Depression is a dark and oppressive mood problem that can feel unbearable to the person suffering from it. The burden of depression drags the individual down as he/she tries to carry on with life as usual when life is not “as usual”. Yet there is hope. By understanding the basic symptoms and causes for depression and learning to express care in ways that the person who is depressed will receive well, you can share the burden of depression with them, and he/she will begin to feel the weight of depression lift. Look for the following symptoms if you think a person may be depressed.

**+Emotional Symptoms:** Hopelessness, sadness, discouragement, anxiety, irritability, frequent crying, sharp and hurtful comments, a pessimistic outlook, feeling overwhelmed by life.

**+Physical Symptoms:** Change in appetite and sleep patterns, physical complaints, taking more trips to the doctor than usual, decreased energy, tiredness, fatigue

**+Cognitive Symptoms:** Thinking negatively about him/herself, making self-deprecating comments, difficulty thinking clearly, difficulty concentrating, inability to make decisions, thoughts of death.

**+Behavioral Symptoms:** Decline in personal hygiene, change in sleeping habits, inability to enjoy things he/she normally loves

**+Spiritual Symptoms:** Difficulty connecting with God and believing in Gods goodness, difficulty praying, feeling hopeless or guilty.

**+Reasons for Depression:**

* **Genetic, biochemical, and hormonal factors**
* **Family history of depression**
* **Losing a relationship (Death or breakup)**
* **Feeling unsafe and insecure**
* **Change of Routine (e.g. moving to a different location, loss or change of job, so on)**
* **Negative thinking**
* **Isolation**
* **Abuse**

You can join with an individual in planning and carrying out goals that will help move him/her along the road to wellness. This role must be approached with caution, however, because it is difficult for a person who is not depressed to understand how debilitating the illness really is. For those who are depressed, it can be hard to find energy for even a small task that seems easy to you – even making a phone call to a friend or taking a walk around the block can seem like impossible assignments. Keeping that in mind, here are some tips for helping and understanding a person with depression.

**+Actively Listen.**

Encouraging someone to talk about his/her sadness will foster understanding, which can help the person feel a sense of control over their emotions instead of feeling controlled by them.

**+Take the person seriously**

Don’t minimize the situation. You can validate their emotions by expressing understanding and care. Normalizing depression can also help the person feel less alone in the process

**+Get on a Schedule**

People with Depression often have problems with sleeping (too much or too little) and eating (loss of appetite or overeating). Encourage them to stick to a consistent bedtime every night and a healthy eating schedule. Being in a routine will help them get back on track.

**+Be nonjudgmental**

People with depression judge themselves every day, so the last thing they need is a friend/leader who judges them, too. Communicate patience and grace. By doing this, you may help them become more patient and gracious toward themselves.

**WHAT NOT TO SAY:**

**+”You’ll snap out of it.”**

Sometimes depression is more than just being sad and may require medical intervention. Even once a person is under a doctors supervision, expect the person to feel better over time, not immediately.

**+”Just think positive.”**

Positive thinking is a good goal to work toward, but stating it this way can make someone feel as if all their concerns and feelings – and maybe their life itself – are invalid. Try listening without trying to fix their problems (this is a good rule of thumb in most cases).

**+”Don’t be sad. Nothing is all that bad.”**

Biology, psychology, and environment may all play a role in causing someone to be depressed, so circumstances alone can’t always account for it. Negative thinking, including feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, is a part of the depression and not something you can dismiss. You can, however, gently help them see things from a different perspective.

**WHAT TO SAY:**

**+”Let’s go out.”**

People who are depressed tend to isolate themselves from family, friends, and the world. Explain to them that there is a link between being isolated and feeling lonely and depressed. Because of depression, they will lack motivation and energy to get out on their own. Take the initiative to organize an outing they have enjoyed in the past, and that don’t take “no” for an answer.

**+”I’m here for you.”**

Don’t just say it – live it. Be there for them. Listen when they want to talk. Hang out regularly. Initiate activities they will enjoy. Do what it takes to demonstrate commitment to your group member. It wont always be easy to spend time with a depressed person, but you may be part of God’s healing process for them. If physical contact is not possible continue to encourage them through regular and even scheduled electronic communication (e.g. Phone, Text, Video Chat)

**+”How can I pray for you?”**

God offers hope and love. Even if the person feels like they can’t pray, you can pray for them.

**SCRIPTURE HELP:**

* 2 Samuel 22:7
* Psalm 42:1-8
* Psalm 107:13-15
* Psalm 121
* Isaiah 40:27-31
* Jeremiah 29:11
* Lamentations 3:21 – 26
* Romans 5:1-8
* Romans 12:12
* 1 Peter 1:3-9

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