

When a Loved One is Depressed

With the lifetime prevalence of depression between 10 to 20% of the general population, you've probably been with people suffering from depression. If that affected person is a loved one, you undoubtedly will face special challenges. The families of the [National Guard](#) have many challenges. At times, some family members may experience extreme sadness and depression. When this happens, we recommend that you take action.

Everyone gets “the blues” at times, just as everyone experiences happiness, sadness, and anger at times. What's the difference between the blues and more serious depression? There is a kind of depression that mental health professionals label “clinical” or “major” depression. It is characterized by the following symptoms, of which five need to be present consistently for a period of at least two weeks:

- Depressed or irritable mood
- Change in sleep pattern
- Change in appetite
- Poor concentration
- Change in activity and energy level
- Increased social isolation
- Preoccupation with negative themes and guilt
- Decreased interest in activities that used to bring pleasure
- Thoughts of suicide

When you are close to someone who is depressed, your usual way of cheering up that person rarely works. As your loved one becomes increasingly depressed and withdrawn, you can feel inadequate, helpless, and angry, and feel confused about how to help. When the situation seems frustrating, keep in mind:

- Don't take your loved one's behavior personally. It's the depression talking, and not your fault.
- Depression is largely treatable. Well over 90% of people with major depression do get better with treatment.
- Encourage your loved one to seek help. Depression is one of the most common problems that mental health counselors treat.
- Take care of yourself. You cannot rely on the depressed person emotionally, so look for support from other people.
- You cannot force a person to get professional help. However, if they are an acute safety risk to themselves or others, they can be involuntarily evaluated and subsequently hospitalized if deemed a safety risk. Always err on the side of getting an evaluation if you are concerned that the person may be suicidal.

- If your loved one has a chronic problem with depression, consider joining a support group. There are organizations that provide support and information for people who suffer from mood disorders and their families. We can help you find a group near your home.

For further assistance our staff is available to speak with you privately, confidentially and at no charge as part of the [Guard Your Buddy](#) program. We can be reached 24/7 at 855 HELP GYB (855-435-7492).

If you see a family member in distress, please call us so we can help you to design a practical strategy.

@Copyright, Sobel & Raciti Associates, Inc., 2011