



Depression | Supporting Others with Depression

Depression is a psychological condition that changes how you think and feel, and also affects your social behaviour and sense of physical well-being. Depression can affect anyone. Once identified, most people diagnosed with depression are successfully treated. Unfortunately, depression is not always diagnosed, because many of the symptoms mimic physical illness, such as sleep and appetite disturbances.

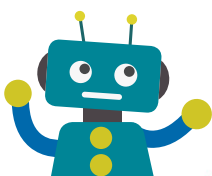
Depression is a "whole-body" illness, involving your body, mood, and thoughts. It affects the way you eat and sleep, the way you feel about yourself, and the way you think about things. A depressive disorder is not the same as a passing blue mood. It is not a sign of personal weakness or a condition that can be willed or wished away. People with a depressive illness cannot merely "pull themselves together" and get better. Without treatment, symptoms can last for weeks, months, or years. Appropriate treatment, however, can help most people who suffer from depression.

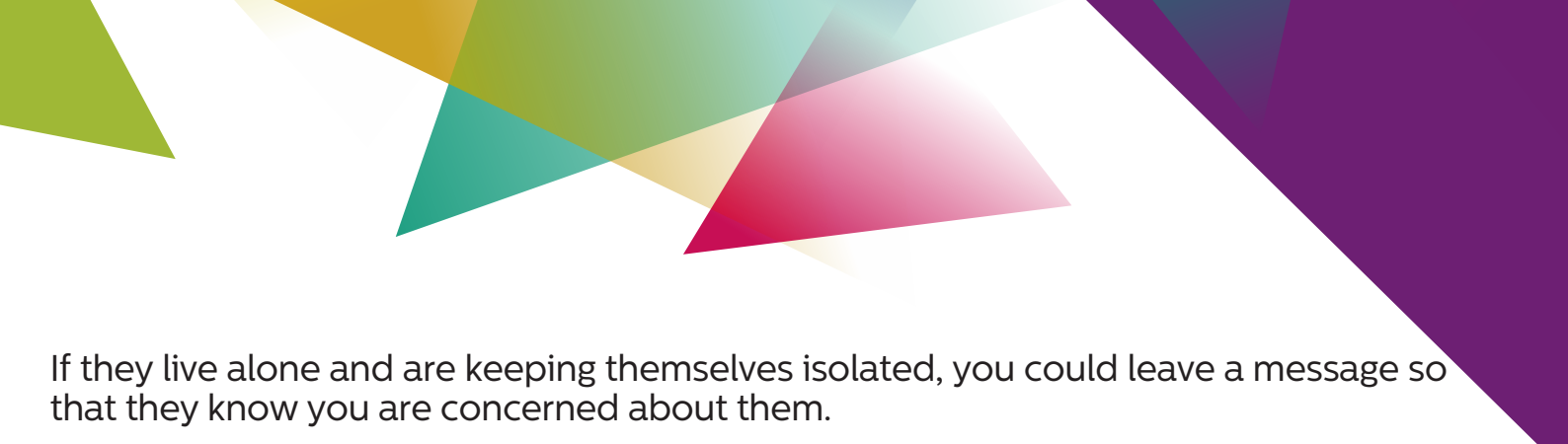
Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and worthlessness are a major part of depression. This can mean someone avoids their friends and relatives, rather than asking for help or support. However, this is a time when they need your help and support most.

Perhaps the most important thing that you can do is to encourage your friend or relative to seek appropriate treatment. You can reassure them that it is possible to do something to improve their situation, but you need to do so in a caring and sympathetic way.

You can encourage them to talk about how they are feeling and get them to work out what they can do, or what they need to change, in order to deal with their depression.

You can show that you care by listening, sympathetically, by being affectionate, by appreciating them, or simply by spending time with them.





If they live alone and are keeping themselves isolated, you could leave a message so that they know you are concerned about them.

Try not to blame the person for being depressed, or tell them to ‘pull themselves together’. They are probably already blaming themselves, and criticism is likely to make them feel even worse.

Someone with depression may get irritable, and be more liable to misunderstand others, or feel misunderstood, than usual; they may need reassurance in some situations, and you may need to be patient with them.

If your friend or relative has repeated episodes of depression you may be able to learn what their triggers are, or spot when an episode might be starting, and encourage them to take action before it gets any worse.

Remember:

Remember that, even after someone has started treatment for depression, it still may be some time before they really start to feel better. If your friend or relative is severely depressed, you may be faced with some hard decisions about how much to do on their behalf. If, for example, they are not looking after their physical needs, should you takeover and do the shopping, cooking and cleaning for them, if you are able to? Or should you try and encourage them to do it? There are no easy answers to this situation. It will help if you can find someone who you can discuss these and other issues with and who may be able to share the responsibility with you.

Look after yourself

Supporting a friend or relative who is depressed can be an opportunity to build a closer and more satisfying relationship. However, it can also be hard work and frustrating, at times. Unless you pay attention to your own needs, it can make you feel depressed, too. There may be a local support group of others in your situation. You could also talk to your GP or another healthcare professional about getting help for yourself and your family.

