

*Everyone feels down sometimes.
But some people have a more
serious difficulty to deal with.
Here are some ways to help.*

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Imagine this scenario: Your friend hasn't been herself lately. Usually she's upbeat and fun, but now she doesn't want to do things that she used to have fun doing. You were surprised when she decided to stay home rather than go to a dance last Saturday. Every time you see her now she seems sad, withdrawn, and irritable. And this has been going on for a while.

As you think about it, you realize your friend was always a good student, but last week she didn't turn in her history paper for the third time in a row. It's like she's lost her motivation. She says she feels tired all the time but can't fall asleep at night and mentions how she always feels sad but doesn't know why. She's been this way for a while, and you're worried she might be depressed.

SADNESS VS. DEPRESSION

There's a difference between feeling sad and experiencing depression. For example, you can feel sad after failing a test or discouraged because your team is on a losing streak. Sadness and discouragement are normal reactions to life's challenges and disappointments. So how can you tell if you or someone you know is depressed or just experiencing life's ups and downs?

To start, depression is more than just sadness. Depression is a medical condition that affects millions of people of all ages and situations. It negatively affects how a person thinks,

feels, and acts. Some of the symptoms of depression include persistent sadness, lack of energy, and feelings of despair and hopelessness that last weeks, months, or longer. Those with depression might not enjoy many of the things they used to and can find it difficult to handle daily activities.

There's no one cause for depression, but causes include genetics, chemical imbalance, certain patterns of thinking, and stressful life events. Fortunately, there is help.

HELPING A FRIEND

It can be hard to know what to say or do when a friend is depressed. But you can start by offering support and encouragement. Here are other ways to help:

- 1. Pray.** Ask Heavenly Father how you can best help your friend. Pay attention to promptings you get. It might just be something simple and good you feel you should do.
- 2. Listen.** You don't have to fix anything; you just need to be a good listener. Really listen to what your friend is saying and let your friend know you'll always be there.
- 3. Guide.** Simply suggest, "Have you thought about getting help?" You can help your friend reach out to a parent, Church leader, or other trusted adult. This can guide your friend to the right resources to get better. If your friend doesn't accept your invitations to talk to someone and you're still concerned, you may need to confide in an adult who can get help.



4. Invite. Those with depression tend to withdraw and isolate themselves. Help your friend get out. Include your friend in Church activities and service opportunities. Be direct, but don't take it personally if your friend doesn't respond. Interacting with others lessens feelings of isolation and depression, but it can be a difficult step for people to take.

SHOW PATIENCE AND CHARITY

People with depression can't just wave a magic wand and cheer up, snap out of it, or forget about it on their own; it will take patience and love on your part to help them. No matter what your friend may be facing, remember what President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, has taught: "The beginning and end of the solution is charity, the pure love of Christ."¹ Your support, encouragement, and love can play an important role in getting your friend needed help.

WHAT IF I FEEL DEPRESSED?

Elder Quentin L. Cook of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught, "Life is not easy, nor was it meant to be. It is a time of testing and

trial.”² For divine purposes, our life on earth is challenging. Depression can be one of the challenges we face here.

If you’re struggling with depression, realize that it isn’t a sign of weakness or something to be embarrassed about or to hide. Unfortunately, depression and other mental conditions can carry a stigma. This often leaves those who struggle with depression feeling stereotyped and alienated, which can keep them from getting help. The truth is, no one would look down on you for going to the doctor for a broken leg or heart trouble. Getting help for depression is just as important.

HELP AND HOPE

Negative thoughts and feelings of hopelessness are symptoms of a depression condition, not the reality of your situation. Help and hope are available. Here are things you can do:

1. Talk to someone such as a parent or Church leader. It can be hard to open up and share how you’re feeling, but it will help. A strong support system is key to overcoming depression, so reach out!
2. How we treat our bodies affects our minds and spirits. A healthy diet, regular exercise, and sufficient sleep really help our physical, mental and spiritual well-being.
3. Journaling can be a great way to safely unload negative thoughts and feelings and work through problems. As you write, make a commitment to focus on healthy and positive thinking.
4. Turn to things that bring the Spirit into your life. Depression can affect you spiritually as well as physically

and emotionally. The Spirit brings feelings of peace and calm which can be hard to feel when you’re depressed. But it’s important to pray to Heavenly Father and tell Him how you’re feeling. Remember your blessings, and read scriptures that bring peace, hope, and strength. Live with faith, and do your best each day. And then if you still feel like you can’t feel the Spirit anymore, keep pressing forward; eventually the light will come.

5. Your depression may need to be treated with medication and therapy from a professional. There’s nothing wrong with seeking professional help; in fact, it can be a really good thing. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has explained, “If you had appendicitis, God would expect you to seek a priesthood blessing *and* get the best medical care available. So too with emotional disorders. Our Father in Heaven expects us to use *all* the marvelous gifts He has provided in this glorious dispensation.”³

DEPRESSION AND WORTHINESS

Often people mistakenly think feelings of depression are the result of unrighteousness or unworthiness. While it’s true that “despair cometh because of iniquity” (Moroni 10:22), we shouldn’t assume that depression is always caused by unrighteous living. If a person feels despair and sadness because of sin, repentance is a precious gift that can bring joy. But if depression hits you out of nowhere, don’t think it’s a punishment from God or that it indicates a lack of faith, character, or worthiness. Even President George Albert Smith battled depression for many years. Remember that you are a precious

SIGNS OF DEPRESSION

- A persistent sad, helpless, hopeless, or worthless feeling.
- Decreased energy and motivation, and increased fatigue.
- A loss of interest in activities one used to enjoy.
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions.
- Appetite change and weight loss or gain.
- Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up.
- Thoughts about death and suicide.

son or daughter of God. He knows you and loves you. “The worth of souls is great in the sight of God” (D&C 18:10). As a child of God, you are of eternal worth.

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Jesus Christ came to dispel all darkness. He is “the light and life of the world” (3 Nephi 11:11) and “a light that shineth in a dark place” (1 Peter 1:19). He wants to help you. The Savior said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Depression may be a continual struggle, but Christ’s promises are real: “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you” (John 14:18). He perfectly understands because He took upon Himself the “pains and afflictions and temptations of *every* kind” for “*every* living creature, both men, women, and children” (Alma 7:11–12; 2 Nephi 9:21; emphasis added). Jesus Christ knows what depression feels like, and He knows what your depression or your friend’s depression feels like. With the Savior’s help, you can come out of the darkness of depression and see more of the good that is around you. **NE**

NOTES

1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “In Praise of Those Who Save,” Apr. 2016 general conference.
2. Quentin L. Cook, Oct. 2015 general conference.
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, Oct. 2013 general conference.

If you or someone you know shows persistent signs of depression, they or you might need some help. So talk to someone, and go to mentalhealth.lds.org.