

How can you help someone with depression/anxiety?



FACT SHEET 1

HOW DO YOU LET A PERSON KNOW THAT YOU THINK THEY MIGHT NEED HELP?

It's not always easy to know how to help someone who is experiencing depression/anxiety. It can be hard to know what to say or do. We all respond to situations and talk about things differently. The following approaches are designed with this in mind. They offer you a number of ways to help a friend or family member.



Initiate talk

Taking that first step towards helping a person who appears to be in need, requires some thought and care. Choose a mutually convenient time and place.

Listen more than talk

Sometimes, when a person you care about wants to talk, they're not necessarily seeking advice, but just need to talk about some of their concerns. 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 bother you'.

Use appropriate body language

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

Use open-ended questions

Open-ended questions are a good way to start a conversation. They require more information and 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, if people are experiencing the symptoms of depression/anxiety, they may find it awkward to discuss their thoughts and emotions openly. They may even get angry with you when you ask if they're OK.

The following tips may be helpful when approaching a difficult conversation:

- Stay calm
- Be firm, fair and consistent
- If you are wrong, admit it
- Don't lose control.

For more information see *beyondblue* **Fact sheet – Understanding depression** and **Fact sheet 21 – Anxiety disorders**.

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.

Take care of yourself

As a family member or friend of someone who is experiencing depression/anxiety, it's important to look after yourself. Take time to relax and enjoy things you like doing.

There are organisations that can provide support, education and information – see *beyondblue* **Fact sheet 2 – Living with and caring for a person with depression/anxiety**.

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PRACTICAL WAYS TO HELP

People with depression/anxiety often don't see the point of doing anything and may feel that no one can really help them. The type and amount of help you're able to provide may depend upon your relationship with the person experiencing depression/anxiety.

Helping someone who isn't ready to recognise they need assistance may be very difficult.

Below are some do's and don'ts for helping a person with depression/anxiety.

DO – You can help someone by:

- Spending time talking about their experiences
- Indicating that you've noticed a change in their behaviour
- Letting them know you're there to listen without being judgemental
- Suggesting they see a doctor or health professional
- Assisting them to make an appointment with a doctor or health professional
- Going with the person to the doctor or health professional
- Asking how their appointment went
- Assisting them to find information about depression/anxiety
- Talking openly about depression/anxiety
- Encouraging them to become involved in social activities
- Encouraging them to exercise and eat well
- Providing a change of scenery occasionally
- Maintaining contact
- Encouraging other close friends and family to adopt a similar, inclusive approach
- Encouraging them to practice stress management and relaxation techniques (see *beyondblue* **Fact sheet 6 – Reducing stress**).

DON'T – It's unhelpful to:

- Pressure them to 'snap out of it', 'get their act together', 'cheer up' or 'calm down'
- 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.

For more information on caring for someone with depression, anxiety and/or a related disorder, see the *beyondblue Guide for Carers* and the *Carers' Stories of Hope and Recovery* DVD – available to order at www.beyondblue.org.au or by calling the *beyondblue* info line 1300 22 4636.



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PO Box 6100, Hawthorn West VIC 3122

T: (03) 9810 6100

beyondblue info line 1300 22 4636

F: (03) 9810 6111

E: bb@beyondblue.org.au

W: www.beyondblue.org.au