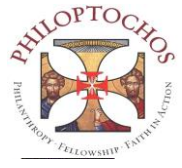




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**8 THINGS YOU SHOULDN'T SAY IF SOMEONE YOU LOVE HAS DEPRESSION*
AND WHAT YOU CAN SAY INSTEAD**

By Kelsey Borresen

*The worst thing you can do is ignore the subject altogether.
Talking through the ups and downs with your partner is essential.*

When your partner is dealing with depression, you want to be as supportive and loving as possible. But it's hard to know what to say or how to help, especially if you've never experienced depression firsthand. Starting a conversation with your significant other is critical, but sometimes offering the wrong words — while well-intentioned — can do more harm than good. We asked experts to tell us some of the most damaging phrases people with depression hear from their loved ones and what more compassionate things you can say instead.

Don't say: "You need to get help."

Instead say: "I'm worried about you and us. I love you and want to support you. How can I help?"

"Ask your partner, 'Do you want me to look into a therapist for you, or a couples counselor for us together? Or I can make an appointment for you to talk to your doctor about medication?' This way it's a team approach, not blaming one person. And if he or she is depressed, you finding a therapist or making an appointment for them may make it seem less daunting or exhausting. Tell him or her, 'We'll get through this together. It will get better.'"

— Shannon Kolakowski, psychologist and author of *When Depression Hurts Your Relationship*

Don't say: "Things can't be THAT bad right now."

Instead say: "How have you been feeling lately? Is it worse at some times than others?"

"Ask, don't tell. Don't try to reassure your partner by telling them it couldn't be that bad. Don't tell them that they will get over it soon or that tomorrow will be a better day. Don't tell them how to fix the problem. Instead, ask questions. How have they been feeling? Ask if it seems to be worse at some times than others. Ask what they think might have been the trigger. Asking gives your partner permission to talk about feelings. Talking establishes connection, which is very helpful because depressed people tend to socially isolate."

— Susan Heitler, psychologist and author

Don't say: "How much longer until you're better?"

Instead say: "How are you feeling?"

"One of my previous partners used to ask me this after every therapy appointment, as though there was a set timeline for depression and an end date for treatment that was the same for everyone. This would make me feel as though I was failing at therapy, and would actually work against any progress I had made, since I felt so far from being where I 'should' be or where he thought I needed to be.

Open-ended questions, like 'how are you feeling?' or 'in what ways do you think therapy sessions are helping you?' may be more beneficial and feel like less of an attack. Stay away from statements that may cause your partner to feel like what they are experiencing is their fault. Acknowledge that your partner is not feeling well, and that you support them and love them, even if it takes a while for them to start to feel like themselves again."

— Lauren Hasha, counselor and writer

Don't say: "Why don't you just get out of bed and go for a walk, or watch a happy movie?"

Instead say: "Would you go for a short walk with me?"

"When our partner is depressed, we want to help and fix it immediately. As the caregiving partner without depression, we tend to start sentences like, 'Why don't you just — fill in the blank: go for a walk, watch a happy movie, get out of bed.' After all, we can see what would help! While depression does often make it difficult to get motivated and create action, we cannot presume that our partner is ignorant to a healthier way of doing things. It may just be that in that

moment, they simply cannot do what seems healthy. Depression is a liar, and often keeps those experiencing it stuck in a negative vacuum of destructive thoughts, immobility and inaction.

A different way of suggesting action and movement in a depressed partner may be to ask, 'Would you go for a short walk with me?' Or, 'I'd like to watch this funny movie, would you watch it with me?' You are asking your partner to participate with you in something that you suspect will also help them. They feel needed and wanted, and you may be able to move them off their depressive center."

— Angela Avery, counselor who specializes in depression and marital issues

Don't say: "How could this happen to you?"

Instead say: "I am with you. You are not alone in this. This happens to others."

"Any remarks which communicate judgment, disappointment or negativity are problematic. A depressed person is already feeling terrible. What is needed are statements of acceptance and care. It's helpful to say stuff like, 'I am with you. You are not alone in this. This happens to others.' While a depressed person doesn't necessarily need a cheerleader, it is important to communicate confidence that he or she will be well again, and that this is a dark and difficult period but not a permanent situation."

— Irina Firstein, couples therapist

Don't say: "You're so negative."

Instead say: "It won't be like this forever."

"It's true that depression can transform even the most positive person into someone who may only be able to see negativity in the world around them. This has nothing to do with the person and everything to do with the depression. When making a statement that begins with the word 'you,' it can feel to the other person that you are pointing your finger at them, accusing them of something that may be entirely out of their control in that moment. This will lead to hurt, defensiveness, and isolation between your partner and yourself.

Depression is a lens through which they are currently seeing the world, one that is unwelcome and unpleasant. They don't want to see the glass as half empty, but right now, depression has taken over and that's all they might be able to see. Gently and kindly remind yourself and your partner that in those moments, it's the depression doing the talking. Also remind yourself (and them) that after the depression lifts, they will be able to see the positive things in the world once again. When someone is depressed, it truly feels as though the symptoms may last forever, so it's important to remind your partner that they will pass."

— Lauren Hasha, counselor and writer

Don't say: "You shouldn't feel that way."

Instead say: "I'd like to remind you that you matter to me. I need you, I want you, I love you."

"Clinical depression is not a choice, it is a mood disorder caused by any number of biopsychosocial factors. When our partner is down, it's normal to try and negate their seemingly irrational thoughts and argue for the positive, more constructive side of things. However, when a depressed person hears 'you shouldn't' before any further words, he or she often feels more guilt, shame and sensitivity about their thought patterns, as if they've done something wrong.

The better choice is to frame their thinking and validate it through their depressive lens. What that sounds like is, 'Your depression is telling you that you don't matter to anyone. I understand it has a strong hold on your mind. I'd also like to remind you that you matter to me, I need you, I want you, I love you.' Whenever we can promote the distinction between what depression is saying, and what reality is presenting, we are not arguing with our partner. Rather, we are showing them that there are alternatives to a thought."

— Angela Avery, counselor who specializes in depression and marital issues

Don't say: "You're not fun anymore. We never go out."

Instead say: "Let's get coffee together."

"Take simple steps to get out of the house with your partner. Suggest a walk together, or coffee with friends — one simple routine activity each day can help lift your partner's mood. And take care of yourself, too. Plan outings with friends or family, or take a day of relaxation to get support for yourself. This is essential to buffer you from also becoming depressed, which can happen when your partner is down."

— Shannon Kolakowski, psychologist and author of [*When Depression Hurts Your Relationship*](#)

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