

Tip Sheet

Helping Your Friends Through Tough Times - Do's and Don'ts



HOW CAN I TELL IF SOMEONE IS STRUGGLING WITH DEPRESSION?

- ◆ If you are worried about possible depression in yourself, a friend, or a family member, here are some key things to look for:
 - ✓ Change in mood for over two weeks
 - ✓ Isolation from other people and/or changes in relationships
 - ✓ Not doing things he/she typically likes do
 - ✓ Change in eating, sleeping habits; lack of energy or feeling tired
 - ✓ Seeming sad, withdrawn, angry,
 - ✓ Increasing negative self-talk
 - ✓ Talking about death or suicide
 - ✓ Picking fights; getting into trouble; using drugs
 - ✓ Difficulties in school or decreased school performance
 - ✓ Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
 - ✓ Chronic stomach ache/headache

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE SOMEONE TO GET HELP?

Helping a friend who may be depressed can be challenging. It's important to know that it's perfectly normal to feel a variety of emotions (overwhelmed, confused, and angry) during your efforts. Helping a friend does not mean you are responsible for fixing their depression. What you can offer is a listening ear, be supportive and encourage them seek help.

WHAT MIGHT HELPFUL?

- ◆ It is ok to talk to someone and let them know that you have been noticing changes in their behavior or words. Use open-ended questions like "How are things going for you? I noticed you seem different lately, can you tell me how you are feeling?"
- ◆ Let your friend know that you are there to listen and support, not judge or criticize.
- ◆ Realize that at first, your friend might say nothing is wrong or not want to get help. It is ok to give him/her information anyway and let him/her use it whenever ready.
- ◆ Offer your friend choices regarding how to get help, including websites, phone numbers for crisis hotlines, or numbers for helpful adults in school or in the community.
- ◆ If you think a friend needs help, you can encourage him/her to get help from a professional. Do not try to solve the problem yourself, but instead offer to help with making phone calls or going to appointments.
- ◆ When you are really worried about someone's safety, it is ok to talk to them about it. It is a myth that if you ask someone about suicidal thoughts you will be introducing new ideas. If you are worried about your friend's safety – ask and listen!
- ◆ Suicide hotline: 1-800-273-TALK

WHAT MIGHT NOT BE SO HELPFUL?

- ◆ Trying to solve your friend's problems by yourself is not helpful for him/her or for you. Seek professional advice and support from trusted adults!
- ◆ Do not avoid the person. You do not have to have all the answers. Just being with your friend and listening can be helpful.
- ◆ People who are struggling with depression often feel like everything is their fault, or that they just cannot do things right. Statements like the following might make them feel even worse: "Snap out of it," "Get your act together," "You have so much to be happy about," "Get over it," "I know how you feel," "If you just try hard enough things will be better," "You're being too sensitive."