

# A little bit of understanding makes a big difference

## If someone close to you is depressed, you're probably wondering what you can do to help them.

Your support could make a big difference to them. But it can be hard to know what to say or do to let them know that you think they might need help.

### + what you can do

Here are some tips for when you're in this situation.

#### Getting started...

It's not always easy to know how to help someone who is experiencing depression. They may feel that no-one can really help them, so be prepared for any kind of reaction.

But if the person is ready to talk, here are some tips on how to go about it...

#### Initiate the talk

Choose a time and place that's private, and where you both feel comfortable.

#### Listen more than talk

Often when a person wants to talk, they're not necessarily seeking advice, but just need to talk it through. Listening, rather than talking, is a way of understanding how someone feels. This is called active listening. You may like to save any suggestions, solutions or advice for a later discussion – and instead, offer neutral comments such as 'I can see how that would be hard'.

#### Use appropriate body language

Body language plays an important role in helping the person feel more comfortable. To show you are listening, try to maintain eye contact and sit in a relaxed position.

## If you want to talk to someone who can help:

Call the Depression Helpline on **0800 111 757**

Text The Lowdown team for free on **5626**

Or talk to your doctor

### Use open-ended questions

Open-ended questions are a good way to start a conversation. They can't be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Some examples are 'So tell me about...?' or 'What's troubling you?'

### Difficult conversations

Sometimes people may find it awkward to discuss their thoughts and emotions openly. They may even get angry with you when you ask if they're okay. If this happens:

- Stay calm and keep listening.
- Be firm, fair and consistent.
- If you are wrong, admit it.

### Spend time together

Often, just taking the time to talk to or be with the person lets them know you care and can help you understand what they're going through.

### Other practical ways to help

People with depression often don't see the point of doing anything, and may feel that no one can really help them.

It's not easy to help someone who doesn't want to talk about it. So here are some common do's and don'ts for helping a person with depression.

**DO:**

- Spend time listening to them talk about their experiences (without being judgmental).
- Suggest they see a doctor or health professional.
- Help them to make an appointment with a doctor or health professional.
- Perhaps go with the person to the doctor or health professional.
- Ask how their appointment went.
- Help them to find information about depression.
- Talk openly about depression (i.e don't avoid the subject like it's something to be ashamed of).
- Encourage them to become involved in social activities.
- Encourage them to exercise and eat well.
- Provide a change of scenery occasionally.
- Maintain contact.
- Encourage other close friends and family to adopt a similar, supportive approach.

**What else do I need to keep in mind?**

What you can do to help – and how much, and for how long - will really depend on your relationship with the person. Keep the following things in mind:

**Take care of yourself**

As a family member or friend of someone who is experiencing depression, it's important to look after yourself too. It's not uncommon for friends/whanau/family members caring for someone with mental illness to also experience some distress themselves. Take time to relax and enjoy things you like doing and get support yourself if you need it (see where to get help below).

**Sometimes you can help “too much”**

If the person is relying on you as their only source of support – and you're finding it a bit overwhelming – it's a good idea to find other help. Remember you're not a counsellor, and your friend may need professional help.

**Get advice from others**

You don't need to do this on your own. There is help and advice available from other people who've been there in support. Check out the Getting Help section below.

**DON'T:**

- Pressure them to 'snap out of it', 'get their act together', or 'harden up'.
- Stay away or avoid them.
- Tell them they just need to stay busy or get out more.
- Pressure them to party more or wipe out how they're feeling with drugs or alcohol.
- Assume the problem will just go away.

**+ getting help**

**If you want to talk to a trained counsellor about someone you care about, or you've got any questions, you can:**

- **Call the Depression Helpline on 0800 111 757**
- **Text The Lowdown team for free on 5626**

They can listen to your story, and come up with ideas about what might help. They can also put you in touch with health professionals close to where you live, if that's what you want.

**Or for more information you can visit:**

**[www.depression.org.nz](http://www.depression.org.nz) or [www.thelowdown.co.nz](http://www.thelowdown.co.nz)**

The Ministry of Health would like to acknowledge information sourced from: NZ Mental Health Survey 2006, NZ Guidelines Group, Royal Australian and NZ College of Psychiatrists, MaGPIe Research Group, Beyond Blue (Australia).

For more information and fact sheets visit  
**[www.depression.org.nz](http://www.depression.org.nz)**

[newzealand.govt.nz](http://newzealand.govt.nz)