

Supporting Another Who is Struggling with
Depression
and
Finding Direction in Your life

1) Since the time of the fall into sin (Genesis 3), life on this earth for human beings includes a series of joys and sorrows, connected by varying degrees of each, as we move from one to another. This will be earthly reality until “heaven and earth will pass away”. (Matthew 24:35)

In that regard, we understand that, as children of God, we are passing through this “Valley of Weeping” (Psalm 84:6) on our way to our heavenly home. In the meantime, we remain in this earthly body, experiencing the “ups and downs” of the journey. Research has demonstrated that positive loving connections with others can diminish our experience of stress and help us cope better with life’s challenges and traumas¹.

In considering the “down” times it’s important to understand that **there’s a difference between simply “feeling down”, or “having the blues”, and clinical depression.**

2) The following questions may help to determine what’s happening.

NOTE: These aren’t questions to “diagnose” whether you or another have depression. That’s something to be discovered with the help of a mental health professional. Instead, these questions are designed to help you determine if the depressive symptoms are getting the upper hand:

- Are you in a depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day?
- Are you sleeping more or less than you normally do?
- Are you eating more or less than you normally do?
- Are you finding it hard to enjoy the things in which you used to take pleasure?
- Do you feel tired no matter how much you sleep?
- Are you experiencing feelings of worthlessness, or excessive/inappropriate guilt?
- Have you noticed dramatic and unexplained mood swings in yourself?
- Is it hard for you to do personal grooming?
- Are you having thoughts of your own death?

If you or someone you know is experiencing five or more of these symptoms most of the day most days of a two week period, and it’s not attributable to grief or another medical condition, it’s time to see a mental health professional for evaluation.

1 Coan, James, Hillary Schaefer, and Richard Davidson. Lending a hand-social regulation of the neural response to threat . Psychological Science, 2006, vol. 17, pp.1-8, and pp. 1032-1039.

Whether your friend or spouse is working with a mental health professional or not, your supportive, non-judgmental, and compassionate presence is important. Here are some things to consider.

3) It can be tempting to just do things for your friend when they're in a depressive state, because one symptom of depression is lack of motivation. But this may be a mistake, leading instead to increasing their sense of helplessness and dependency. Keep in mind that a significant factor in depressive states is the feeling of low value, and lack of purpose.

These questions may help another find their own way through their symptoms, with you there by their side for support:

- What helped the last time you were feeling like this?
- Would you consider beginning a gratitude journal (3 items a day)?
- Can you think of some people among whom you typically feel well-supported?
- Can we make a list of the things we would do (when you're feeling up to it) that would help someone else?

- Use caution with questions or comments intended to "cheer up" someone in a depressive state. Equally important, never ask questions that may feel as if you're blaming your friend for being ill. Some examples:
 - Don't you see how lucky you are?
 - Why are you making such a big deal about this small thing?
 - Do you feel better now?
 - What's the matter with you?
 - What do you have to be depressed about?

Instead, use language that validates their feelings. If you do that, your friend will feel supported and understood, which in and of itself can help them move forward out of the depressive state.

Suicidality
The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
800.273.8255

1) Some specific warning signs:

- Talking about wanting to die, or wanting to kill themselves;
- Looking for a way to kill themselves, like searching online or buying a gun;
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live;

- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain;
- Talking about being a burden to others;
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs;
- Acting anxious or agitated, behaving recklessly;
- Sleeping too little or too much;
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves;
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge;
- Extreme mood swings.

2) Things to do for a friend that you think may be considering suicide:

There's not one answer to what makes someone move from thinking about suicide to planning or attempting it, but experts say feeling connected to one or two supportive others can help.

- Don't be afraid to ask, then act.
 - Ask (in a private setting) Studies show that it does not "plant" the idea in those who were already thinking of it, but, rather, reduces risk.
 - If your friend tells you they're thinking about suicide, actively listen. Don't act shocked, minimize their feelings, or debate the value of life.
 - Focus on their reasons for living. Ask: "What's kept you safe up to this point?"
- Keep them safe.
 - Ask: "Do you have a plan?" "Have you gathered the materials?" "Where are they?"
 - "What could I do to help you stay around until this passes?"
 - Be there. Continue to support them. Ask them to coffee. Ask them for a safety contract.
 - **Help them connect - to the suicide lifeline (800. 273.8255) - to professional help – to a support group.**
- You do not need to have all the answers

3) A word about "cutting."

Finding Direction

- Discover: What does “Flow” consist of for you.

NOTE:

(Martin E.P. Seligman, Ph.D., defines “Flow” as involvement in an event or task in which you are completely absorbed. It’s something which feels to you as though this is what God has created you for, it’s totally “in your wheel house”, and you can easily lose track of time, lose all-self-consciousness. Your gifts and strengths are fully engaged, and the rest of the world is inconsequential.)

- List the times when you recall having experienced Flow.
- Consider how your times of Flow might “dovetail” with God’s desire for us to love:
 - a. God;
 - b. Self;
 - c. Others.
- Think through what God is blessing, and join Him.

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