

## How do I comfort my friend with depression?



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Hi Anonymous!

You ask:

**How do I comfort my friend with 'depression' if whenever she speaks about it, it has to do with getting excuses to get out of things in class or to get attention from other people or other emotionally manipulative things? And it is diagnosed.**

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It seems as if you doubt your friend's diagnosis. Possibly you resent the way your friend takes advantage of her depression. These are some of your personal issues that you need to resolve before you can help your friend.

It is easy to become prejudiced against people with depression because it is very difficult to engage with a depressed person and not come off feeling worse for it.

People who are only a bit sad are easily cheered up, but a person who is depressed is unlikely to respond well to efforts to cheer them up.

That makes the person trying to help feel helpless or worthless. If you want to help your friend then you need to be prepared to deal with feeling helpless without subconsciously taking out your bad feelings on your friend.

Trying to cheer up a depressed person often makes matters worse because the depressed person rarely wants to know what they need to talk about to really be helped.

A depressed person's denials are an important reason for them to get into counseling. It takes skill to deal with the issues of denial productively.

A counselor mostly lets their client talk. Their job is to listen.

Listening is an important skill.

Most people who listen to a depressed person either tune them out or fixate on the first issue they can criticize.

Criticism is a natural response, it's a defense mechanism. A good listener learns to avoid criticism both in their speech and in their thoughts.

Criticism gets in the way of listening.

Criticism builds the ego of the critic at the expense of the depressed person. It's a way for the person who should be listening to feel better about themselves that interferes with listening.

A good listener also learns to stay focused on what the other person is saying; tuning them out is another defense mechanism.

## **How do I comfort my friend with depression?**

When a depressed person is speaking with another person the other person often feels subconsciously criticized, especially if they are a close friend or relative.

Essentially, a depressed person is saying that they hate their life; someone who is a part of their life may then feel as if the depressed person hates them too.

This puts a beloved listener in a defensive position that interferes with listening by engaging reactive defense mechanisms such as being critical, tuning out, looking for a distraction, creating red herrings, etc...

You can't comfort your friend if you are subconsciously acting out your own pain, frustration, or anger towards them. So you need to resolve some of your own feelings first.

Try to recognize that your friend doesn't really want to know what to talk about, so instead she fixates on whatever is most immediately irritating or worrisome and then moves from topic to topic because nothing she can say about any of these red herrings will really help her feel better.

If you can be a good listener and really pay attention you may be able to discern what your friend isn't talking about.

Your depressed friend is likely to subconsciously avoid the things she most needs to talk about; if you listen well you may be able to help her open up about the things that really bother her. That's what a good counselor does.

Once the real issues are out in the open the red herrings usually dry up. The things being done for attention are no longer needed because the things that really need attention are now accessible and easier to attend to.

Unfortunately, the real issues can be so depressing that the listener may wind up feeling depressed too. This is another reason your friend should see a counselor.

A counselor is trained to deal with the sort of deeply disturbing questions a depressed person needs to address without becoming depressed in response.

Your friend is in pain. It may not seem as if she is in pain, but depression always involves pain.

The pain a depressed person feels becomes so frightening that they will try to avoid it at all costs. They may go to extreme lengths to escape their pain.

They will be subconsciously motivated to alienate close friends or relatives because those people often make their pain worse without meaning to.

The depressed person's feelings of alienation are already present, but the presence of people with whom the depressed person feels alienated makes their degree of alienation clearer and more painful.

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By acting in a manner that alienates the people with whom the depressed person feels alienated they motivate those people to avoid them; alienation becomes a defense mechanism for dealing with feeling alienated.

It's seems illogical, but there is a logic to it, the logic of avoidance and denial.

Consequently, friends and family often can't help a person who is depressed.

The depressed person may need to work things out for themselves.

Unfortunately, they will often feel conflicted between their needs to function well as a social person and their need to isolate themselves from the people who are closest to them when those people have become more sources of their pain.

This may mean that your friend is hurt by your presence regardless of how well you behave or how much you want to comfort her.

So before you try to comfort her you need to be prepared to accept your friend's pain without feeling hurt by it. You need to be in neutral both emotionally and critically to listen well.

When your friend comes to you, then listening well will be the best thing you can do to comfort your friend. You can't just go up to your friend and tell them you are there to listen to them; that will usually get a defensive response that shuts your friend down or spawns new red herrings to deal with.

The red herrings are relatively safe ways to engage with your friend to show your support. Sure, they are often nonsense and nuisances, but by engaging with your friend over a few red herrings you show you are really on her side.

Don't be resentful if she gets more attention or other rewards.

If you feel manipulated, then your friend needs to feel she is in control and this is how she is trying to meet that need. Help her get in control of the real issues she needs to face up to and the red herrings and manipulation will die off.

You can't tell your friend what to do but you can listen well and occasionally make gentle remarks that help your friend open up to discussing her real issues on her own terms.

Your friend needs help, but you may need help too if you can't engage with your friend without being hurt.

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*Enjoy!*

*love, the grigs...*

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## How do I comfort my friend with depression?

### **ADVISORY:**

If you are using psych meds please do not stop taking your meds without a doctor's supervision.

Many people only learn to thrive once they discover which meds work best for them.

If you are someone who does well enough without meds or who has some other good reason not to use meds then please do not encourage other people to stop using their meds; please do not criticize them for seeking help from a doctor in order to try new meds in search of something that will help them.

Meds save lives, even if they can't help everyone.

We caution people using meds to never abruptly stop taking their meds because the side-effects of quitting may be very dangerous.

*Yes, we said that right; for many people on psych meds the side-effects of quitting meds can be dangerous.*

Abruptly quitting psych meds may make depression much worse; psychotic episodes may even be triggered.

Only withdraw very slowly under medical supervision.

Let people know what you are doing; have them verify your plan with your doctor if they are afraid for you.

We know medications can work but we also know how often people only want to quit their meds.

Please don't argue the merits of one life choice over the other, instead allow others the courtesy to make their own choices just as you do, and just as you would want them to allow you to do.

Please support each other and stop hurting each other over the issues of whether or not to medicate or how to medicate safely.

Anyone self-medicating should educate themselves about their meds of choice and also find more help from people they trust.

### **FURTHER ADVISORY:**

Gharveyn, by any and all aliases, is not a licensed medical practitioner, nor any other sort of professional care-provider. His opinions, however well-formulated they may sometimes appear to be, are not the products of a formal education; Gharveyn holds no degrees of any sort.

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GRIGORY RHO GHARVEYN, BIO:

We identify as a 'multiple personality'. To ourselves we appear to be a collective with many members or associates, some of whom may be avatars of other people we have known, and some of whom are avatars of ourselves at different ages in this incarnation.

Some of our members are avatars of some of our past or future incarnations.

Some of us appear to be machines or cyborgs; many of ourselves appear to come from alternate realities or from different eras of time.

Some of our group's associates appear to be avatars of some of our favorite authors, or the avatars of some of their fictional characters. Some of our associates appear to be mythical beings from ancient Rome, Greece, or Egypt.

It's complicated, but it seems to work well enough for us...

We have no degrees or titles, nor are we an authority of any sort.

We have been partially or acutely disabled by chronic pain for more than 35 years.

We have lived with depression for more than 50 of our 60+ years in this incarnation.

We need physical therapy and exercise but we can scarcely walk or afford transportation.

We wish we could go swimming every day, like we used to do at Ocean Beach in San Francisco.

We currently reside with our girlfriend Tina, roommate Sid, houseguest Jenny, 2 dogs and 2 cats in a small apartment in Gaskill, a small neighborhood in Oakland CA.

We have been almost desperately poor; keeping well fed and keeping the lights on is sometimes a challenge. It's been about 12 years since the last time we were homeless.

To learn more about us or some of our work please visit [gharveyn.com](http://gharveyn.com)

*Cheerio!*

Keywords:

alienation, loneliness, apathy, depression, suicide, healing, cognit, mental illness, psychology, psychiatry, psych meds, hope, help, hotline, marginaliz, ostraciz, conditioning, shunning, defense mechanism, inner voice, conflicted, repressed memor, self medicating, kill myself, Deepak Choprah, ptsd

*Some keywords have been 'short-spelled' to match multiple forms of a word.*

*For instance: cognit == cognitive, cognition*

*Theory: searches for either of these longer words will be matched by the short-spelled form.*