

6 Things Never to Say to a Person With Depression

“Don’t think about it”

Some people with depression actually suffer from rumination. Ruminating means repetitively going over a thought or problem without completion, and it can contribute to increased feelings of worthlessness or helplessness in depressed patients.

A person can’t simply will depression away, and telling a person to stop thinking about their problems can actually trigger them to engage in rumination. One study found that although ruminators do tend to reach out for help, they often don’t get the support they seek and their rumination causes social friction. When a support system pulls away or tells the depressed person to stop thinking about it, the ruminator has more to ruminate about.

“Think positive!”

Although psychotherapists often use cognitive reframing to help depressed patients replace negative thoughts with positive ones, this process takes time and helps the patient explore the roots of the negative thought cycle.

Telling a depressed person to “think positive” is dismissive of the medical condition that causes the symptoms and places blame on the person struggling with the disease.

“I know how you feel”

Although this statement is empathic and meant to help the depressed person feel understood, it can backfire. There is a significant difference between clinical depression and sadness. It’s normal to experience feelings of sadness, but depression is a mood disorder that negatively impacts a person’s ability to attend to normal daily activities. Statements like this one minimize the person’s pain.

“Count your blessings”

There tends to be a lot of guilt and shame with depression. Depressed people often describe feelings of guilt, worthlessness, and helplessness. Because depression is an invisible disease (people don’t necessarily appear “depressed”), there is a stigma surrounding the disease. Statements like “count your blessings” or “be grateful for what you have” imply that the person is depressed because he or she simply can’t see what they do have.

“It could be worse”

Comparisons to other people fighting other battles are rarely useful. When a depressed person reaches out for social support, he or she is looking for empathy and compassion. Although there might be other people suffering from any number of medical conditions, telling a depressed person that someone else has it worse only makes that person feel ashamed.

“Get over it”

Depression is a serious medical condition, and simply telling someone to move on or get over it won't actually cure it. This kind of statement lacks compassion and will likely make the person with depression feel shamed and misunderstood.

There are no perfect answers when it comes to supporting a friend or loved one with depression, and questions can be just as helpful as statements when a depressed person opens up. Try a few of these empathic responses:

- How can I help you during this difficult time?
- I'm sorry that you're hurting. I'm here for you.
- Tell me more about it.
- Would you like to take a walk with me?
- Can I keep you company today?
- Can I bring you dinner this week?
- Thank you for sharing this with me so that I can understand what you're going through.

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