depression include:

1. Being sad much of the day, even when there may not be a reason to feel this way
2. Having reduced interest in activities and events you once enjoyed, and anticipated with pleasure
3. Involuntary changes in weight, either weight gain or weight loss
4. Changes in sleep patterns
5. Feeling sluggish or lethargic
6. Judging yourself harshly
7. Engaging in self-harm, such as cutting
8. Feeling hopeless or worthless
9. Having more difficulty concentrating than usual
10. Having thoughts of, or made attempts at suicide

## TIPS FOR MANAGING DEPRESSION

1. **Be active:** This can mean taking a walk outside or going to a workout class. Your energy may change but it's important to try to be active each day. Exercise can help reduce your depressive symptoms because it releases chemicals like endorphins and serotonin that improve your mood.
2. **Set goals:** Start with small goals so that you can build momentum and progress. Sometimes taking a shower or talking to a friend can be huge accomplishments. Meeting goals can increase your ability to manage your symptoms and provide a boost of energy.
3. **Set up support:** Make a list of the people you can turn to. Knowing who to call or text when you need help can make it easier to reach out.
4. **Practice self-care:** Cope with your own stress by eating healthy foods, exercising, getting regular sleep, engaging in mindfulness practices, doing things you enjoy, and avoiding alcohol or substance use.
5. **Get help:** If depression is causing you distress and impairing your ability to do things you need and want to do, it's important to seek professional help. Start by talking to your parents, or another trusted adult who can help you connect with a mental health professional. You may not feel hopeful that you can change, but a professional who's worked with many young people with depression can make a big difference in your life.

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## HOW TO ENCOURAGE A FRIEND TO GET HELP AND SUPPORT THEM

1. **Ask them how they are feeling**, show them you understand their feelings, and offer to help. **Listen without judgment** and try to avoid problem-solving unless they ask for that kind of help.
2. **Help them find motivation, see their point of view, and identify benefits and challenges of getting help:**
  - Highlight the benefits: feeling healthier and happier, having energy to be around friends, participating in enjoyable activities
  - Identify stumbling blocks: knowing when to push through hard moments and when to take a break, using coping strategies on a down day, managing expectations for what recovery will look like
3. **Offer to set similar goals and be accountability partners.** You can each commit to being active, going to a party, or talking to friends. Having someone who is in it with you can help you meet your goals.
4. If a friend is seriously struggling, **encourage them to talk to their parents or another trusted adult** to get connected to professional help, and express confidence that therapy and/or medication can make a big difference.

## TYPES OF TREATMENT

The treatment for depression can include therapy, medication, or a combination of both. Good treatment can make all the difference when coping with depression

- Therapy:**
1. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) helps you change thinking and behavior patterns that contribute to depression, including challenging negative thoughts and engaging in activities that improve mood.
  2. Interpersonal therapy (IPT) focuses on relationships with peers and family, and how they can positively (and negatively) affect mood and behavior.
  3. Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) is a treatment for teenagers and adults who have difficulty managing extreme emotions, particularly when these emotions are linked to self-harm and suicidal ideation.

**Medication:** Antidepressants increase the supply of certain neurotransmitters whose absence is linked to depression. These drugs include selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), which are safe if properly managed.

## HOW TO FIND TREATMENT

Professionals can be found by talking to parents or other people you trust, using Psychology Today or through an insurance provider. WebMD provides a helpful guide on how to start your search and what to look for.

## RESOURCES

### HOW TO ADDRESS A CRISIS SITUATION

1. Call 911 immediately if you're concerned that you or a friend are unsafe, may be in danger of self-harm, or may be suicidal or overdosing. Tell responders as many details as possible so they can be prepared when they arrive.
2. Free, 24-hr, anonymous hotlines:
  - Crisis Text Line: text UROK to 741741
  - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: call 1-800-273-8255

### EXPERT INFORMATION

- Child Mind Institute
- National Alliance for Mental Health (NAMI)
- National Center for PTSD
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network
- WebMD

### COMMUNITIES

- Project UROK
- Born This Way Foundation
- To Write Love On Her Arms
- The Mighty

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