

What to Do When Depression Enters Your Relationship

The pressure of being in a relationship can feel overwhelming to someone living with depression. When you're struggling with an illness that makes you tired, sad and generally uninterested in life, often the last thing you want to do is deal with the needs of others. Equally frustrating and emotionally draining is trying to maintain a relationship with someone who's depressed. It's hurtful and confusing when a boyfriend or girlfriend increasingly isolates himself/herself, pulls away and rejects others' efforts to help.

Each year, depression affects an estimated 19 million Americans and the countless numbers of other people in their lives. It can test even the most secure of relationships. The good news is that, by taking the appropriate steps to treat the illness, the individual with depression can get better and your relationship can survive.

Steps to Overcome Depression and Keep Your Relationship Healthy

If you're experiencing symptoms of depression:

- Share your feelings as much as possible. Your reluctance to talk about how you feel will only create distance between you and your boyfriend/girlfriend. It's especially important to keep the lines of communication open during difficult times.
- Consider counseling. Your willingness to talk about your relationship and how it may be affected by depression speaks volumes to loved ones about their importance in your life.
- Keep working toward recovery. Find the treatment plan that's right for you and stick with it.
- Ask for support when you need it. Be specific about what your boyfriend/girlfriend can do to help.
- Attend a support group of young people who have depression and learn what has worked for others who have experienced what you're going through.

If you're in a relationship with someone who's experiencing depression:

- Remember, your role is to offer support and encourage your girlfriend/boyfriend to seek professional help. Explain that with the right treatment, people with depression can regain their lives.
- Although you may be prepared to do anything and everything to help, don't try to take over the life of someone who is depressed. Your boyfriend/girlfriend may seem overwhelmed, incapable or frustrated, but you can't run his or her life.
- Give advice in the form of options. For example, recommend a counselor or suggest support groups you think may be a step toward alleviating his or her symptoms.

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- Remember that depression is a real illness that should be taken seriously. Don't belittle the person by saying such things as "Snap out of it," "Get over it" or "Everyone feels down now and then." Try your best to understand the illness.
- Recognize that depression is not rational. It is painful to be rejected, scorned or ignored, but this may be how your girlfriend/boyfriend will respond to your efforts to help. Be patient and understanding.
- If your boyfriend/girlfriend suggests he/she is thinking about suicide or hurting himself/herself, take it seriously and get help.
- Care for yourself. Carve out time to pursue your own interests and to socialize. You might also want to consider seeking individual counseling for yourself, if you are having problems dealing with the situation.

For more information, contact Mental Health America of Wisconsin at (414) 276-3122 or www.mhawisconsin.org or Mental Health America at 800-969-6642 or www.mentalhealthamerica.net.

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